
Urban and Regional Planners

(O*NET 19-3051.00)

Significant Points

- Local governments employ about 68 percent of urban and regional planners.
- Most new jobs will be in affluent, rapidly growing communities.
- Job prospects will be best for those with a master's degree and strong computer skills; bachelor's degree holders may find positions, but advancement opportunities are limited.

Nature of the Work

Urban and regional planners develop long- and short-term plans for the use of land and the growth and revitalization of urban, suburban, and rural communities and the region in which they are located. They help local officials alleviate social, economic, and environmental problems by recommending locations for roads, schools, and other infrastructure and suggesting zoning regulations for private property. This work includes forecasting the future needs of the population. Because local governments employ the majority of urban and regional planners, they often are referred to as community or city planners.

Planners promote the best use of a community's land and resources for residential, commercial, institutional, and recreational purposes. They address environmental, economic, and social health issues of a community as it grows and changes. They may formulate plans relating to the construction of new school buildings, public housing, or other kinds of infrastructure. Planners also may help to make decisions about developing resources and protecting ecologically sensitive regions. Some planners are involved in environmental issues including pollution control, wetland preservation, forest conservation, and the location of new landfills. Planners also may help to draft legislation on environmental, social, and economic issues, such as planning a new park, sheltering the homeless, or making the region more attractive to businesses.

Before preparing plans for community development, planners study and report on the current use of land for residential, business, and community purposes. Their reports include information on the location and capacity of streets, highways, airports, water and sewer lines, schools, libraries, and cultural and recreational sites. They also provide data on the types of industries in the community, the characteristics of the population, and employment and economic trends. Using this information, along with input from citizens, planners try to optimize land use for buildings and other public facilities. Planners prepare reports showing how their programs can be carried out and what they will cost.

Planners examine proposed community facilities, such as schools, to be sure that these facilities will meet the needs of a growing or changing population. They keep abreast of economic and legal issues involved in zoning codes, building codes, and environmental regulations and ensure that builders and developers follow these codes and regulations. Planners

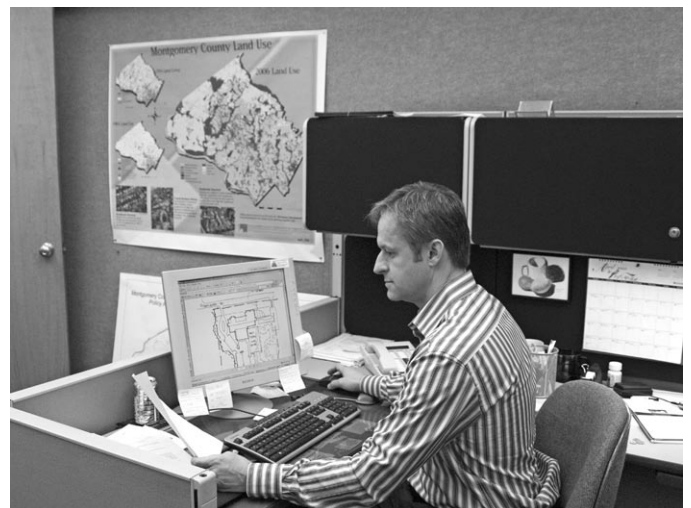
also deal with land-use issues created by population movements. For example, as suburban growth and economic development create more jobs outside cities, the need for public transportation that gets workers to those jobs increases. In response, planners develop and model possible transportation systems and explain them to planning boards and the general public.

Planners use computers to record and analyze information and to prepare reports and recommendations for government executives and others. Computer databases, spreadsheets, and analytical techniques are used to project program costs and forecast future trends in employment, housing, transportation, or population. Computerized geographic information systems (GIS) enable planners to map land areas, to overlay maps with geographic variables such as population density, and to combine or manipulate geographic information to produce alternative plans for land use or development.

Urban and regional planners often confer with land developers, civic leaders, and public officials and may function as mediators in community disputes, presenting alternatives that are acceptable to opposing parties. Planners may prepare material for community relations programs, speak at civic meetings, and appear before legislative committees and elected officials to explain and defend their proposals.

Most urban and regional planners focus on one or more areas of specialization. Among the most common are community development and redevelopment and land-use or code enforcement. While planners may specialize in areas such as transportation planning or urban design, they are also required to keep the bigger picture in mind, and do what's best for the community as a whole.

Work environment. Urban and regional planners often travel to inspect the features of land under consideration for development or regulation. Some local government planners involved in site development inspections spend most of their time in the field. Although most planners have a scheduled 40-hour workweek, they frequently attend evening or weekend meetings or public hearings with citizens' groups. Planners may experience the pressure of deadlines and tight work schedules, as well as political pressure generated by interest groups affected by proposals related to urban development and land use.



Urban and regional planners develop plans for communities to best use land and other resources.

Training, Other Qualifications, and Advancement

A master’s degree from an accredited planning program provides the best training for a wide range of planning positions. Experience and acquiring and maintaining certification lead to the best opportunities for advancement.

Education and training. Most entry-level jobs in Federal, State, and local governments require a master’s degree from an accredited program in urban or regional planning or a related field, such as urban design or geography. Students are admitted to master’s degree programs in planning with a wide range of undergraduate backgrounds; a bachelor’s degree in economics, geography, political science, or environmental design is especially good preparation. A few schools offer a bachelor’s degree in urban planning, and graduates from these programs qualify for some entry-level positions, but their advancement opportunities are often limited unless they acquire an advanced degree.

In 2007, 66 colleges and universities offered an accredited master’s degree program, and 15 offered an accredited bachelor’s degree program, in planning. Accreditation for these programs is from the Planning Accreditation Board, which consists of representatives of the American Institute of Certified Planners, the American Planning Association, and the Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning. Most graduate programs in planning require at least 2 years of study.

Most college and university planning departments offer specialization in areas such as community development and redevelopment, land-use or code enforcement, transportation planning, environmental and natural resources planning, urban design, and economic planning and development.

Highly recommended also are courses in related disciplines, such as architecture, law, earth sciences, demography, economics, finance, health administration, and management, in addition to courses in planning. Because familiarity with computer models and statistical techniques is important, courses in statistics, computer science, and geographic information systems also are recommended or required.

Graduate students spend considerable time in studios, workshops, and laboratory courses, learning to analyze and solve planning problems. They often are required to work in a planning office part time or during the summer. Local government planning offices frequently offer students internships, providing experience that proves invaluable in obtaining a full-time planning position after graduation.

Licensure. As of 2007, New Jersey was the only State that required planners to be licensed, although Michigan required registration to use the title “community planner.” Licensure in New Jersey is based on two examinations—one testing generalized knowledge of planning and another testing knowledge of New Jersey planning laws. Registration as a community plan-

ner in Michigan is based on professional experience and national and State examinations.

Other qualifications. Planners must be able to think in terms of spatial relationships and visualize the effects of their plans and designs. They should be flexible and be able to reconcile different viewpoints and make constructive policy recommendations. The ability to communicate effectively, both orally and in writing, is necessary for anyone interested in this field.

Certification and advancement. The American Institute of Certified Planners, a professional institute within the American Planning Association, grants certification to individuals who have the appropriate combination of education and professional experience and pass an examination. Professional development activities are required to maintain certification. Certification may be helpful for promotion.

After a few years of experience, planners may advance to assignments requiring a high degree of independent judgment, such as designing the physical layout of a large development or recommending policy and budget options. Some public sector planners are promoted to community planning director and spend a great deal of time meeting with officials, speaking to civic groups, and supervising a staff. Further advancement occurs through a transfer to a larger jurisdiction with more complex problems and greater responsibilities or into related occupations, such as director of community or economic development.

Employment

Urban and regional planners held about 34,000 jobs in 2006. About 68 percent were employed by local governments. Companies involved with architectural, engineering, and related services, as well as management, scientific, and technical consulting services, employ an increasing proportion of planners in the private sector. Others are employed in State government agencies dealing with housing, transportation, or environmental protection, and a small number work for the Federal Government.

Job Outlook

Faster than average employment growth is projected for urban and regional planners. Most new jobs will be in affluent, rapidly expanding communities. Job prospects will be best for those with a master’s degree and strong computer skills.

Employment change. Employment of urban and regional planners is expected to grow 15 percent from 2006 to 2016, faster than the average for all occupations. Employment growth will be driven by the need for State and local governments to provide public services such as regulation of commercial development, the environment, transportation, housing, and land use and development for an expanding population. Nongovern-

Projections data from the National Employment Matrix

Occupational Title	SOC Code	Employment, 2006	Projected employment, 2016	Change, 2006-2016	
				Number	Percent
Urban and regional planners	19-3051	34,000	39,000	4,900	15

NOTE: Data in this table are rounded. See the discussion of the employment projections table in the *Handbook* introductory chapter on *Occupational Information Included in the Handbook*.

mental initiatives dealing with historic preservation and redevelopment will also create employment growth.

Most new jobs for urban and regional planners will be in local government, as planners will be needed to address an array of problems associated with population growth, especially in affluent, rapidly expanding communities. For example, new housing developments require roads, sewer systems, fire stations, schools, libraries, and recreation facilities that must be planned for within budgetary constraints.

The fastest job growth for urban and regional planners will occur in the private sector, primarily in the professional, scientific, and technical services industries. For example, planners may be employed by firms to help design security measures for a building that are effective but also subtle and able to blend in with the surrounding area. However, because the private sector employs only 21 percent of urban and regional planners, not as many new jobs will be created in the private sector as in government.

Job prospects. In addition to those from employment growth, job openings will arise from the need to replace experienced planners who transfer to other occupations, retire, or leave the labor force for other reasons. Graduates with a master’s degree from an accredited program should have better job opportunities than those with only a bachelor’s degree. Also, computers and software—especially GIS software—are increasingly being used in planning, and those with strong computer skills and GIS experience will have an advantage in the job market.

Earnings

Median annual wage-and-salary earnings of urban and regional planners were \$56,630 in May 2006. The middle 50 percent earned between \$44,480 and \$71,390. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$35,610, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$86,880. Median annual earnings in the industries

employing the largest numbers of urban and regional planners in May 2006 were:

Engineering services	\$63,840
Architectural, engineering, and related services	62,890
Architectural services.....	61,700
State government.....	57,490
Local government	54,550

Related Occupations

Urban and regional planners develop plans for the growth of urban, suburban, and rural communities. Others whose work is similar include architects; civil engineers; environmental engineers; landscape architects; geographers; property, real estate, and community association managers; surveyors, cartographers, photogrammetrists, and surveying technicians; and market and survey researchers.

Sources of Additional Information

Information on careers, salaries, and certification in urban and regional planning is available from:

- American Planning Association, 1776 Massachusetts Ave. N.W., Washington, DC 20036.

Internet: <http://www.planning.org>

Information on accredited urban and regional planning programs is available from:

- Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning, 6311 Mallard Trace, Tallahassee, FL 32312. Internet: <http://www.acsp.org>

For addition information on urban and regional planning and on related occupations, see “Geography jobs” in the Spring 2005 Occupational Outlook Quarterly. The article is online at: <http://www.bls.gov/opub/ooq/2005/spring/art01.pdf>