

Urban Planner

Decide what gets built where. Zoning, housing, transit and the long fights at public meetings.

TYPICAL PAY

\$89,320

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$60k to \$134k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

4 to 7 years

after high school

DEMAND

Moderate

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

No

anyone can do it

WHERE YOU WORK

City and county planning departments, consulting firms, tra...

How you get there

- 1 High school** Grades 11 and 12
 Geography, government, statistics and any course that makes you argue a case in public.
- 2 Bachelor's degree** 4 years
 Planning, geography, economics, political science, environmental studies or architecture all work. A few schools offer planning as an undergraduate major.
- 3 Master's in planning** 2 years
 The standard credential for this field. Accredited programs exist at schools like the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and many public universities. Expect studio projects with a real client city.
- 4 First planning job** After graduation
 Assistant planner at a city or county, reviewing site plans, writing staff reports and presenting to a planning commission.
- 5 Get certified** 1 to 3 years in
 Pass the AICP (American Institute of Certified Planners) exam, then submit your education and experience for assessment.

Pros and cons

- + You shape places that outlast you
- + Steady government work with a pension
- + Hard skills in data, law and design all at once
- A master's degree is effectively required
- Decisions get overruled by elected officials for political reasons
- Public meetings can be genuinely hostile

Optional boosts

Transportation planning. Housing and community development. Environmental review. GIS (geographic information systems) analysis.

Good to know

Zoning was settled by the Supreme Court in 1926

The case of Village of Euclid against Ambler Realty upheld the right of a town to divide itself into zones and restrict what could be built in each. Almost every American zoning code descends from it.

You can take the exam before you have the experience

The American Planning Association lets candidates sit the certification exam while still earning the required planning experience, so a new graduate can get the hardest part out of the way early.

Where these numbers come from

My Next Move: Urban and Regional Planners (19-3051.00)

American Planning Association: certification

American Planning Association

Massachusetts Institute of Technology: Department of Urban Studies and Planning

Numbers checked September 2026. Pay figures are typical full-time annual amounts in United States dollars, based on Bureau of Labor Statistics wage data and published pay scales. They vary by state, employer and experience. Tuition is for in-state students at public schools unless the card says otherwise. Sources, links and the click-through version: <https://career.help/us/careers/urban-planner>



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