



Local Issue Brief

Innovative Approaches to Urban Planning:

- *Philadelphia's Market Street East redevelopment plan aims to create a diverse business and residential center across several neighborhoods, while preserving one of the city's most historic districts*
- *Architects in Cleveland successfully saved the Ameritrust Tower from being razed, arguing in favor of re-using and restoring the tower, as it was an ideal candidate for efficiency modernization*
- *Scottsdale's Cityshape 2020 program seeks to guide preservation of open space and provide a framework for the city's future*
- *Seattle's Pike Place Market rehabilitation brought this century old historic center of commerce from the brink of extinction, through a mix of public and private investment*
- *In the years since the 1989 earthquake that destroyed San Francisco's waterfront Embarcadero Freeway, the community has redeveloped its bayside façade to re-brand the ferry ports, inviting a surge of businesses and apartments*

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The American Institute of Architects • Government Advocacy • Current Issue Position and Analysis

Planning & Zoning Commissions

AIA Position

The American Institute of Architects (AIA) believes that planning & zoning commissions benefit from the expertise offered by the architecture community. Architects visualize and design the built environment, and every community has distinctive requirements that must be considered.

Action Sought

The AIA supports the involvement of architects on local planning & zoning commissions. Livable, sustainable communities clearly affect the public welfare, and a marked increase in architects working on these commissions will lead to plans reflecting such ideals. By increasing the civic engagement of architects at the local level, a stronger and more sustainable built environment can be forged.

Explanation and Justification

Planning & zoning commissions promote good health and an enhanced quality of living and working, by implementing innovative and well-devised planning policies. These policies continually evolve to fit the changing needs of the community and its inhabitants.

The planning & zoning commission establishes effective policies that provide broad-brush definition to both the municipal building projects of a city, as well as private projects for commercial and residential use. Within the context of safety, accessibility, health, fire prevention, historic preservation, transportation, affordability, and sustainability, many communities are developing increasingly innovative policy on green buildings and sustainable planning. With rising frequency, local planning commissions are also requiring or encouraging new built infrastructure projects to meet green building and energy efficiency standards.

Commissioners come from a variety of backgrounds, and the qualifications for sitting on a commission are varied. The appointees often serve 3- to 4- year terms, with reappointments common, and are selected through an application process that includes interviews with city/county councils, and/or the mayor, in order to determine a candidate's overall ability to make unbiased and thoughtful decisions that are in the interest of the community. Planning and zoning commissions should also have the authority to adequately review planning issues while the town/city council reviews policy, business, and agreement issues. A healthy relationship between the town/city council and the planning and zoning commission is important, because this can mitigate concerns over authority and lead to more well structured planning decisions.

Many times these appointments are made as a result of long-term service to one's community. Therefore it is advisable to get involved with neighborhood associations, civic associations, and other community based organizations and committees in order to enhance your visibility to the community. In addition, land ownership within the commission jurisdiction is generally required.

Design matters and the AIA's Communities by Design program offers many excellent resources on regional and urban planning. By integrating expanded architectural knowledge into the process of planning city growth, the effectiveness of a planning commission's long term application of decisions will increase, and communities will be able to take firmer steps toward designing livable communities. Architects are particularly well suited, during their tenure as planning commissioners, to highlight the importance of positively impacting a community by being advocates of good design. For additional information visit AIA's Communities by Design: <http://www.aia.org/about/initiatives/AIAS075265>.