



**American Planning Association**  
*Making Great Communities Happen*



## WHAT IS... **URBAN DESIGN PLANNING?**

**The American Planning Association is an organization of planners and those interested in planning.**

*APA defines the purposes of planning as:*

1. Helping to create communities of lasting value
2. Offering better choices for where and how people work and live
3. Engaging citizens, businesses, and civic leaders to play a meaningful role in creating communities that enrich people's lives.

The American Planning Association and its professional institute, the American Institute of Certified Planners, help planners, officials, and citizens by providing research, educational resources, practical advice and tools, and up-to-date information on planning.

Urban designers combine skills in design and planning. Rather than designing a single building, they focus on the block, a neighborhood, new development, or even the redesign of a street. Many urban design planners focus on specific projects such as complex of new houses and how they relate to the larger neighborhood. Urban design makes buildings, streets, and public places function better and promotes more attractive communities.

Walk down any street. Did you know urban design is all around you? Look at the overhead lights, some communities design new lights in the style of historic lights to provide interesting character. See the flowers in the median of the street? Or, the benches on the sidewalk? Or, the bike stands outside a restaurant? Urban designer planners, perhaps working with landscape architects, created a streetscape design for plants, bike stands, and street furniture.

Urban design planners focus on the design of our communities. They need to know about environmental issues, historic architecture, transportation issues, as well as other aspects of planning, such as economic development. Even an understanding of social science is helpful. Urban designers also consider how people behave or interact in public places. For example, by placing benches and bike racks on sidewalks in a neighborhood, the design can help create a sense of community by encouraging people to stop, sit, talk with each other, and linger on the street.

Urban design planners can even help fight crime! Urban design planners use "defensible design" such as fences, landscaping, bollards, and even the layout of buildings to lesson crime. Urban design planners have also found that streets lined with buildings with windows and many doorways helps increase pedestrians and lesson crime. Urban designer planners are on the cutting edge of technology too. From creating cities that pollute less to neighborhoods safe from natural disasters, urban design is an important area of planning. Urban designer planners may deal with large issues, but they know that even small things like park benches can go a long way to improve a space.