



**Yesler Terrace**  
**Citizen Review Committee**  
Glossary of Urban Planning and Design Terms

The terms and definitions in this glossary are gathered from various official sources: City of Seattle; American Planning Association (APA); the Planners Network; and University of Washington Design & Planning Department (2007-2008).

### **What Is Planning?**

The goal of any planning, whether it is city, regional, or community, is to further the welfare of people and their communities by creating convenient, equitable, healthful, efficient, and attractive environments for present and future generations.

Planners conduct their work through a highly collaborative process. Through this collaborative process they help to define a community's vision for itself. Working with local residents, politicians, and special interest groups, planners help establish the vision. Planners work with many types of communities — small villages, large cities, suburban towns, even counties, states, and federal agencies.

This vision is created not only from what community members want, but based on an understanding of the problems and the resources at hand. The planner provides this analysis and helps the community look at the options it has for development and change.

Through the planning process, planners consider the physical, social and economic aspects of communities and examine the connections between them. Professionally trained planners also analyze the existing conditions and future trends in the area. They look at issues such as transportation, land use, housing, recreation and open space, natural and cultural resources, community services, population, and economic development. In addition to generating their own data, planners draw upon the work of others to create a comprehensive overview of the community. Once planners have conducted their analysis, they develop strategic alternatives for solving problems in a coordinated and comprehensive manner. These alternatives will guide future development based on the established goals and the systematic analysis.

Plans can take several shapes, from comprehensive plans to historic preservation plans. Plans are presented to community officials, residents, stakeholders, who review, revise and adopt them for action. Once the plan is adopted, the planner's job becomes the implementation of the plan, coordinating work among many groups. The tools of planning implementation include such things as land use controls, economic development strategies, and community engagement.

From "*What is Planning*"  
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## Glossary of Urban Planning, Design, and City Planning Process Terms:

Below is a glossary of terms you may hear during any planning-related meeting or discussion. This glossary is by no means complete; however, it is intended to provide you with a better understanding of some of the basic terms used by the planners, designers, architects, and consultants participating in development or redevelopment of a city, neighborhood, community, or individual home. Where appropriate, the definitions have been tailored to the Seattle community.

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**Adequate Public Facilities:** A term often used in discussing a new development to describe whether existing public facilities, such as roads, schools, sewers, and water, are of a size and capacity to serve the new development.

**Affordable Housing:** Non-market-rate housing available only to citizens meeting certain income criteria. Because of the high costs of land and construction in many areas, housing prices are higher than lower-income individuals can afford to pay. Therefore, a public or private source must provide a subsidy to make housing affordable to this population.

Affordable is a relative term that varies according to the actual median income (AMI) of the community in question. Although many think of very-low-income families (families making under 60% of AMI) as the only people eligible for such housing, affordable housing may be available to individuals or families making as much as 80% of AMI. In wealthier regions, this often means many office workers, teachers, firefighters, and police officers are eligible for such housing.

For example: If the AMI in a community is \$100,000 per year, a family making as much as \$80,000 per year could be eligible. A family making \$40,000 per year, less than 60% of AMI, would easily meet the criteria. If the AMI in a community is \$50,000, a family making \$40,000 could be eligible.

**Amenity:** Those settings or improvements to a property or neighborhood that increase the desirability or enjoyment of the residents, for example, parks, community centers, sports fields. Amenities are not necessities. Amenities can be aesthetic or other features of a development that increase its marketability or usability to the public.

**Arcade:** A passageway, one side of which is an open span of arches supporting a roof.

**Articulation:** The manner in which portions of a building form are expressed (materials, color, texture, pattern, modulation, etc.) and come together to define the structure.

**Awning:** A roof-like cover extending over or in front of an area, to provide a shelter, such as over a deck or in front of a door or window.

**Blight:** The uses or condition of property in parts of a city, town, or neighborhood that are detrimental to the physical, social, and/or economic well-being of a community. Blight can include abandoned or severely neglected buildings, vacant lots with accumulated garbage, and dangerous and/or illegal uses.

**Block Face:** The outside portion of buildings that face the street for the length of one block.

**Building Codes:** Government-established construction standards that a building must meet, such as structural, plumbing, and electrical requirements.

**Business District:** A core of business development or a central business district. Such an area can often be a mix of land uses, including residential, commercial, and industrial.

**Capital Improvement Project (CIP):** Any on or above-grade structure – including buildings and additions to buildings, bridges, viaducts, streets, arterial and highway improvements, park developments, landscaping, fencing, gates, signs and lighting, street furniture, and all similar installations – and any below-grade structures which are regularly visible to the public – including tunnels, arcades and underground passageways – to be constructed on land belonging to the city, financed in whole or in part with city funds, or subject to the approval of the city.

**Compatibility:** The size and character of a building element relative to other elements around it. For example, the size and proportion of windows in a building façade are usually related to one another, the spaces between them, and the scale of surrounding buildings.

**Comprehensive Plan:** The Comprehensive (Comp) Plan, Toward a Sustainable Seattle, is a 20-year policy plan designed to articulate a vision of how Seattle will grow in ways that sustain its citizens' values. The Comp Plan is a collection of the goals and policies that the city will use to guide future decisions about how much growth Seattle should experience and where it should be located. It also describes in a general way how the city will address the effects of growth on transportation and other city facilities.

The City of Seattle first adopted the Comp Plan in 1994 in response to the state Growth Management Act of 1990. The legislative mandate required that each county and city in the State prepare 20-year comprehensive plans to accommodate targeted growth or “population forecasts” provided by the state Office of Financial Management (OFM). These growth targets consisted of the number of households and jobs that could be expected and were first released for planning purposes by the OFM in 1992 and recently renewed for an additional 10-year period. The Comprehensive Plan is the basic guiding document of the public regulatory process, and is sometimes also known as the general plan or master plan.

**Canopy:** A removable fabric, plastic, or natural covering over a public walkway or sidewalk.

**Context:** The characteristics of the buildings, streetscape, and landscape that supports or surrounds a given building, site, or area such as predominance of period architecture or materials, wide sidewalks, or continuous and overhead weather protection, or consistent street trees.

**Conceptual Design:** The first step in the planning/design process. The conceptual design phase is the creation, exploration, and presentation of ideas about a project. Good conceptual design at the beginning of a project avoids the risk of costly redesign later. A clear conceptual design allows for a shared understanding of the proposed design by all project members.

**Creative Class:** A group of people that social scientist Dr. Richard Florida, a professor and head of the Prosperity Institute at the Rotman School of Management at the University of Toronto, believes are a key driving force for economic development of post-industrial cities in the USA. The "Creative Class" concept is controversial, breaks class into two broad sections, and is derived from standard SOC codes data sets:

- Creative Professionals: "Knowledge workers" and expanding to include lawyers and physicians.
- Super-Creative Core: This class comprises about twelve percent of all U.S. jobs and contains a range of occupations (e.g. architecture, education, computer programming) with arts, design, and media workers making up a small subset.

Additional to these two main groups, the smaller group of Bohemians is also included in the Creative Class.

**Demand:** The quantity of goods that consumers are willing and able to purchase at various prices during a given period of time. Along with supply, demand is one of the two key determinants of price. In real estate, demand refers to the need for a use, such as housing, at a particular price (see Supply).

**Demographics:** Statistical data usually referring to the number, age, income, and socioeconomic status of a population group. These statistics help government and private businesses anticipate what a community will look like and what its needs will be in the future. For example, knowing the number of families with children who live in or may move to an area helps determine whether new schools must be built.

**Density:** In real estate, building bigger or taller buildings on a given amount of land increases the project's density. For example, if your block is 80,000 SF, a 1-story building covering only 20,000 SF of ground is less dense than a 1-story building covering all 80,000 SF. Similarly, a 1-story building covering 20,000 SF is less dense than a 10-story building covering 20,000 SF.

**Density per Acre:** The intensity of land use. For example, if a 10-acre subdivision contains 30 single-family houses, the housing density is 3 dwelling units per acre. If the population density is 4 people per house, the population density per acre is 12.

**Design Development:** During the design development phase of the architectural design process, the scheme is refined into the final design. In previous phases, the focus has been on the project as a whole. It is important to give individual attention to each aspect, each space and each detail of the project during design development phase.

**Design Guidelines:** Standards of design or aesthetics that are used to guide development projects in a particular city, community, or neighborhood. Design guidelines are used by design review boards in evaluating new development projects in a particular city or neighborhood

**Developer:** The developer is the leader of a development team, providing the overall vision for the project. The developer also coordinates the purchase of land, design, project planning, financing, and construction for the project.

**Displacement:** When long-time or original neighborhood residents move from an area because of higher rents, redevelopment, increased mortgages, and property taxes.

**Economic Development:** A term generally applied to the expansion of a community's property and sales tax base or the expansion of the number of jobs through office, retail, and industrial development.

**Empty Nesters:** Adults, usually couples, whose children have grown up and left home. Such adults may move from the suburbs to urban areas to enjoy the cultural entertainment and civic activity.

**Environmental Impact Statement (EIS):** A study conducted by specialists and generally required by state or federal law to be completed before a project can be built. It evaluates the project's effect on the environment and infrastructure.

**Floor Area Ratio (FAR):** The gross floor area of a given structure divided by the lot area on which the structure is located. FAR is usually expressed as a decimal fraction. Example: A structure that is 2,000 square feet on a 5,000 square foot lot has a FAR of .4.

**Footprint:** The amount of space a given building occupies on the ground based on its outside dimensions. This figure is usually expressed in square feet. A 1-story building measuring 50 feet by 20 feet has a 1,000-SF footprint. A 10-story building of the same dimensions has the same size footprint, even though it is a much larger building.

**Gateway:** A principal point of entrance into a district or neighborhood.

**Gentrification:** A term applied to that part of the urban housing cycle in which physically deteriorated neighborhoods attract an influx of investment and undergo physical renovation and an increase in property market values. In some cases, the lower-income residents who occupied the neighborhood prior to its renovation can no longer afford properties there.

**Green Building:** The practice of increasing the efficiency with which buildings use resources — energy, water, and materials — while reducing building impacts on human health and the environment, through better siting, design, construction, operation, maintenance, and removal.

**Green Jobs:** Blue-collar jobs that have been upgraded to address environmental challenges. Green jobs are beneficial, or at least not damaging, to the environment.

**Gross Floor Area (GFA):** Measured in square feet, the sum of the horizontal areas of all floors of a given building as measured from the exterior walls of the building.

**Growth Management:** One of the major challenges faced by developed nations is the question of how to apply growth management principles to help produce more livable, efficient, and orderly urban areas.

In King County there is a body of elected officials called the Growth Management Planning Council (GMPC) from across the county that oversees implementation of the state's Growth Management Act, making decisions about where and how new households and employment should be accommodated. The comprehensive plans of all the cities in the county, and of the county itself, must be consistent with the GMPC's decisions.

**Inclusionary Housing:** A requirement that a specific percentage of housing units in a project are affordable.

**Incubator Space:** Retail or industrial space that is affordable to new, low-rent paying businesses.

**Infrastructure:** Public facilities provided to a site so that it can be developed, including roads, bridges, and utilities such as sewer and water.

**Land Use:**

- **Industrial:** Production, distribution and repair (PDR) related activities such as wholesale trade, manufacturing, warehousing, construction, communication, and utilities.
- **Open Space:** Public owned parks, recreation, and open spaces and some highway rights-of-way.
- **Office Use:** Management, information, and professional services such as finance, insurance, and real estate, business, legal, and public administration.
- **Mixed-Use:** In a given building or neighborhood, a mix of uses, such as office and retail, industrial and office, or industrial, retail and housing, etc.
- **Mixed-Residential:** Housing in a given building or neighborhood with one or more other uses.
- **Cultural/Institutional/Educational:** Uses such as museums, zoos, hospitals, medical centers, colleges, meeting halls, etc.
- **Retail:** Shopping and direct consumer services, amusement, personal services, restaurants and bars, from neighborhood-serving to region-serving.
- **Visitor/Hotel:** Hotels and Motels.

**Live/Work Unit:** A space combining a living and working environment.

**Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED):** A green building rating system for new and existing commercial, institutional, and multi-family residential buildings that evaluates environmental performance from a “whole building” perspective. There are four rating levels: Bronze, Silver, Gold, and Platinum.

**Microloan:** Loans to small-business owners, usually under \$1,000, to assist start-up, newly established, or growing small businesses. A federal microloan program was developed by the Small Business Administration in 1992; however, many additional microloan programs administered by government agencies and nonprofit organizations also exist.

**Mixed-Income Groups:** Mixture in a single development of some combination of low-, middle-, and upper-income residents and workers.

**Mixed-Use Development:** A form of development that mixes residential, commercial, retail, and other uses in one project.

**Mortgage:** A loan made for real property, for example a house or office building, where the property is the security for repayment of the loan or debt.

**National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA):** Requires federal agencies to integrate environmental values into their decision making processes by considering the environmental impacts of their proposed actions and reasonable alternatives to those actions. To meet this requirement, federal agencies prepare a detailed statement known as an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The Environmental Protection Agency reviews and comments on EISs prepared by other federal agencies, maintains a national filing system for all EISs, and assures that its own actions comply with NEPA.

**Neighborhood Alliance:** A local community group often formed to promote community interest in a specific area.

**Neighborhood Matching Fund (NMF):** A fund administered by the Department of Neighborhoods to provide money to Seattle neighborhood groups and organizations for neighborhood-initiated improvement, organizing or planning projects. The community's contribution of volunteer labor, materials, professional services or cash is "matched" by cash from the fund.

**Neighborhood Plan:** A plan adopted by the city council and consistent with the Comprehensive Plan to guide development in a neighborhood and possibly address related issues such as housing, major institutions, transportation, economic development, and other community development activities.

**Neighborhood Planning:** Neighborhood planning provided residents an opportunity to influence the how the "growth targets" established by the GMA for their specific region of the city would be accomplished. Growth targets were the expected future increases of households in Seattle in the 20-year period of the Comprehensive Plan. (Hauger, 2003) The city invited any neighborhood that wished to contribute to the process to develop a neighborhood plan. In exchange, the city paid for an independent consultant to assist each neighborhood, but the residents did the hiring.

Neighborhood plans reflect thousands of hours of discussions by community participants as well as many different stakeholders expressing their interests. The plans were adopted as a "city action". Because of the many different development strategies and in some cases, the vision of how they wanted to preserve or improve their unique community, the neighborhood plans did not provide enough uniformity to be adopted into the Comprehensive Plan. The city, instead, working with community representatives extracted certain elements from their neighborhood plans using language that conformed to the rest of the language of the Comprehensive Plan- and this language was adopted into the final Comprehensive Plan.

**New Urbanism:** New urbanism is an American urban design movement that arose in the early 1980s. Its goal is to reform many aspects of real estate development and urban planning, from urban retrofits to suburban infill. New Urbanist neighborhoods are designed to contain a diverse range of housing and jobs, and to be walkable. New Urbanism can include (neo) traditional neighborhood design and transit-oriented development.

**One Planet Living ®:** A global initiative developed by BioRegional Development Group and the World Wildlife Fund to promote the concepts of sustainable development and ecological footprinting. The One Planet Living ® program is based on ten guiding principles which act as a framework to highlight the sustainability challenge in a given situation and as a mechanism for developing and presenting solutions.

**Open Space:** Land and/or water area with its surface open to the sky and predominantly undeveloped, which is set aside to serve the purposes of providing active or passive recreational opportunities, conserving valuable natural resources, and structuring urban development and form.

**Pedestrian Orientation:** The characteristics of an area where the location and access to buildings, uses on the street level, and storefront design are based on the needs of people on foot.

**Proportion:** The balanced relationship of the parts of a building, landscape, and adjacent structures to each other and to the surrounding community.

**Public Sector:** The offices and responsibilities of government. In economic terms, the part of an economy in which goods and services are produced and/or (re)distributed by government agencies.

**Public Works:** Facilities run by public agencies to provide water, power, waste disposal, transportation, and similar services to meet common social and economic objectives. Infrastructure is not labeled “public works” unless it is financed, constructed, and/or operated and maintained by the public sector.

**Rhythm:** Reference to the regular or harmonious recurrence of lines, shapes, forms or colors, incorporating the concept of repetition as a device to organize forms and spaces in architecture.

**Redevelopment:** Generally, the redesign or rehabilitation of existing properties and improvement of land in accordance with a city’s goals and objectives.

**Retail Space:** Space in a building for selling merchandise.

**Request for Proposal (RFP):** A request from a government or private entity asking developers to submit proposals for ways to develop a property.

**Right-of-Way (ROW):** A strip of land, including the space above and below the surface, which is platted, dedicated, condemned, established by prescription or otherwise legally established for the use of pedestrians, vehicles, or utilities.

**Scarcity:** A condition that occurs because the wants and needs of people are unlimited, while the resources to produce goods and services to meet those wants and needs are limited.

**Shortage:** The condition in which the quantity demanded is greater than the quantity supplied at a certain price.

**Scope:** 1. The range or extent of action, inquiry, etc., or of an activity, concept, etc. 2. Room or opportunity for freedom of action or thought.

**Site Analysis:** The study of a specific parcel of land and the surrounding area to determine its suitability for a specific use.

**Site Context:** 1. The background or surrounding environment relevant to a particular site, project, etc. 2. Having to do with historic and social infrastructures and the natural and built environments.



**Smart Growth:** Generally, smart growth is development that consumes less land by encouraging it to occur in a more compact form in communities that provide a variety of housing types arranged around parks, playgrounds and neighborhood shopping facilities accessible by pedestrian walkways and bikeways, and serviced by public transportation, thus reducing the use of automobiles.

**Sprawl:** Dispersed, low-density, single-use, automobile dependent land use patterns.

**Stakeholder:** Individuals or groups that are affected by a decision and have an interest in its outcome.

**Streetscape:** The visual character of a street as determined by elements such as structures, access, greenery, open space, views, etc.

**Stewardship:** Supervision or administration, as of finances and property, for another or others.

**Scale, Human:** Used to describe the quality of a building that includes structural or architectural components of size and proportions that relate to the human form and/or that exhibits through its structural or architectural components the human functions contained within.

**Setback:** The required or actual placement of a building from a road, property line, or other structure.

**Site Plan:** A detailed plan showing the proposed placement of structures, parking areas, open space, landscaping, and other development features, on a parcel of land.

**Supply:** The total amount of a good or service available for sale at various prices; along with demand, supply is one of the two key determinants of price (see Demand).

**Sustainable Design:** A holistic approach to the design of buildings and landscapes that minimizes ecological impacts to the environment while balancing economic, social, and environmental factors. Since becoming the first city in the nation to formally adopt a citywide sustainable building policy in 2000, Seattle has achieved national recognition for its bold leadership. Seattle's Department of Planning and Development (DPD) is working internally to incorporate sustainability principles into the daily work of their engineers, plans examiners, code developers, and planners.

**Toxic Waste:** Harmful substances including asbestos, lead, and oil residue which may have resulted from previous uses of the property. Toxic waste must be disposed of before development can begin. Developers must test for toxins before purchasing a piece of land because cleanup can be time consuming and expensive.

**Transit Oriented Development (TOD):** Refers to residential and commercial areas designed to maximize access to passenger transit with features to encourage transit ridership and pedestrians. A TOD neighborhood typically has a center with a rail or bus station surrounded by relatively high-density mixed-use development with progressively lower-density spreading outwards.

**Urban Form:** The spatial arrangement of a particular environment, as defined by the connectivity of built mass and form, the natural environment, and the movement of persons, goods and information within it.

**Vacation:** An action taken by the council which terminates or extinguishes a city's right-of-way easement, such as with a street or alley, when it is no longer necessary for a public right-of-way.

**Vision:** 1. A mental image; an imaginative contemplation (*to have visions of power*) 2. a) Mode of seeing or conceiving (*a project made possible by one person's vision*) b) force or power of imagination (*a statesman of great vision*).

**Woonerf:** Plural *woonerven*. Dutch word meaning concept for making roads safer for pedestrians and children at play. Often translated into English as "living street," "living yard," or "home zone," a woonerf is a paved area shared by cars and pedestrians. Safety is a byproduct because of the almost complete absence of signs, traffic signals, road markings, or even curbs; cars drive more slowly and fewer accidents occur.

**Urban Village:** The locations where the Comprehensive Plan expected to see the greatest amount of growth and change over 20 years. Amenities such as improved streets and sidewalks, open space, etc, are constructed to accommodate the expected growth.

**Zoning Map:** A map that shows the use designation for each parcel within a local jurisdiction (also see zoning ordinance).

**Zoning Ordinance:** A legal document that spells out the requirements for each land use designation. Each use has a specific set of requirements regarding floor area ratio, building height and setbacks, number of parking spaces, landscaping and/or open space. (also see zoning map).