



INSTITUTE FOR  
LOCAL GOVERNMENT<sup>SM</sup>

*Promoting Good Government at the Local Level*

# BUILDING HEALTHY & VIBRANT COMMUNITIES

Achieving Results through Community Engagement



# WHAT

## What is Land Use Planning

Land use planning determines how communities are built and what you can do with your property. Competing demands for the same space and resources can generate conflict. Local officials must balance these competing demands as they make decisions impacting the future of their communities. This publication focuses on land use planning at the local level where residents can easily be involved in, and impact, the process.

The fields of land use planning and community development have evolved to address a number of rising concerns. Some of the issues that have spurred changes in the way that communities are planned and built include:

- ! Longer commutes, rising gasoline prices, growing traffic congestion and declining mobility;
- ! Loss of farmland, wildlife habitat and natural resources as low-density development spreads into formerly undeveloped areas;
- ! Air quality and climate-change issues associated with vehicle emissions and energy use in buildings;
- ! Inefficient water use and water-intensive landscaping; and
- ! Growth that outpaces investments in infrastructure and services resulting in an increased need for maintenance and replacement.



# WHO

## Who is Involved

Everyone is affected by land use decisions. However, because planning issues can be complex, residents are often unaware of how, where and when to get involved. Local officials and planning staff have the opportunity to harness community interest by encouraging the public to actively participate in the planning process.

### Typical land use decisions involve the following:



#### City Council / Board of Supervisors

A legislative group of elected residents that oversees local government operations.



#### Developer / Applicant

Any person, firm or entity which seeks local agency approvals for all or part of a development project.



#### General Public / Community

A diverse group of people that may or may not share the same set of goals and concerns.



#### Interest Groups / Stakeholders

Organizations or individuals with an identifiable stake in the issue focused on a particular priority (i.e. agriculture, business and environment).



#### Planning Commission

A committee of residents who have been appointed by your city council or county board of supervisor to review and consider land use matters such as general plans, rezoning, use permits and subdivisions. There are also other boards and commissions, such as the architectural review board that can be involved in the process.



#### Planning Staff

Public employees that administer zoning ordinance and general plan provisions and provide technical planning services to a local agency. Additional local agency staff (such as public works, police, fire and building departments) often advise planners during the review process.

# WHY

## Why Community Engagement Matters

Public engagement processes can take time and scarce resources to implement effectively. They are not always appropriate in all situations; however, there are many practical reasons to engage residents in planning.



“ Involve the public early in the front end of designing a public a process and be open to what the public wants to do. If you go in with a clear vision of what you want out of it people will sense that and get angry. Involving the public in a planning process builds credibility and support for changes that are implemented. ”

– ROD GOULD, CITY MANAGER, CITY OF SANTA MONICA

# HOW

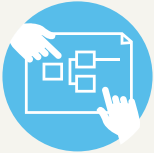
## How to Engage

There are many ways to get involved in local land use planning decisions. Your city or county may use community organizations, chambers of commerce, neighborhood associations or other groups to let you know about upcoming land use decisions. Contact the planning department in your community to learn more about the ways that you can be involved in local land use decisions. Opportunities for engagement may include:



### Advisory Committees

A representative group of typically volunteer stakeholders are convened to guide a planning effort over an extended period of time. To ensure that membership is representative, be sure to include hard to reach populations such as youth, immigrants and low-income individuals or advocates.



### Charrettes

A facilitated multiple-day process that includes interested stakeholders. Participants develop solutions that address potential concerns simultaneously.



### Focus Groups

Small groups of stakeholders brought together for a limited amount of time to provide their knowledge of a project/area and discuss their concerns.



### Participatory Mapping

Residents identify community assets, needs and opportunities on a large photo aerial map of the community. Participants can be encouraged to use sticky dots, markers or other similar items.



### Scenario Planning

A visioning process during which the public helps a local agency generate proposed alternatives future growth and development. Computer-based modeling tools are often used.



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The Institute for Local Government is the nonprofit research education affiliate of the League of California Cities and the California State Association of Counties. Its mission is to promote good government at the local level with practical, impartial and easy-to-use resources for California communities.

The Institute's current program areas include:

- Public Engagement
- Local Government Basics
- Ethics and Transparency
- Sustainable Communities
- Collaboration and Partnerships

## Land Use Planning Resources

- Engaging the Public in Planning, Housing & Sustainability [www.ca-ilg.org/engaging-public-planning-housing-sustainability](http://www.ca-ilg.org/engaging-public-planning-housing-sustainability)
- Understanding the Basics of Land Use Planning [www.ca-ilg.org/post/understanding-basics-land-use-and-planning-series](http://www.ca-ilg.org/post/understanding-basics-land-use-and-planning-series)
- Land Use and Environment [www.ca-ilg.org/land-use-environment](http://www.ca-ilg.org/land-use-environment)
- SB 375 Resource Center [www.ca-ilg.org/sb-375-resource-center](http://www.ca-ilg.org/sb-375-resource-center)
- Online Guide to Planning Healthy Neighborhoods <http://www.ca-ilg.org/online-guide-planning-healthy-neighborhoods>

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## Institute for Local Government

1400 K Street, Suite 205  
Sacramento, CA 95814  
(916) 658-8208  
[www.ca-ilg.org](http://www.ca-ilg.org)