



ACP 101 UNIT DESCRIPTIONS

Unit 1 – Introduction to Planning

This unit is a short introduction to your role as a planning official. It will introduce you to your duties and responsibilities as a planning official, as well as the groups with which you will be working.

Unit 2 – The Foundations of Planning and Zoning

Many citizens who take on the planning official role do not have the opportunity to understand the historical context within which planning and zoning are done. Without this understanding, you may wonder how local governments came to be involved in planning and zoning. If so, then this learning unit is for you.

The goal of this unit is to describe how your role evolved from efforts to resolve historical conflicts and implement social goals related to land use. We will introduce planning and zoning and describe why they came about and what they are today.

Unit 3 – Planning Official Ethics 101

In this unit, we will introduce why ethics are a concern of any public official. We look at how ethics governs a planning official's duties and actions. By the end of this unit, you will have a basic understanding of your ethical boundaries and responsibilities.

Unit 4 – What is a Comprehensive Plan?

Before you create any document or plan, you need to know its purpose and the components to complete the document. This unit reviews the components of a

comprehensive plan created through the planning process. It examines the purpose and the basic information of each component.

Unit 5 – Looking Back to Look Forward

The comprehensive plan considers the past, present, and future for each community. This unit provides an historical view of land use patterns in the United States and the potential need for change. An historical perspective is important when it comes to changing the present and shaping the future. Without this larger perspective, the planning process at the local level can undo the progress that has been made and repeat the damage that has been done.

Unit 6 – Future Land Use Classifications

What is meant by future land use classifications? How does this apply to the comprehensive plan and the future land use map? This unit answers these questions and more. Citizen planners need to consider land use classifications when creating their comprehensive plan to ensure that they address goals and design guidelines related to land uses. Land use classifications are also key in creating and implementing the zoning ordinance.

Unit 7 – Should the Plan be Updated?

Now that we've discussed the components of a comprehensive plan, the next step is deciding when to take action to review and revise the current plan, or to create a new one. This unit is designed to help a planning commission make decisions about when to review its comprehensive plan and how to identify characteristics of a good plan.

Unit 8 – Overview of the Planning Process

In order to develop or update a comprehensive plan, you need a process. The planning process is not unlike how we plan our everyday activities. For example, before you start planning a trip across the country, you need an overall view of how you are going to get there. Once you have that, you can plan the details for each part of the trip. This unit provides an overview of the phases involved in developing or

updating the comprehensive plan and the details that will assist with actually performing each phase.

Unit 9 – Working with the Public

Working with the public is a critical element of the planning process. Knowing what the public wants or needs has a direct bearing on the content of the comprehensive plan. This unit describes various techniques by which a planning commission works with the public and identifies what is required for making that interaction successful.

Unit 10 – Collecting and Analyzing Data

A successful planning effort begins with useful and relevant information. This unit describes the various pieces of information that may be available and may be able to contribute to the plan. While not all elements of data collection and analysis are needed for every community, it is important to understand the general process used to ensure that the information is meaningful and contributes to the rest of the plan.

Unit 11 – Issues, Vision, Goals and Objectives

At the end of this unit, the learner should be able to describe a process used to develop or update planning goals in a comprehensive plan

Unit 12 – Drafting the Plan

Knowing what you want in the comprehensive plan and actually writing it are two different things. This unit looks at what a planning official needs to consider when drafting and reviewing the comprehensive plan.

Unit 13 – Adopting the Plan

Each state's planning enabling act specifies a process, including timing of parts of the process, for formal adoption of a comprehensive plan. Parts of this process have been mentioned in previous units. This unit provides a description of the actions that a planning body should take as it moves the comprehensive plan toward adoption.

Unit 14 – Going from Issue to Future Land Use

One challenge that planning commissions face is the task of taking land use issues, turning them into policy, and then ultimately deciding just where in the community the policies should be implemented. The future land use map of the comprehensive plan visually conveys how and where the community wishes to implement its land use policies. This unit provides example processes that community planners can utilize when faced with similar implementation decisions.



Empowering People to Get Better Planning

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ACP 201 UNIT DESCRIPTIONS

Unit 1 – Basic Legal Framework for Planning Officials

This unit introduces the laws that give planning officials the powers to perform their duties. It also introduces the sources and types of law that planning officials should know in order to understand the legal basis for planning and zoning.

Unit 2 – Governmental Authority for Planning and Zoning

This unit introduces the legal basis for planning and zoning. It describes how the authority for planning and zoning is established, why zoning has been upheld by the courts as a legitimate exercise of police power, and how zoning authority changes over time.

Unit 3 – Constitutional Limitations on Planning and Zoning

This unit introduces the constitutional limitations of government and the rights of individuals with respect to planning and zoning. The unit will help planning officials understand that their actions are limited by provisions in the U.S. and state constitutions.

Unit 4 – How does Zoning Work?

Now that you have completed your comprehensive plan, it is time to put the plan into practice by using the tools available within the zoning ordinance. But before jumping into zoning procedures, it is necessary that you know the basics of zoning, what zoning tools are available, and how they can be used to their best advantage.

This unit introduces zoning from the vantage point of how its implementation by local governments is similar to the work of our federal government. Legislative, administrative, and quasi-judicial functions provide a check and balance for each other. This unit will also look at the roles different bodies and people perform.

Unit 5 – The Site Plan

In this unit, you will learn about the nature and use of a site plan and how it relates to the requirements of the zoning ordinance. The unit covers the definition of a site plan, site plan requirements, and the process of conducting a thorough site plan review. The site plan is often the last step in the review process prior to having the development actually under construction. The plan, once approved, is what the public will see once the project is completed; and once the plan is approved, the community is committed to seeing it through.

Unit 6 – Making Site Plan Decisions

When presented with a site plan, what do you do? This unit walks you through the site plan review process and decisions you will encounter along the way. The unit offers a series of questions that you can use to help you understand how a site plan should be reviewed.

Unit 7 – Development Options

Subdivisions, conservation subdivisions and planned unit developments are common development options available to property owners and developers. Each of these options work in concert with the zoning ordinance and comprehensive plan. This unit will review each development option, explaining the authority for their use and common issues arising under them.

Unit 8 – Site Specific Zoning Tools

In this unit, we discuss some of the specific tools that communities can employ to control how developments fit and function within the community. These tools are included in the zoning ordinance and support the goals of the comprehensive plan. For example, there are many aspects to reviewing a site plan including parking, site circulation, landscaping, and screening requirements. Being comfortable with the

underlying concepts of zoning tools used for site plan reviews can help you employ them effectively during the development review process.

Unit 9 – Overview of the Zoning Process

This unit gives you an overview of the zoning processes. The remaining units in this module provide details that will assist with actually performing each process.

Unit 10 – Appeals, Variances and Interpretations

What happens if the zoning ordinance has requirements that cannot be fulfilled on a particular property? What happens if the zoning ordinance is ambiguous or unclear as it applies to specific circumstances? How should landowners in your community go about seeking relief from the ordinance requirements when those requirements prevent a reasonable use of land?

In this unit, we will consider appeals, variances, and interpretations. The perspective of this presentation should benefit members of the Zoning Board of Appeals, those wishing to bring their issues to the ZBA, and anyone else involved in the zoning process.

Unit 11 – Zoning Enforcement

Even the best ordinances are of little value without the resources and willingness to enforce them. An effective enforcement program requires three essential pieces that together make up the COP: Commitment; Ordinances; and Process. This unit will consider each of these.

Unit 12 – Making Zoning Decisions

Knowing what is included in a zoning ordinance, that it can be amended, and that exceptions to the rules can be made is the first step in understanding how zoning ordinances, ordinance amendments, variances, Planned Unit Developments (PUDs) and other special uses relate to each other. This unit takes the next step. It offers a series of questions that you can use to help you decide which is the best course of action when it comes to changing land use and/or intensity of an existing property.

Unit 13 – Effective Public Meetings

This unit is designed to help you with the selection of the right type of meeting for the situation. It will also guide you through the process of running meetings for each situation. You will learn about the steps involved in successful meetings and how to organize them. You will be able to record those meetings and understand decisions made at the meeting based on the written record.

Unit 14 – Dealing with Conflict

Conflict is inevitable and when conflict is not handled effectively, negative consequences may result. Identifying and effectively addressing conflict can greatly reduce the chances of interactions getting out of hand. This unit provides tips and information on how to identify, prevent, de-escalate, and resolve conflict.



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