**Historical Perspective of Urban Planning**

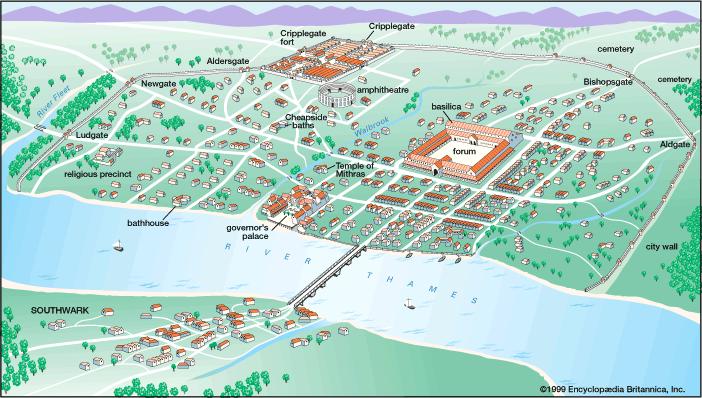
Urban planning, design and regulation of the uses of space that focus on the physical form, economic functions, and social impacts of the urban environment and on the location of different activities within it. Because urban planning draws upon [engineering](http://www.britannica.com/technology/engineering), [architectural](http://www.britannica.com/topic/architecture), and social and political concerns, it is variously a technical profession, an endeavour involving political will and public participation, and an academic discipline. Urban [planning](http://www.britannica.com/topic/planning) concerns itself with both the development of open land (“greenfields sites”) and the revitalization of existing parts of the city, thereby involving goal setting, data collection and analysis, forecasting, design, strategic thinking, and public consultation. Increasingly, the technology of geographic information systems ([GIS](http://www.britannica.com/technology/GIS)) has been used to map the existing urban system and to project the consequences of changes. In the late 20th century the term [sustainable development](http://www.britannica.com/topic/sustainable-development) came to represent an ideal outcome in the sum of all planning goals. As advocated by the United Nations-sponsored World Commission on Environment and Development in *Our Common Future* (1987), *sustainability* refers to “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” While there is widespread consensus on this general goal, most major planning decisions involve trade-offs between subsidiary objectives and thus frequently involve conflicts. The modern origins of urban planning lie in a social movement for urban reform that arose in the latter part of the 19th century as a reaction against the disorder of the industrial [city](http://www.britannica.com/topic/city). Many visionaries of the period sought an ideal city, yet practical considerations of adequate sanitation, movement of goods and people, and provision of amenities also drove the desire for planning. Contemporary planners seek to balance the conflicting demands of social equity, economic growth, environmental sensitivity, and aesthetic appeal. The result of the planning process may be a formal master plan for an entire city or [metropolitan area](http://www.britannica.com/topic/metropolitan-area), a neighbourhood plan, a project plan, or a set of policy alternatives. Successful implementation of a plan usually requires entrepreneurship and political astuteness on the part of planners and their sponsors, despite efforts to insulate planning from politics. While based in government, planning increasingly involves private-sector participation in “public-private partnerships.”

**[](http://www.britannica.com/topic/urban-planning/images-videos/Georges-Eugene-Haussmanns-modernization-plan-transformed-many-areas-of-Paris/82279)**

## Development of urban planning

## Early history

Evidence of planning has been unearthed in the ruins of cities in [China](http://www.britannica.com/place/China), [India](http://www.britannica.com/place/India), [Egypt](http://www.britannica.com/place/Egypt), Asia Minor, the Mediterranean world, and [South](http://www.britannica.com/place/South-America) and [Central America](http://www.britannica.com/place/Central-America). Early examples of efforts toward planned urban development include orderly street systems that are rectilinear and sometimes radial; division of a city into specialized functional quarters; development of commanding central sites for palaces, temples, and civic buildings; and advanced systems of fortification, water supply, and drainage. Most of the evidence is in smaller cities that were built in comparatively short periods as colonies. Often the central cities of ancient states grew to substantial size before they achieved governments capable of imposing controls.

**[](http://www.britannica.com/topic/urban-planning/images-videos/The-Roman-settlement-of-Londinium-AD-200-which-developed-into/82278)**

several centuries during the [Middle Ages](http://www.britannica.com/event/Middle-Ages), there was little [building](http://www.britannica.com/technology/building) of cities in Europe. Eventually towns grew up as centres of church or feudal authority, of marketing or trade. As the urban population grew, the constriction caused by walls and fortifications led to overcrowding, the blocking out of air and light, and very poor sanitation. Certain quarters of the cities, either by custom or fiat, were restricted to different nationalities, classes, or trades, as still occurs in many contemporary cities of the developing world.

The physical form of medieval and Renaissance towns and cities followed the pattern of the village, spreading along a street or a crossroads in circular patterns or in irregular shapes, though rectangular patterns tended to characterize some of the newer towns. Most streets were little more than footpaths—more a medium for communication than for transportation—and even in major European cities paving was not widely introduced before the 12th century (1184 in Paris, 1235 in Florence, and 1300 in Lübeck). As the population of the city grew, walls were often expanded, but few cities at the time exceeded a mile in length. Sometimes sites were changed, as in Lübeck, and many new cities emerged with increasing population—frequently about one day’s walk apart. Towns ranged in population from several hundred to perhaps 40,000 (as in London in the late 14th century, although London’s population had been as high as 80,000 before the arrival of the [Black Death](http://www.britannica.com/event/Black-Death)). Paris and Venice were exceptions, reaching 100,000.

Conscious attempts to plan cities reemerged in Europe during the [Renaissance](http://www.britannica.com/event/Renaissance). Although these efforts partly aimed at improving circulation and providing military defense, their prime objective was often the glorification of a ruler or a state. From the 16th century to the end of the 18th, many cities were laid out and built with monumental splendour. The result may have pleased and inspired the citizens, but it rarely contributed to their health, to the comfort of their homes, or to efficiency in manufacturing, distribution, and marketing.

The New World absorbed the planning concepts of European [absolutism](http://www.britannica.com/topic/absolutism-political-system) to only a limited degree. [Pierre L’Enfant](http://www.britannica.com/biography/Pierre-Charles-LEnfant)’s grandiose plan for [Washington, D.C.](http://www.britannica.com/place/Washington-DC) (1791), exemplified this transference, as did later City Beautiful projects, which aimed for grandeur in the siting of public buildings but exhibited less concern for the efficiency of residential, commercial, and industrial development. More influential on the layout of U.S. cities, however, was the rigid [grid plan](http://www.britannica.com/topic/gridiron-plan) of Philadelphia, designed by [William Penn](http://www.britannica.com/biography/William-Penn-English-Quaker-leader-and-colonist) (1682). This plan traveled west with the pioneers, since it was the simplest method of dividing surveyed territory. Although it took no cognizance of topography, it facilitated the development of land markets by establishing standard-sized lots that could be easily bought and sold—even sight unseen.

In much of the world, city plans were based on the concept of a centrally located public space. The plans differed, however, in their prescriptions for residential development. In the United States the [New England](http://www.britannica.com/place/New-England) town grew around a central [commons](http://www.britannica.com/topic/commons); initially a pasture, it provided a focus of community life and a site for a meetinghouse, tavern, smithy, and shops and was later reproduced in the central squares of cities and towns throughout the country. Also from the New England town came the tradition of the freestanding single-family [house](http://www.britannica.com/topic/house-astrology) that became the norm for most [metropolitan areas](http://www.britannica.com/topic/metropolitan-area). The central plaza, place, or square provided a focal point for European city plans as well. In contrast to American residential development, though, European domestic [architecture](http://www.britannica.com/topic/architecture) was dominated by the attached house, while elsewhere in the world the marketplace or [bazaar](http://www.britannica.com/topic/bazaar) rather than an open space acted as the cynosure of cities. Courtyard-style domiciles characterized the Mediterranean region, while compounds of small houses fenced off from the street formed many African and Asian settlements.

## The era of [industrialization](http://www.britannica.com/topic/industrialization)

In both Europe and the United States, the surge of industry during the mid- and late 19th century was accompanied by rapid population growth, unfettered business enterprise, great speculative profits, and public failures in managing the unwanted physical consequences of development. Giant sprawling cities developed during this era, exhibiting the luxuries of wealth and the meanness of poverty in sharp juxtaposition. Eventually the corruption and exploitation of the era gave rise to the [Progressive movement](http://www.britannica.com/place/United-States/Building-the-Panama-Canal-and-American-domination-in-the-Caribbean), of which city planning formed a part. The [slums](http://www.britannica.com/technology/slum), congestion, disorder, ugliness, and threat of disease provoked a reaction in which sanitation improvement was the first demand. Significant betterment of [public health](http://www.britannica.com/topic/public-health) resulted from engineering improvements in [water supply](http://www.britannica.com/technology/water-supply-system) and [sewerage](http://www.britannica.com/technology/sewerage-system), which were essential to the further growth of urban populations. Later in the century the first housing reform measures were enacted. The early regulatory laws (such as Great Britain’s [Public Health Act](http://www.britannica.com/topic/Public-Health-Acts) of 1848 and the New York State Tenement House Act of 1879) set minimal standards for housing [construction](http://www.britannica.com/technology/construction-technology). Implementation, however, occurred only slowly, as governments did not provide funding for upgrading existing dwellings, nor did the minimal rent-paying ability of slum dwellers offer incentives for landlords to improve their buildings. Nevertheless, housing improvement occurred as new structures were erected, and new legislation continued to raise standards,

Also during the Progressive era, which extended through the early 20th century, efforts to improve the urban environment emerged from recognition of the need for [recreation](http://www.britannica.com/topic/recreation). [Parks](http://www.britannica.com/art/park) were developed to provide visual relief and places for healthful [play](http://www.britannica.com/topic/play-behaviour) or relaxation. Later, playgrounds were carved out in congested areas, and facilities for games and sports were established not only for children but also for adults, whose workdays gradually shortened. Supporters of the parks movement believed that the opportunity for outdoor recreation would have a civilizing effect on the working classes, who were otherwise consigned to overcrowded housing and unhealthful workplaces. New York’s [Central Park](http://www.britannica.com/place/Central-Park-New-York-City), envisioned in the 1850s and designed by architects [Calvert Vaux](http://www.britannica.com/biography/Calvert-Vaux) and [Frederick Law Olmsted](http://www.britannica.com/biography/Frederick-Law-Olmsted), became a widely imitated model. Among its contributions were the separation of pedestrian and vehicular traffic, the creation of a romantic landscape within the heart of the city, and a demonstration that the creation of parks could greatly enhance real-estate values in their surroundings.

Concern for the appearance of the city had long been manifest in Europe, in the imperial tradition of court and palace and in the central plazas and great buildings of church and state. In [Paris](http://www.britannica.com/place/Paris) during the [Second Empire](http://www.britannica.com/place/France/The-Second-Empire-1852-70) (1852–70), [Georges-Eugène, Baron Haussmann](http://www.britannica.com/biography/Georges-Eugene-Baron-Haussmann), became the greatest of the planners on a grand scale, advocating straight arterial boulevards, advantageous vistas, and a symmetry of squares and radiating roads. The resulting urban form was widely emulated throughout the rest of continental Europe. Haussmann’s efforts went well beyond beautification, however; essentially they broke down the barriers to commerce presented by medieval Paris, modernizing the city so as to enable the efficient transportation of goods as well as the rapid mobilization of military troops. His designs involved the demolition of antiquated tenement structures and their replacement by new apartment houses intended for a wealthier clientele, the construction of transportation corridors and commercial space that broke up residential neighbourhoods, and the displacement of poor people from centrally located areas. Haussmann’s methods provided a template by which urban redevelopment programs would operate in Europe and the United States until nearly the end of the 20th century, and they would extend their influence in much of the developing world after that.

As the grandeur of the European vision took root in the United States through the [City Beautiful movement](http://www.britannica.com/topic/City-Beautiful-movement), its showpiece became the [World’s Columbian Exposition](http://www.britannica.com/event/Worlds-Columbian-Exposition) of 1893, developed in Chicago according to principles set out by American architect [Daniel Burnham](http://www.britannica.com/biography/Daniel-H-Burnham). The architectural style of the exposition established an ideal that many cities imitated. Thus, the archetype of the City Beautiful—characterized by grand malls and majestically sited civic buildings in Greco-Roman [architecture](http://www.britannica.com/topic/architecture)—was replicated in civic centres and boulevards throughout the country, contrasting with and in protest against the surrounding disorder and ugliness. However, diffusion of the model in the [United States](http://www.britannica.com/place/United-States) was limited by the much more restricted power of the state (in contrast to European counterparts) and by the City Beautiful model’s weak potential for enhancing businesses’ profitability.

Whereas Haussmann’s approach was especially influential on the European continent and in the design of American civic centres, it was the utopian concept of the [garden city](http://www.britannica.com/topic/garden-city-urban-planning), first described by British social reformer [Ebenezer Howard](http://www.britannica.com/biography/Ebenezer-Howard) in his book *Garden Cities of To-Morrow* (1902), that shaped the appearance of residential areas in the United States and Great Britain. Essentially a suburban form, Howard’s [garden city](http://www.britannica.com/topic/garden-city-urban-planning) incorporated low-rise homes on winding streets and culs-de-sac, the separation of commerce from residences, and plentiful open space lush with greenery. Howard called for a “cooperative commonwealth” in which rises in property values would be shared by the community, open land would be communally held, and manufacturing and retail establishments would be clustered within a short distance of residences. Successors abandoned Howard’s socialist ideals but held on to the residential design form established in the two new towns built during Howard’s lifetime ([Letchworth](http://www.britannica.com/place/Letchworth) and [Welwyn Garden City](http://www.britannica.com/place/Welwyn-Garden-City)), ultimately imitating the garden city model of winding roads and ample greenery in the forming of the modern suburban subdivision.

Perhaps the single most influential factor in shaping the physical form of the contemporary city was [transportation](http://www.britannica.com/technology/transportation-technology) technology. The evolution of transport modes from foot and horse to mechanized vehicles facilitated tremendous urban territorial expansion. Workers were able to live far from their jobs, and goods could move quickly from point of production to market. However, automobiles and buses rapidly congested the streets in the older parts of cities. By threatening strangulation of traffic, they dramatized the need to establish new kinds of orderly circulation systems. Increasingly, transportation networks became the focus of planning activities, especially as [subway](http://www.britannica.com/technology/subway) systems were constructed in [New York](http://www.britannica.com/place/New-York-state), [London](http://www.britannica.com/place/London), and Paris at the beginning of the 20th century. To accommodate increased traffic, municipalities invested heavily in widening and extending roads. (*See also* [traffic control](http://www.britannica.com/technology/traffic-control).)

Many city governments established planning departments during the first third of the 20th century. The year 1909 was a milestone in the establishment of urban planning as a modern governmental function: it saw the passage of Britain’s first town-planning act and, in the United States, the first national conference on city planning, the publication of [Burnham](http://www.britannica.com/biography/Daniel-H-Burnham)’s [plan for Chicago](http://www.britannica.com/topic/Plan-of-Chicago), and the appointment of [Chicago](http://www.britannica.com/place/Chicago)’s Plan Commission (the first recognized planning agency in the United States, however, was created in Hartford, Connecticut, in 1907). Germany, Sweden, and other European countries also developed planning administration and law at this time.

The colonial powers transported European concepts of city planning to the cities of the developing world. The result was often a new city planned according to Western principles of beauty and separation of uses, adjacent to unplanned settlements both new and old, subject to all the ills of the medieval European city. [New Delhi](http://www.britannica.com/place/New-Delhi), India, epitomizes this form of development. Built according to the scheme devised by the British planners [Edwin Lutyens](http://www.britannica.com/biography/Edwin-Lutyens) and Herbert Baker, it grew up cheek by jowl with the tangled streets of Old Delhi. At the same time, the old city, while less salubrious, offered its inhabitants a sense of community, historical continuity, and a functionality more suited to their way of life. The same pattern repeated itself throughout the [British-ruled](http://www.britannica.com/place/British-Empire) territories, where African capitals such as [Nairobi](http://www.britannica.com/place/Nairobi), [Kenya](http://www.britannica.com/place/Kenya), and Salisbury, Southern Rhodesia (now [Harare](http://www.britannica.com/place/Harare), [Zimbabwe](http://www.britannica.com/place/Zimbabwe)), were similarly designed to accommodate their white colonial rulers. Although the decorative motifs imposed by [France](http://www.britannica.com/place/France) in its colonial capitals reflected a somewhat different aesthetic sensibility, French planners likewise implanted broad boulevards and European-style housing in their colonial outposts.

After [World War II](http://www.britannica.com/event/World-War-II) a number of European countries, especially France, the [Netherlands](http://www.britannica.com/place/Netherlands), [Germany](http://www.britannica.com/place/Germany), and the Soviet Union, undertook the building of [new towns](http://www.britannica.com/topic/new-urbanology) (comprehensive new developments outside city centres) as governmental enterprises. Concerned with what they regarded as too much density within urban areas, governments constructed these new towns as a means of capturing the overspill from cities within planned developments rather than allowing haphazard exurban growth. Most of them, except in the Soviet Union, were primarily residential suburbs, although some British towns such as [Milton Keynes](http://www.britannica.com/place/Milton-Keynes) did succeed in attracting both industry and population within low-rise conurbations. In Sweden the government successfully constructed accessible high-rise residential suburbs with mixed-income occupancy. Tapiola, in metropolitan Helsinki, Finland, was a low-rise ensemble embodying many of Howard’s original ideas and incorporating [architecture](http://www.britannica.com/topic/architecture) of the highest order. New town development in France, Italy, Spain, and Belgium, however, mostly resulted in large, uninviting high-rise residential projects for the working class on the urban periphery.

American postwar new town development depended largely on private initiative, with [Reston](http://www.britannica.com/place/Reston-Virginia), [Virginia](http://www.britannica.com/place/Virginia-state); [Columbia](http://www.britannica.com/place/Columbia-Maryland), [Maryland](http://www.britannica.com/place/Maryland-state); [Irvine](http://www.britannica.com/place/Irvine-California), [California](http://www.britannica.com/place/California-state); and Seaside, [Florida](http://www.britannica.com/place/Florida), serving as some of the better-known examples. Preceding these efforts, however, were a number of small, privately planned suburbs, including Riverside, [Illinois](http://www.britannica.com/place/Illinois-state), a planned community outside [Chicago](http://www.britannica.com/place/Chicago) that was designed by [Frederick Law Olmsted](http://www.britannica.com/biography/Frederick-Law-Olmsted) in 1868–69, and Radburn, [New Jersey](http://www.britannica.com/place/New-Jersey), built in 1929 according to plans conceived by Clarence Stein and Henry Wright. There are a few outstanding examples of planned new cities in such widely scattered places as India (where Le Corbusier designed [Chandigarh](http://www.britannica.com/place/Chandigarh-India)), the [Middle East](http://www.britannica.com/place/Middle-East), and [South America](http://www.britannica.com/place/South-America).

In [Asia](http://www.britannica.com/place/Asia) the emerging industrial economies of the post-World War II period produced large, densely populated, congested metropolises. Some Asian governments addressed the problems of rapid expansion through massive construction projects that encompassed [skyscraper](http://www.britannica.com/technology/skyscraper) office buildings, shopping malls, luxury apartments and hotels, and new airports. In Shanghai, in the span of little more than a decade, the Chinese government created Pudong New Area—a planned central business district along with factories and residences in Pudong, across the Huangpu River from Shanghai’s old downtown core. Many developing countries, however, are still preoccupied with political and economic problems and have made little progress toward establishing an environmental planning function capable of avoiding the insalubrious conditions that characterized Western cities in the 19th century.