Community planning is a process that helps communities solve problems, protect important community features, and guide how the community will grow and change in the future.

Every community in Harrison County is experiencing problems. For example, there is too little housing following Hurricane Katrina. In some areas there are not enough parks for children to play in. You can likely think of other problems your community is facing.

Every community has features that the residents would like to protect. For example, the community may want to make sure that their bayous and waterways are clean or that the old buildings in the community are preserved.

One of the major challenges in community planning is guiding future growth and change. Following Hurricane Katrina, many communities in Harrison County are trying to determine how they should rebuild and where new growth should occur. This includes deciding where new houses and businesses should be built, where schools and parks should be placed, and which land should be left as natural.

Community planners direct the planning process. Citizens, children to grandparents, play an important part in the planning process. Planners and citizens decide how to improve their community and what it should look like in the future. Since Hurricane Katrina, communities across Harrison County have been engaged in community planning efforts. For example, students at Pineville Elementary School provided their opinions on what their community should look like in the future.

Planning works best when planners and citizens recognize how the parts of the community fit together. For example, new houses for families should be near schools and parks. Factories should be near large streets where trucks can easily get to them. Sound planning considers the needs of every member of the community.

Once the planners have worked...
Planning Word Find
Find the missing words listed below on the right in the word find. Each of the words is related to community planning.

NCWSEROTSEEUMUWHK
AENVIRONMENTUMRGLAWIBBSARTSNOBLPDPUNOSADNSNWEEM
EOLGROTHWIMRENPV

VOANMBMANDALSNGDR
IHNCRANYEEYEAHN
SRNRCSANTTIRSNSBNOCITPICITRASESE
EBNAGRENSPACEAA
HHGNSAAHUVMISREE
EGEIELWURMCFUICWP
IRSRBLSAMFOROBC
PEOMCEFMOHREETPI
MNIGOCICWICIRWDQAV
OWASNCMINTSROGHCNWSEOETNNORWOS

New urbanism
Comprehensive plan
Community
Neighborhood
Sprawl
Growth
Planning
Environment
Boomburst
Participation
Growth space
Focus
Roadways
Offices
Stores

Recommended Readings
There are a number of books that students can read to learn more about community planning and development. Students can ask their school or local librarian for help in finding books about planning. Below are several recommended books:

Underground by David MacCaulley describes the complicated system of infrastructure underneath one's feet.

Tar Beach by Faith Ringgold is about one student's favorite places in New York City. In this story, the student shares what her city is like from the roof of her home.

Metropolis by Albert Lorenz and Joy Schleh explores ten cities across the world over time. The book describes what life was like in each city during that time period.

City: A Story of Roman Planning and Construction by David MacCaulley describes the planning of an imaginary Roman city.

The Great City Search by Rose Haywood lets students learn about different people who work in cities.

How to Draw Maps and Charts by Pam Beasant and Alastair Smith teaches students about how to create their own maps and charts.

The Art of Construction by Mario Salvadori describes how buildings are constructed.

Under Every Roof: A Kid’s Style and Field Guide to the Architecture of American Houses by Patricia Brown Glenn allows students to learn about the different architectural styles across the United States.
Mapping Your Neighborhood

Scenario 1: Jennifer is running late for work. She grabs her briefcase and runs two blocks to the bus stop. Luckily, the bus arrives in one minute. As she sits on the bus, she looks out the window and notices that Vinnie’s Pizza is going out of business and, one block later, that St. Joseph’s Elementary School is having a carnival on Saturday. A block later she sees a “For rent” sign on a building. The friend brags about her new car, and Jennifer says, “There’s no way I would ever get a car. What a hassle!”

Scenario 2: Juan is running late for work. He opens the garage door and speeds down the driveway. As he goes down his street, he has to slow down for children and speed bumps. Once he gets to the main boulevard, he hits two red lights. On the freeway, it’s bumper-to-bumper. Never mind—he can get some work done on his cell phone and comb his hair in the process. He makes it to work just in time for dinner and relax.

Exercise 2: This activity allows you to think about the differences in types of communities. To begin, read the following two scenarios.

Exercise 3: Review the text in the box on the page about sprawl and new urbanism. How do street design and layout affect a town? What might sprawl affect the environment (e.g., animals, plants, and air and water quality)? How might sprawl affect people’s interactions with their neighbors? (Hint: Think about how long it takes people to get to and from work and the consequences of having a big garage rather than a front porch.) What are some things that town planners can do to combat sprawl? What are some of the benefits of living in a sprawl area?

Exercise 4: This lesson is adapted from the National Geographic: http://www.nationalgeographic.com/xpeditions/lessons/12/g08/sprawl/what.html.

What is Sprawl?

The term sprawl is used to describe development patterns that are common throughout the United States. Sprawl:

1) uses more land than necessary;
2) has a lower population density than traditional cities and towns (e.g., fewer people in larger houses);
3) creates a dependence on cars for almost everything;
4) results in fragmented open spaces, wide gaps between development, and a scattered appearance;
5) separates uses into distinct areas (so, you don’t usually have a store or a movie theater within walking distance from your home);
6) is characterized by repetitive one-story commercial buildings surrounded by acres of parking; and
7) lacks public spaces and community centers.

Community planners are working to try to prevent sprawl. Smart Growth is a term used to describe well-planned communities that protect the environment, provide places for people to walk, and a mix of housing and businesses. Planners are promoting traditional urban centers and towns, which is also known as new urbanism. A new urbanist community:

1) has higher population density than surrounding areas;
2) offers mixed use buildings (businesses and homes on the same block or at least within walking distance of each other);
3) is pedestrian-friendly;
4) is served by public facilities, services, and spaces (e.g., public transportation or community centers);
5) consists of many different types of housing and businesses;
6) has centers for community activities; and
7) are surrounded by open spaces, including productive farm and forest land.

There are numerous resources to learn more about sprawl, smart growth and new urbanism:

Smart Growth Network: http://www.smartgrowth.org
Planning Commissioners Journal: http://www.plannersweb.com/articles/sprawl-articles.html
Sierra Club: http://www.sierrclub.org/sprawl/
Careers in Community Planning

Planning is a growing career field with many jobs. What do planners do? Planners help communities determine their future. In addition to working with citizens, they perform technical analyses, create maps, work with developers, plan transportation systems, and protect the environment. Planners develop a plan through analysis of data and identification of goals for the community. Plans can take many different forms including: policy recommendations, comprehensive plans, neighborhood plans, regulations, and others. Planners are also responsible for helping implement the plan.

Planners work in every state and around the world. They work in rural communities, suburbs, and cities. They work in the public sector for federal, state, and local governments. They also work for non-profits and with private companies. Planners can specialize and focus on one type of planning, such as transportation planning, urban design, environmental planning, or information technology.

What do planners do at work? A typical day for a planner can vary, but generally planners spend a lot of their time working with other people. For example, at the beginning of the day the planner may meet with citizens to talk about how they plan to add to their houses. In the afternoon they may meet with a neighborhood organization to discuss a neighborhood plan. Part of the planner’s day may be spent collecting information, conducting interviews, and analyzing information. Planners use GIS, census data, and other information about a community.

What skills do planners need? Planners need strong writing skills to communicate with public officials, professionals, and citizens. Planners need to be able to speak in front of large groups of people. Planners need to have good math skills to analyze data.

Planning Maze

When communities are not designed well it can be difficult to find your way from home to school. Smart Growth ensures that students can easily get from home to school by walking, riding a bike, or on a bus. Find the way from the school to the house. There may be more than one path. As you complete the maze, think about your own community. What places do you pass as you travel from your school to your home? How do you get to school by car, by bus, by bike, or by walking? How would you like to be able to get to school? What would you like to see on your way, perhaps a library or snow cone stand?

Planning Maze

City of Gulfport Department of Urban Development is responsible for all planning and development inside the city of Gulfport. http://www.ci.gulfport.ms.us/NEWsite/urban_development_main.htm

Gulf Regional Planning Commission is responsible for transportation planning across the Mississippi Gulf Coast. http://www.grpc.com/

Southern Mississippi Planning and Development District is responsible for regional planning, economic development, and land use planning in the 15 south Mississippi counties. http://www.smpdd.com

Harrison County Zoning Office is responsible for creating community plans for the unincorporated areas of Harrison County and working with citizens to build on their land. http://www.co.harrison.ms.us/departments/zoning

What Kind of Education Do You Need to be a Planner?

Many planners have degrees in planning. However, others have studied geography, public administration, urban studies, architecture, landscape architecture, economics, sociology, or political science. Most planners have an undergraduate degree and many have a Master’s degree. Jackson State University offers a Master’s degree in planning (http://www.jsums.edu/liberalarts/urban/index.html) and the University of New Orleans offers an undergraduate degree in Urban Studies and Planning, as well as a Master’s degree in Urban Planning (http://cupa.uno.edu/bsusp.html). To learn about other schools that offer planning degrees visit the Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning at http://www.acsp.org.