

UrbanPlan for Public Officials Workshop

Engaging Local Decision Makers in a Dialogue about Land Use Dynamics

The UrbanPlan for Public Officials Workshop is ideal for local decision makers who would like to learn more about the fundamental forces that shape and affect the built environment and the important leadership roles that elected and appointed officials play in the real estate development process.

Working with its District Councils, the Urban Land Institute aims to engage public officials in an interactive dialogue about the challenging issues, varying private and public sector roles, complex tradeoffs, and economics that are at play in land use in communities across the country.

Workshop as a Living Case Study

Participants work as competing development teams to respond to a hypothetical request for proposal (RFP) for the redevelopment of a site in the fictitious town of Yorktown. Teams work together, using blocks to represent different building types and a financial analysis tool, to create a feasible proposal that meets the RFP’s objectives, the community’s interests, and the investor’s bottom line. ULI members serve as facilitators challenging the conceptual proposal, act as a selection committee to review the final proposals, and present a case study to spur discussion and analysis.

Leverage Public/Private Partnerships

The workshop enables public officials to better understand the tradeoffs and risks at play in the entitlement and negotiation process associated with land use, especially in public/private partnerships (PPPs). The UrbanPlan case study is an example of a city-led redevelopment effort where compromise is needed from the locality, the development team selected through the RFP, and the community.

By taking on the role of developer, participants in the workshop get a chance to broaden their knowledge in the following areas:

- the basics of a pro forma and funding of a complex project;
- the economics of different building types and community benefits;
- the different time horizons for the public and private sectors;
- the risk associated with lengthy negotiations among all parties; and
- the importance of a clear and open process in the selection of a private partner.

Public officials will gain a deeper understanding of their own role in the shaping of the built environment and the tools to create a collaborative relationship with private sector partners to make city-led projects a success.



Teams use color-coded Legos to create a “massing plan” and pro forma for their development proposal.



Once the teams have a proposal completed, a ULI volunteer challenges their decisions.



The challenge culminates with a presentation to a “City Council Selection Committee” that questions each team on its proposal.

Who Should Attend the Workshop?

The workshop is intended for elected officials, such as mayors and city council members, as well as appointed officials, such as planning commission members. Typically, the workshop is offered to regional audiences of public officials. The workshop can also, by special arrangement, be offered to elected officials from one jurisdiction, local citizens’ groups, or senior departmental staff.

What to Expect at the Workshop

The workshop typically runs six hours and includes lunch. The agenda for the workshop is as follows:

- Overview
- Teams work on vision for RFP proposal
- Teams build out their proposal
- Facilitators visit teams
- Networking lunch
- Teams revise their proposal
- Facilitators visit teams a second time
- Teams finalize their proposal and present it to the Selection Committee
- ULI member presents case study of local project
- Discussion of how the workshop will affect the work of public officials in their own community

Dialogue with Real Estate Experts

UrbanPlan workshops benefit from ULI members who volunteer their time to participate in the program and bring a sense of reality to the case study. It presents an opportunity for senior real estate professionals to volunteer and create a dialogue between the private and public sectors that will help improve the community.

Testimonials about UrbanPlan

“Understanding markets and risk makes the public sector better communicators with developer partners. Understanding social and political influences helps developers manage risk more effectively. UrbanPlan could transform the public/private dialogue.”

Mark Rhoades, AICP, Past Planning Manager, Berkeley, California; Partner, Citycentric Investments, Oakland, California

“UrbanPlan distills and transmits the essence of the development process more effectively, more comprehensively, in less time, with more lasting results than any other program suitable for a classroom environment.”

David Green, Associate Principal, Perkins & Will, Former Professor of Urban Design, Georgia Tech, Atlanta, Georgia

“UrbanPlan does what ULI does best: help external audiences understand how the market and nonmarket forces in their community affect what can be approved, financed, built, and sustainably tenanted. That insight is essential for any meaningful land use discussion.”

Bryan Thornton, Partner, Pacific Coast Capital, San Francisco, California

“The UrbanPlan workshop is an opportunity to gain different perspectives on the development process. It is particularly useful to get a view on the fiscal constraints that developers face when trying to accommodate communities. It’s helpful to understand the balance between getting what you can from a developer but not pushing them too hard, so everyone wins.

The Urban Land Institute gave me the opportunity to discover how to accomplish that.”

Mayor Patrick Wojahn, College Park, Maryland

About the Urban Land Institute

The mission of ULI is to provide leadership in the responsible use of land and in creating and sustaining thriving communities worldwide. For more information about UrbanPlan and how to introduce it in your community, contact Sophie Lambert, UrbanPlan national director, at sophie.lambert@uli.org, or Sean Geygan, UrbanPlan associate, at sean.geygan@uli.org.

