

UMass Boston Urban Scholars Program

Seeing Your Community Through a Planner's Eyes

Summer 2025

University of Massachusetts - Boston

June 29th to July 9th – Mon to Thurs, Class Sessions: 12:50 pm to 1:45 pm

July 13th to Aug 5th – Mon to Thurs, Internships: 12:50 pm to 5:00 pm

Room number: TBD

Instructor: Elinor Hanjian

Program Director: Dr. Sowmya Balachandran

Course Description

Have you ever wondered why some neighborhoods feel welcoming and vibrant while others feel disconnected? Why are some streets easy to walk along while others are difficult or unsafe? Who decides where parks, bus stops, housing, bike lanes, and schools should go?

In this course, students will learn to think like urban planners by observing their own communities, asking critical questions, and proposing solutions to real-world challenges. Through interactive activities, neighborhood investigations, and engagement with professionals from government and community organizations, students will explore careers in planning, transportation, sustainability, environmental justice, housing, and public policy.

The course serves as the academic foundation for the Urban Scholars internship experience with the City of Boston Streets Cabinet.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the program, students will be able to:

- Explain the role of urban planning in everyday life.

- Describe how planning influences transportation, housing, climate resilience, public health, and equity.
- Observe and evaluate community design using a planner’s perspective.
- Collect and communicate evidence through photographs, maps, and written reflections.
- Develop practical recommendations for improving neighborhoods.
- Explore educational and career pathways in planning and public service.

Class Structure

Each session includes:

- **20-minute mini lecture**
- **30-minute interactive activity**
- **Group discussion and reflection**
- **Planner’s Eye Challenge** (community-based homework)

The Planner’s Eye Challenge

Every evening, students will complete a short observation exercise (homework) in their own neighborhood or another place they visit.

For each challenge, students will:




1. Take **one original photograph** related to the day’s topic.
2. Write a **50–100 word reflection** explaining:
 - o What they observed.
 - o Why it matters.
 - o How it affects people.
 - o **“If I were the planner, I would...”**






Students are encouraged to share their observations through a designated class platform or, if comfortable and permitted, on social media using the program hashtag. They should also submit their work to the instructional team (Elinor.Hanjian001@umb.edu).

Throughout the program, selected observations may be featured in class discussions and, with appropriate permissions and media releases, highlighted in program communications and LinkedIn updates to showcase student learning and community engagement.

Course Schedule

Phase I: Classroom Modules (June 29 – July 9)

Date	Topic	Mini-Lecture	In-Class Activity	Weekly Deliverable (Homework)
June 29	What is Urban Planning?	Introduction to planning, local government, and careers	Create a personal mobility map and discuss how planning shapes daily life	 <i>Planner's Eye #1:</i> Photograph one place that influences your daily life and explain why. End with “If I were the planner, I would...”
June 30	Seeing Communities Through a Planner's Eyes	Land use, neighborhood assets, and placemaking	Analyze and categorize student photos from Day 1	 Neighborhood observation with one photo and reflection identifying an asset or opportunity for improvement
July 1	Transportation and Complete Streets	Walking, biking, transit, accessibility, and safety	Campus walkability audit	 Document one transportation feature that works well or could be improved in your

				community
July 2	Housing and Neighborhood Change	Housing diversity, affordability, zoning, and neighborhood evolution	Design a neighborhood block	 Photograph different housing types and discuss how they shape community life
July 6	Climate Resilience and Environmental Justice	Trees, flooding, heat islands, and green infrastructure	Map resilience opportunities	 Identify one place that could become greener or more climate resilient
July 7	Community Engagement and Civic Leadership	Why planners listen to communities	Mock public meeting with stakeholder roles	 Interview a family member or neighbor about one improvement they would like to see
July 8	Maps, Data, and Evidence	GIS, surveys, and observation as planning tools	Build a collaborative class map from student observations	 Create one evidence-based recommendation supported by observations and photos
July 9	From Observation to Action	Preparing for internships and careers	Student presentations of mini planning proposals	 Final classroom reflection: “What kind of planner would I like to be?”

Phase II: Internship Experience (July 13 – August 5)

Students will spend four weeks working with the City of Boston Streets Cabinet and community partners on real-world projects. To encourage reflection and create materials for the end-of-summer celebration, students will complete one portfolio assignment each week.

Week	Theme	Student Deliverable	Poster Element
Week 1 (July 13–16)	Meet My Internship	Submit one photograph, a short description of the organization or project, and a reflection on first impressions	“Introducing Our Partners” collage with student quotes
Week 2 (July 20–23)	A Planning Problem I Observed	Document one challenge encountered during fieldwork and explain why it matters	Themed poster highlighting transportation, housing, public space, or environmental issues
Week 3 (July 27–30)	Planning in Action	Photograph or describe a planning activity, meeting, or field observation and explain what was learned	“Young Planners at Work” poster with images and reflections
Week 4 (August 3–5)	My Recommendation	Prepare one recommendation for improving the project or community, supported by observations	“If I Were the Planner...” poster featuring student proposals and quotes

Planner's Portfolio

Throughout the summer, each student will maintain a digital portfolio consisting of:

- Original photographs
- Weekly reflections (50–100 words)
- Community observations
- Maps or sketches
- Interview summaries
- Internship highlights
- Planning recommendations

Each reflection should conclude with:

“If I were the planner, I would...”

Students should submit their work to the instructional team and are encouraged to share it through the program's designated online platform. With appropriate permissions and media releases, selected submissions may be featured in program communications and summarized on LinkedIn to celebrate student learning and community engagement.

End-of-Summer Celebration

The weekly deliverables will be curated into a series of professional posters showcasing:

1. **How Students See Their Communities**
2. **Transportation Through a Planner's Eyes**
3. **Housing and Neighborhood Observations**
4. **Climate Resilience and Environmental Justice**
5. **Voices from the Community**

6. Planning in Action: Internship Experiences

7. If I Were the Planner... Student Recommendations

These posters will be displayed during the final celebration and can also be adapted for presentations, outreach materials, and future program promotion.

Student Materials

- 20 clipboards
- 20 notebooks or "Planner's Journals"
- 20 folders or binders
- 20 pens
- 20 pencils
- Colored pencils or markers (class set)
- Highlighters (class set)
- Sticky notes (multiple colors)
- Index cards

Mapping and Activity Supplies

- Large easel pads or flip-chart paper
- Poster boards (20–30)
- Colored dot stickers
- Sharpies (fine and broad tip)
- Tape
- Glue sticks
- Scissors
- Rulers

Observation and Field Activities

- Walkability audit sheets
- Neighborhood observation worksheets
- Community interview worksheets
- Asset mapping worksheets
- Transportation observation worksheets

Technology

- Laptop and projector
- Speakers for videos
- Power strip/extension cords
- QR codes linking to submission forms
- Shared Google Drive account
- Optional: ArcGIS StoryMaps account through UMass

Day 1: What Is Urban Planning?

Class Activity and Homework Assignment

Class Activity (30–40 minutes)

My Community, My Future

Purpose

This activity introduces students to the idea that cities and neighborhoods are designed by people and that planning influences many aspects of daily life. Students will begin thinking critically about their communities and identifying issues that matter to them.

Part 1: If You Could Change One Thing... (10 minutes)

As students enter the classroom, give each student a sticky note and ask them to respond to the following question:

If you could change one thing about your neighborhood tomorrow, what would it be?

Examples:

- Safer streets
- More trees
- Better public transportation
- Cleaner parks
- More affordable housing
- More places for teenagers
- Better lighting
- More local businesses

Students place their sticky notes on a wall or board.

Once everyone has posted their ideas, the instructor groups similar responses together and briefly discusses common themes.

Part 2: Video and Discussion (20 minutes)

Show the introductory urban planning video.

After the video, ask:

- What surprised you?
- What was most interesting?
- Who do you think has the power to make the changes you listed?
- What role might urban planners play?

Discuss how planning influences where people live, work, travel, and spend time.

Part 3: Community Mapping Activity (15–20 minutes)

Provide each student with a blank sheet of paper.

Ask students to draw a simple map showing:

- Their home
- Their school
- Places they visit frequently
- A favorite place
- A place they would like to improve

Students should label:

- How they travel to these places
- Any barriers they experience
- Features they appreciate

Students then pair up and explain their maps to a classmate.

Conclude by asking:

What do all of these places have in common?

Guide students toward the realization that every location was planned, designed, regulated, or influenced by decisions made by communities and governments.

Homework Assignment

Planner's Eye Challenge #1:

Someone Planned This

Purpose

Urban planning is often invisible. This assignment encourages students to recognize planning decisions in their everyday lives and begin observing their communities through a planner's lens.

Instructions

Take one original photograph of something in your neighborhood or community that required planning.

Possible examples include:

- A bus stop
- Sidewalk
- Crosswalk
- Playground
- Park
- Apartment building
- Community garden
- Street tree
- Bicycle lane
- Public plaza
- School

- Library

Reflection (50–100 words)

Answer the following questions:

1. What did you photograph?
2. Why do you think it was created?
3. Who benefits from it?
4. How does it affect people's daily lives?
5. Complete the sentence:

If I were the planner, I would...

Submission Requirements

Students should submit:

- One photograph
- A title for the photograph
- A 50–100 word reflection
- One keyword describing the topic

Examples:

- Transportation
- Housing
- Parks
- Accessibility
- Safety
- Environment
- Community

Sharing and Community Engagement

Students should upload their submission to the program's shared platform. Students who are comfortable doing so may also share their observation on social media using the program hashtag.

Selected submissions may be highlighted during class discussions and incorporated into program newsletters, presentations, posters, and end-of-summer showcases, consistent with applicable media release and consent policies.

Looking Ahead

Tomorrow's class focuses on community assets and neighborhood design. Be prepared to share your photograph and explain why you selected it.

We will use student photographs to build a collective picture of how planning shapes communities across Greater Boston.

Day 2: Seeing Your Community Through a Planner's Eyes

Learning Goal

Students will learn that planners observe communities carefully before proposing solutions. They will practice identifying community assets, challenges, and opportunities for improvement using real-world examples from their own neighborhoods.

Opening Activity (15 minutes)

Planner's Eye Gallery Walk

Preparation

Display the photos submitted for Homework #1 around the room (or in a slide presentation).

Instructions

Ask students to walk around and review their classmates' photographs.

Give each student three sticky dots.

Students should place dots next to:

- One place they would like to visit.
- One place they think is important to the community.
- One place they think could be improved.

Discussion Questions

After the gallery walk:

- What themes appeared most often?
- What types of places did students photograph?
- Were there any surprises?
- What did we learn about Greater Boston communities?

Transition:

"Yesterday we learned that planners help shape communities. Today we're going to learn how planners observe communities before deciding what changes are needed."

Mini Lecture (20 minutes)

What Makes a Great Community?

Discuss:

Community Assets

Examples:

- Parks
- Libraries
- Schools
- Small businesses
- Transit stops
- Community centers
- Public art
- Trees and open space

Community Challenges

Examples:

- Vacant lots
- Dangerous intersections
- Poor lighting
- Flooding
- Lack of sidewalks

- Long transit waits

Key Planning Question

Ask:

"How do we know what a community needs?"

Introduce observation as one of the most important planning tools.

Main Class Activity (30–40 minutes)

Community Asset Detectives

Materials

- Asset Mapping Worksheet
- Large map of Boston and surrounding communities
- Sticky notes

Instructions

Divide students into groups of 3–4.

Each group receives:

- Photos from Day 1
- Neighborhood observations
- Asset Mapping Worksheet

Students identify:

Community Assets

Examples:

- Parks
- Transit
- Housing
- Schools

- Local businesses
- Community organizations

Opportunities for Improvement

Examples:

- Missing sidewalks
- Vacant spaces
- Unsafe crossings
- Lack of gathering spaces
- Poor accessibility

Each group places assets and challenges on the large map.

Group Discussion

Each group presents:

1. One community strength.
2. One challenge.
3. One opportunity for improvement.

Instructor records recurring themes.

Reflection Activity (10 minutes)

Ask students:

"Did any neighborhood have everything?"

Usually the answer is no.

Then ask:

"Did every neighborhood have something valuable?"

Usually the answer is yes.

Key takeaway:

Planning is not just about fixing problems.

It is also about recognizing and building upon community strengths.

Homework Assignment

Planner's Eye Challenge #2:

Community Assets and Opportunities

Objective

Students will investigate their neighborhood as planners and identify both strengths and opportunities for improvement.

Instructions

Take **two photographs**:

Photo 1: Community Asset

Photograph something that makes your community stronger.

Examples:

- Park
- School
- Community garden
- Transit stop
- Local business
- Recreation center

Photo 2: Opportunity for Improvement

Photograph something that could better serve residents.

Examples:

- Missing sidewalk
- Empty lot

- Unsafe crossing
- Poor lighting
- Lack of shade
- Underused space

Reflection

For each photo, answer:

Community Asset

1. What is it?
2. Why is it important?
3. Who benefits from it?

Opportunity for Improvement

1. What is it?
2. Why does it matter?
3. Who is affected?

Finally answer:

If I were the planner, I would...

(50–100 words)

Submission Requirements

Upload:

- Two photographs
- Reflection
- One keyword

Examples:

- Transportation

- Housing
- Environment
- Public Space
- Safety
- Accessibility

Students may also post on the program's shared social platform or class discussion board.

Connection to Day 3

Tomorrow we will focus on:

Transportation and Mobility

Ask students to pay special attention to:

- Sidewalks
- Crosswalks
- Bus stops
- Bicycle facilities
- Traffic

because many of their observations will become part of the transportation audit conducted during Day 3.

Day 3: Transportation and Mobility

How Do People Get Around?

Learning Goal

Students will understand how transportation systems shape access to school, jobs, healthcare, recreation, and opportunity. They will learn that transportation planning is about much more than roads—it is about helping people safely and efficiently reach the places they need to go.

Opening Activity (15 minutes)

Transportation Bingo

Preparation

Create a simple bingo card containing transportation experiences such as:

- Rode a bus this week
- Walked to school
- Ridden a bicycle
- Used a rideshare service
- Taken the subway
- Missed a bus or train
- Walked across a crosswalk today
- Had to cross a busy street
- Waited more than 15 minutes for transit
- Walked somewhere because there was no transportation option

Instructions

Students move around the room finding classmates who match each box.

Discussion Questions

Afterward ask:

- What transportation methods were most common?
- Were there experiences everyone shared?
- Were there transportation challenges people had in common?

Transition:

"Today we're going to explore how transportation decisions shape our daily lives and why transportation is one of the most important things planners work on."

Mini Lecture (20 minutes)

Transportation Shapes Opportunity

Discuss:

Why Transportation Matters

Transportation affects:

- Getting to school
- Getting to work
- Accessing healthcare
- Shopping
- Visiting friends and family
- Recreation

Transportation Options

- Walking
- Biking
- Public transit
- Cars
- Shared mobility

What Transportation Planners Think About

- Safety
- Accessibility
- Reliability
- Equity
- Sustainability

Complete Streets

Introduce the concept that streets should work for everyone:

- Pedestrians
- Cyclists
- Transit users
- Drivers
- People with disabilities

Discussion Question

"Who is your street designed for?"

Main Class Activity (40 minutes)

Campus Walkability and Transportation Audit

Materials

- Walkability Audit Sheet
- Clipboards
- Pens
- Campus map

Instructions

Students work in small groups.

Each group is assigned a route around campus.

Students evaluate:

Safety

- Are crosswalks visible?
- Is traffic moving too fast?
- Are intersections safe?

Accessibility

- Are there curb ramps?
- Can someone using a wheelchair move easily?

Comfort

- Is there shade?
- Are sidewalks wide enough?
- Are there places to sit?

Connectivity

- Can people easily reach transit stops?
- Are routes clear and direct?

Student Challenge

Each group must identify:

- One transportation feature that works well
- One transportation challenge
- One improvement recommendation

Report Back (15 minutes)

Groups share:

1. One strength.

2. One challenge.
3. One recommendation.

Instructor records common themes.

Then ask:

"If you had \$100,000 to improve transportation around campus, what would you spend it on?"

Reflection Activity (10 minutes)

Ask students:

"How would your day change if you could not drive, bike, or use transit?"

Discuss:

- Dependence on transportation systems
- Equity
- Accessibility
- Opportunity

Key takeaway:

Transportation is not just about moving people.

Transportation connects people to opportunity.

Homework Assignment

Planner's Eye Challenge #3:

My Journey Through the Community

Objective

Students will examine one trip they regularly make and identify how transportation infrastructure affects their experience.

Instructions

Choose a trip that you make regularly.

Examples:

- Home to school
- Home to work
- Home to a friend's house
- Home to a park
- Home to a store

Document the trip using photographs and observations.

Required Photos

Take:

Photo 1: Transportation Feature That Works Well

Examples:

- Bus stop
- Sidewalk
- Bike lane
- Crosswalk
- Transit station

Photo 2: Transportation Challenge

Examples:

- Missing sidewalk
- Dangerous crossing
- Poor lighting
- Lack of bike infrastructure
- Long wait area

Reflection Questions

1. Where were you going?
2. How did you travel?
3. What transportation feature helped you?
4. What transportation challenge did you notice?
5. How might this challenge affect:
 - o Children?
 - o Older adults?
 - o People with disabilities?
6. Complete the sentence:

If I were the planner, I would...

(75–100 words)

Submission Requirements

Upload:

- Two photographs
- Reflection
- Travel mode used
- One keyword

Examples:

- Transit
- Walking
- Biking
- Safety
- Accessibility

- Complete Streets

Social Media and Portfolio Component

Students should give each photograph a title.

Examples:

- "The Crosswalk I Use Every Day"
- "Waiting for the Bus"
- "The Missing Sidewalk"
- "A Safer Route to School"

Selected student submissions may be featured in program updates and end-of-summer displays.

Connection to Day 4

Tomorrow's topic is:

Housing and Neighborhoods

Ask students to pay attention to the buildings, homes, apartments, and neighborhoods they pass during their transportation observations.

Tomorrow they will explore:

Why do different neighborhoods look different?

Who gets to live where?

How do housing choices shape communities?

Day 4: Housing and Neighborhoods

Why Do Communities Look Different?

Learning Goal

Students will understand how housing influences opportunity, neighborhood character, affordability, and quality of life. They will learn that housing is not just about buildings—it affects who can live in a community, how people access jobs and services, and how neighborhoods change over time.

Opening Activity (15 minutes)

Where Would You Live?

Preparation

Display photographs of several different housing types:

- Single-family home
- Triple-decker
- Apartment building
- Mixed-use building with shops below
- Townhouse
- Student housing
- Senior housing

Instructions

Ask students:

"If cost didn't matter, where would you choose to live and why?"

Students move to different corners of the room based on their choice.

Discussion Questions

- Why did you choose that housing type?

- What are the advantages?
- What are the disadvantages?
- Would everyone want the same thing?

Transition:

"Today we're going to learn that communities need many different types of housing because people have different needs."

Mini Lecture (20 minutes)

Housing Shapes Communities

Discuss

Why Housing Matters

Housing affects:

- Health
- Education
- Transportation
- Access to jobs
- Family stability

Different Housing Types

Examples:

- Single-family homes
- Apartments
- Condominiums
- Triple-deckers
- Mixed-use developments

Key Housing Questions

- Who can afford to live here?
- What types of housing are available?
- Are there options for young adults, families, and seniors?
- How does housing affect transportation choices?

Neighborhood Change

Introduce concepts such as:

- New development
- Revitalization
- Rising housing costs
- Housing affordability

Keep it simple and focused on real-life impacts.

Main Class Activity (40 minutes)

Design a Neighborhood

Materials

- Large paper
- Markers
- Housing cards
- Asset cards (school, park, grocery store, transit stop, library)

Instructions

Students work in teams of 3–4.

Each team receives:

Housing Types

- Single-family homes
- Apartments

- Townhouses
- Senior housing

Community Assets

- School
- Park
- Grocery store
- Bus stop
- Community center

Teams must create a neighborhood where:

- People can access daily needs
- Different housing types exist
- Transportation is available
- Public spaces are included

Challenge Questions

Ask:

- Where should housing be located?
- How close should housing be to transit?
- What amenities should be nearby?
- How can people of different incomes live in the community?

Neighborhood Planning Meeting (15 minutes)

Each team presents:

1. One thing they are proud of.
2. One difficult decision they made.
3. One thing they would change if they had more time.

Discuss how planning often involves balancing competing needs.

Reflection Activity (10 minutes)

Ask students:

"What makes a neighborhood feel like home?"

Possible answers:

- Family
- Friends
- Safety
- Community
- Parks
- Transportation
- Schools

Key takeaway:

Housing is more than a building.

Housing is connected to opportunity, belonging, and community.

Homework Assignment

Planner's Eye Challenge #4:

Housing Around Me

Objective

Students will investigate the different types of housing in their community and think about who those homes are designed to serve.

Instructions

Take photographs of at least **three different housing types** in your neighborhood or a neighborhood you visit.

Examples:

- Single-family home
- Apartment building
- Triple-decker
- Condominium
- Townhouse
- Mixed-use building

Avoid photographing people or private activities.

Housing Observation Worksheet

For each housing type:

1. Describe the building.
2. Who do you think might live there?
3. What are the advantages of this housing type?
4. What challenges might residents face?

Reflection Questions

Answer:

1. Which housing type was most common?
2. Which housing type was least common?
3. Do you think there are enough housing choices in your community?
4. What types of housing might be missing?

Complete:

If I were the planner, I would...

(75–100 words)

Submission Requirements

Upload:

- Three photographs
- Housing Observation Worksheet
- Reflection
- One keyword

Examples:

- Housing
- Neighborhoods
- Affordability
- Families
- Density
- Community

Social Media and Portfolio Component

Students should title their photographs.

Examples:

- "A Home for a Family"
- "Apartments Near Transit"
- "Housing Above Shops"
- "The Neighborhood I Grew Up In"

Selected submissions may be featured in program updates, newsletters, LinkedIn posts, and the end-of-summer exhibition.

Connection to Day 5

Tomorrow's topic is:

Climate Resilience and Environmental Justice

Ask students to pay attention to:

- Trees
- Shade
- Green space
- Flood-prone areas
- Heat
- Environmental conditions around homes

Tomorrow they will explore:

Why do some neighborhoods experience more environmental challenges than others?

How can planners make communities healthier, safer, and more resilient?

End-of-Summer Poster Contribution

Poster Theme:

"Where We Live"

Students will contribute:

- One housing photograph
- One key observation
- One quote from their reflection

These submissions will become part of a poster exploring housing diversity and neighborhood experiences across Greater Boston.

Day 5: Climate Resilience and Environmental Justice

Why Are Some Places Hotter, Flood More, or Have Fewer Trees?

Learning Goal

Students will understand how the environment and the built environment interact to influence health, safety, and quality of life. They will learn how planners use green infrastructure, parks, trees, and climate adaptation strategies to build healthier and more resilient communities.

Opening Activity (15 minutes)

Which Place Would You Choose?

Preparation

Display pairs of photographs:

- Tree-lined street vs. treeless street
- Shaded playground vs. asphalt playground
- Community garden vs. vacant lot
- Flooded street vs. well-drained street
- Neighborhood park vs. large parking lot

Instructions

Ask students to vote:

"Which place would you rather spend an hour in during a hot summer day?"

Then ask:

"Why?"

Students will usually mention:

- Shade

- Comfort
- Beauty
- Safety
- Cooling
- Recreation

Transition:

"Today we're going to explore how planners help communities prepare for climate challenges and create healthier environments."

Mini Lecture (20 minutes)

Climate Resilience and Environmental Justice

What Is Climate Resilience?

Climate resilience means helping communities prepare for and recover from challenges such as:

- Extreme heat
- Flooding
- Storms
- Sea level rise
- Poor air quality

What Is Environmental Justice?

Environmental justice means ensuring that everyone has:

- Clean air
- Safe water
- Parks and green space
- Protection from environmental hazards

Discuss

How planners use:

- Street trees
- Parks
- Green roofs
- Rain gardens
- Wetlands
- Permeable pavement

to make communities healthier and safer.

Boston Examples

Use examples such as:

- Heat islands
- Coastal flooding
- Green infrastructure projects
- Urban tree planting programs

Key Question

"Do all neighborhoods experience environmental challenges equally?"

Main Class Activity (40 minutes)

Climate Detective Challenge

Materials

- Printed aerial photographs
- Neighborhood maps
- Climate Observation Worksheet
- Markers

Instructions

Students work in groups.

Each group receives several photographs or maps.

Students identify:

Places That May Be Vulnerable

Examples:

- Large parking lots
- Treeless streets
- Areas near water
- Highly paved areas

Places That Promote Resilience

Examples:

- Parks
- Tree canopy
- Rain gardens
- Community gardens
- Green infrastructure

Group Task

Create two lists:

Community Strengths

What features help the neighborhood remain healthy and resilient?

Community Challenges

What features may increase risk during heat waves or storms?

Groups then identify one improvement they would recommend.

Climate Planning Challenge (15 minutes)

Each group receives a hypothetical budget of:

\$1 million for climate improvements

Students decide how to spend it.

Options:

- Tree planting
- Park improvements
- Rain gardens
- Flood protection
- Community cooling centers
- Green schoolyards

Each group explains:

1. What they selected.
2. Why they selected it.
3. Who benefits.

Reflection Activity (10 minutes)

Ask students:

"What is one environmental challenge you have noticed in your own community?"

Then ask:

"What would make your neighborhood healthier and more resilient?"

Key takeaway:

Climate resilience is not only about protecting the environment.

It is about protecting people.

Homework Assignment

Planner's Eye Challenge #5:

Climate Resilience in My Community

Objective

Students will investigate how their neighborhood responds to environmental challenges and identify opportunities for improvement.

Instructions

Take **two photographs**.

Photo 1: Community Strength

Find something that helps make your neighborhood healthier or more resilient.

Examples:

- Trees
- Park
- Community garden
- Green space
- Water feature
- Shade structure

Photo 2: Opportunity for Improvement

Find something that may contribute to environmental challenges.

Examples:

- Large paved area
- Lack of shade
- Flood-prone location
- Excessive heat exposure

- Trash accumulation
- Vacant lot

Reflection Questions

For each photograph:

1. What did you photograph?
2. Why is it important?
3. How does it affect people?

Then answer:

4. Which issue concerns you most?
5. Who is most affected?
6. What could be done to improve it?

Complete:

If I were the planner, I would...

(75–100 words)

Submission Requirements

Upload:

- Two photographs
- Reflection
- One keyword

Examples:

- Trees
- Heat
- Flooding
- Parks

- Environment
- Climate
- Resilience

Social Media and Portfolio Component

Students should title their photographs.

Examples:

- "The Coolest Block in the Neighborhood"
- "A Place That Needs More Shade"
- "Where Rainwater Goes"
- "Our Community Garden"

Selected submissions may be featured in program updates, newsletters, LinkedIn posts, and the final exhibition.

Connection to Day 6

Tomorrow's topic is:

Community Engagement and Civic Leadership

Students will explore:

- How communities influence planning decisions
- Why public participation matters
- How planners gather feedback
- How residents shape the future of neighborhoods

Ask students to think about:

Who should decide what happens in a community?

and

Whose voices are often missing from those decisions?

End-of-Summer Poster Contribution

Poster Theme:

"Climate and Community"

Students will contribute:

- One resilience photograph
- One environmental challenge photograph
- One quote from their reflection
- Their recommendation beginning with:

"If I were the planner..."

These submissions will become part of a poster illustrating how students understand climate resilience and environmental justice in communities across Greater Boston.

Day 6: Community Engagement and Civic Leadership

Who Gets a Say in the Future of a Community?

Learning Goal

Students will understand how residents, businesses, community organizations, and government agencies influence planning decisions. They will learn that good planning is not simply about designing places—it is about listening to people, balancing different perspectives, and helping communities shape their own futures.

Opening Activity (15 minutes)

The Impossible Decision

Instructions

Present students with the following scenario:

A vacant lot in your neighborhood has received funding for redevelopment. The city can only choose one option:

- A new park
- Affordable housing
- A community center
- A parking lot
- A grocery store

Ask students to move to different corners of the room based on their choice.

Discussion Questions

- Why did you choose that option?
- Who would benefit?
- Who might disagree?

- How should the city decide?

Transition:

"Planners face these kinds of decisions all the time. The challenge isn't just choosing a solution—it's understanding what different people want and need."

Mini Lecture (20 minutes)

Why Community Engagement Matters

Discuss

Who Shapes Communities?

Examples:

- Residents
- Business owners
- Students
- Community organizations
- City officials
- Developers
- Planners

Why Engagement Matters

Communities work better when planners understand:

- Local knowledge
- Community priorities
- Historical experiences
- Cultural values

What Happens When People Are Not Included?

Discuss examples:

- Parks nobody uses
- Transit routes that miss important destinations
- Public spaces that don't feel welcoming
- Projects that face community opposition

How Planners Gather Input

Examples:

- Public meetings
- Surveys
- Focus groups
- Interviews
- Community workshops
- Pop-up events

Key Question

"Should teenagers have a voice in planning decisions?"

Most students will have strong opinions.

Main Class Activity (40 minutes)

Community Meeting Role Play

Scenario

The city is considering redesigning a busy street.

Potential changes include:

- Protected bike lanes
- Wider sidewalks
- Street trees
- Bus improvements

- Reduced parking

Roles

Assign students stakeholder roles such as:

- High school student
- Parent
- Business owner
- Older adult
- Transit rider
- Cyclist
- Driver
- City planner
- Environmental advocate

Instructions

Students spend 5–10 minutes preparing their positions.

Conduct a mock public meeting.

Each participant must explain:

- What they support
- What concerns them
- What they would like changed

Planner Challenge

At the end, ask the students playing planners:

"How would you balance all of these competing interests?"

Debrief Discussion (15 minutes)

Ask:

- Was it easy to reach agreement?
- Did different groups have different priorities?
- Were some concerns more difficult to address than others?

Key takeaway:

Planning is not about making everyone happy.

It is about helping communities make informed decisions while considering many different perspectives.

Reflection Activity (10 minutes)

Ask students:

Think about a place in your neighborhood.

Then ask:

Who should be involved in decisions about that place?

Examples:

- Residents
- Young people
- Businesses
- Schools
- Community organizations

Discuss:

Whose voices are often missing?

Homework Assignment

Planner's Eye Challenge #6:

Listening to Community Voices

Objective

Students will learn how planners gather information by listening to community members.

Instructions

Interview one person.

Possible interviewees:

- Parent
- Grandparent
- Neighbor
- Teacher
- Friend
- Community member

Ask:

"If you could change one thing about our community, what would it be and why?"

Record

1. Who did you interview?
2. What change did they suggest?
3. Why was it important to them?

Reflection Questions

Answer:

1. Did you agree with their opinion?
2. Did anything surprise you?
3. How was their perspective different from yours?
4. Why is it important for planners to listen to different voices?

Complete:

If I were the planner, I would...

(75–100 words)

Bonus Challenge

Ask:

"What advice would you give to city leaders?"

Include the response in your submission.

Submission Requirements

Upload:

- One photograph representing the issue discussed (optional but encouraged)
- Interview summary
- Reflection
- One keyword

Examples:

- Community
- Youth
- Safety
- Parks
- Housing
- Transportation
- Leadership

Social Media and Portfolio Component

Students should create a title for their interview.

Examples:

- "A Safer Street for Everyone"

- "More Places for Young People"
- "The Park Our Neighborhood Needs"
- "What My Grandmother Wants the City to Know"

Selected quotes may be featured in class discussions, program updates, LinkedIn posts, and the end-of-summer exhibition.

Connection to Day 7

Tomorrow's topic is:

Maps, Data, and Evidence

Students will learn how planners use:

- Surveys
- Observations
- Maps
- Data

to support decisions.

Tell students:

"Yesterday we learned how planners listen to people.

Tomorrow we'll learn how planners use data to understand communities."

End-of-Summer Poster Contribution

Poster Theme:

"Community Voices"

Students will contribute:

- One interview quote
- One key observation
- One recommendation beginning with:

"If I were the planner..."

The poster will showcase the diverse perspectives students collected from residents across Greater Boston and demonstrate the importance of public engagement in planning.

Day 7: Maps, Data, and Evidence

How Do Planners Know What a Community Needs?

Learning Goal

Students will understand that planners use both community voices and data to make decisions. They will learn how maps, surveys, observations, photographs, and statistics help planners identify problems, understand patterns, and develop solutions.

Opening Activity (15 minutes)

Fact or Feeling?

Instructions

Present students with several statements:

- "My neighborhood needs more trees."
- "Traffic is bad around my school."
- "There are not enough places for teenagers."
- "People would use public transportation more if buses came more often."
- "Our community needs more affordable housing."

Ask students:

"How would you prove it?"

Allow students to brainstorm.

Responses might include:

- Surveys
- Photos
- Maps
- Interviews

- Traffic counts
- Observations

Transition:

"Yesterday we learned how planners listen to people. Today we're going to learn how planners collect evidence."

Mini Lecture (20 minutes)

How Planners Use Data

Discuss

What Is Data?

Data is information that helps us understand a community.

Examples:

- Population
- Housing costs
- Traffic counts
- Transit ridership
- Tree canopy
- Survey responses
- Observations
- Photographs

What Is a Map?

Maps help planners see patterns.

Examples:

- Where people live
- Where parks are located

- Where flooding occurs
- Where transit routes exist
- Where crashes happen

Why Use Data?

Data helps planners:

- Identify needs
- Prioritize investments
- Evaluate projects
- Explain decisions

Important Lesson

Ask:

"Can data tell the whole story?"

Discuss why planners need both:

- Data
- Community voices

Main Class Activity (40 minutes)

Build a Community Story Map

Materials

- Large map of Boston/Greater Boston
- Sticky notes
- Student Planner's Eye submissions
- Markers

Instructions

Students work in small groups.

Each group reviews:

- Transportation observations
- Housing observations
- Environmental observations
- Community interviews

Students identify themes.

Examples:

- Missing sidewalks
- Lack of shade
- Unsafe crossings
- Community assets
- Housing concerns
- Parks

Mapping Exercise

Students place observations on a large map.

Each observation should include:

- Location
- Issue or asset
- Student quote

Analysis Questions

Ask:

- What patterns do you see?
- Are some issues appearing repeatedly?
- Are some neighborhoods experiencing similar challenges?

Data Detective Challenge (15 minutes)

Each group chooses one issue.

Examples:

- Transportation
- Housing
- Parks
- Climate

Groups answer:

What evidence do we have?

Examples:

- Photographs
- Interviews
- Observations

What additional information would we want?

Examples:

- Survey data
- Census information
- Traffic counts
- Transit data

What recommendation would we make?

Reflection Activity (10 minutes)

Ask:

"What surprised you about the information collected by the class?"

Then ask:

"How is data different from an opinion?"

Discuss:

- Evidence
- Observation
- Interpretation

Key takeaway:

Good planning combines community voices with reliable evidence.

Homework Assignment

Planner's Eye Challenge #7:

Evidence-Based Recommendation

Objective

Students will use everything they have learned during the week to develop one planning recommendation supported by evidence.

Instructions

Review your previous assignments:

- Community observations
- Transportation observations
- Housing observations
- Climate observations
- Community interview

Identify one issue that matters to you.

Examples:

- Unsafe crossings
- Lack of parks

- Housing concerns
- Limited transportation options
- Lack of shade
- Poor accessibility

Create a Planning Recommendation

Your recommendation should answer:

1. What is the issue?
2. Why does it matter?
3. Who is affected?
4. What evidence do you have?
5. What would you recommend?

Required Submission

Include:

One Photo

Choose the photograph that best represents the issue.

One Piece of Evidence

Examples:

- Observation
- Interview quote
- Personal experience

Recommendation Statement

Complete:

If I were the planner, I would...

(100–150 words)

Bonus Challenge

Create a simple sketch showing your proposed improvement.

Examples:

- New crosswalk
- Bus shelter
- Community garden
- Tree planting
- Bike lane
- Public space improvement

Submission Requirements

Upload:

- One photo
- Reflection
- Recommendation
- Sketch (optional)
- One keyword

Examples:

- Safety
- Transportation
- Housing
- Environment
- Accessibility
- Community

Social Media and Portfolio Component

Students should give their recommendation a title.

Examples:

- "Making It Safer to Cross"
- "More Trees for Our Neighborhood"
- "A Place for Teens"
- "Housing Near Transit"

Selected recommendations may be featured in program updates, LinkedIn posts, and the final exhibition.

Connection to Day 8

Tomorrow's topic is:

Designing Better Communities

Students will work in teams to transform their observations and recommendations into mini planning proposals.

Tell students:

"Today you gathered evidence.

Tomorrow you become planners."

End-of-Summer Poster Contribution

Poster Theme:

"What the Data Tells Us"

Students will contribute:

- One photograph
- One piece of evidence
- One recommendation
- One quote beginning with:

"If I were the planner..."

Together, these submissions will show how Urban Scholars used observation, interviews, and evidence to understand their communities and propose meaningful improvements.

Day 8: Designing Better Communities

From Observation to Action

Learning Goal

Students will bring together everything they have learned during the previous seven sessions to develop and present a planning recommendation for a real community issue. They will learn that planning is ultimately about transforming observations, data, and community voices into actions that improve people's lives.

Opening Activity (15 minutes)

Looking Back, Looking Forward

Instructions

Return the sticky notes students completed on Day 1.

Remind them of the question:

"If you could change one thing about your neighborhood tomorrow, what would it be?"

Ask students to review their original response.

Then ask:

Reflection Questions

- Has your answer changed?
- What have you learned since Day 1?
- Would you approach the problem differently now?
- What evidence would you use to support your idea?

Discussion

Explain:

"On Day 1, you were community members with ideas.

Today, you are planners with evidence."

Mini Lecture (20 minutes)

How Planning Ideas Become Reality

Discuss

The Planning Process

1. Observe the community
2. Gather community input
3. Collect evidence
4. Analyze information
5. Develop recommendations
6. Present ideas
7. Implement projects
8. Evaluate results

What Makes a Good Planning Recommendation?

A good recommendation:

- Solves a real problem
- Uses evidence
- Considers multiple perspectives
- Benefits the community
- Is realistic

Examples

- Safer crosswalks
- Additional street trees
- Bus stop improvements

- Community gardens
- Public seating
- Better lighting
- Youth gathering spaces

Key Question

"How do planners convince others that their ideas are worth investing in?"

Main Class Activity (60 minutes)

Urban Scholars Planning Challenge

Materials

- Poster paper
- Markers
- Student photographs
- Planner's Eye assignments
- Community maps
- Sticky notes

Team Formation

Students work in teams of 3–4.

Each team selects one issue that emerged repeatedly during the program.

Possible topics:

- Transportation safety
- Housing
- Public spaces
- Climate resilience
- Accessibility

- Youth spaces
- Community services

Team Task

Each team creates a mini planning proposal.

Part 1: Define the Problem

Answer:

- What is the issue?
- Why does it matter?
- Who is affected?

Part 2: Present the Evidence

Use:

- Student photographs
- Community observations
- Interviews
- Maps
- Personal experiences

Part 3: Develop a Recommendation

Complete:

If we were the planners, we would...

Describe:

- Proposed improvement
- Expected benefits
- Who would benefit
- Potential challenges

Part 4: Create a Visual

Students should include:

- Photographs
- Sketches
- Maps
- Diagrams

Community Planning Presentations (30 minutes)

Each team delivers a 3–5 minute presentation.

Presentation should include:

1. The issue
2. Evidence
3. Recommendation
4. Expected impact

Audience members provide feedback using sticky notes.

Reflection Activity (15 minutes)

Ask students:

What surprised you most about planning?

What was your favorite activity?

What did you learn about your community?

What did you learn about yourself?

Would you consider a career in planning, public policy, sustainability, transportation, or public service?

Final Assignment

Planner's Eye Challenge #8:

My Community, My Future

Objective

Students will reflect on their growth during the Urban Scholars Planning Institute and identify how they would contribute to improving their communities in the future.

Instructions

Choose your favorite photograph from the entire program.

Then write a final reflection (150–250 words) answering:

Looking Back

- What did you learn about planning?
- What did you learn about your community?

Looking Forward

- What issue matters most to you?
- What would you like to improve?
- How can young people contribute to change?

Complete:

If I were the planner, I would...

Submission Requirements

Include:

- One photograph
- Reflection
- One key lesson learned
- One recommendation

Social Media and Portfolio Component

Students should create a title for their final reflection.

Examples:

- "The Community I Want to Build"
- "Planning for Everyone"
- "My Vision for the Future"
- "A Better Neighborhood Starts Here"

Selected reflections may be featured in program communications, LinkedIn updates, and the end-of-summer celebration.

Program Wrap-Up

Key Message

Throughout this program, students have:

- Observed their communities
- Identified assets and challenges
- Collected evidence
- Interviewed residents
- Explored planning careers
- Developed recommendations

Most importantly, they have learned that communities are not accidental.

As planners often say:

The future is something we build together.

End-of-Summer Poster Contribution

Poster Theme:

"My Community, My Future"

Students will contribute:

- One favorite photograph

- One quote from their final reflection
- One recommendation beginning with:

"If I were the planner..."

Together, these contributions will form the final showcase poster demonstrating how Urban Scholars learned to see, understand, and shape their communities through the lens of planning.

Transition to Internship Phase

Before leaving, students should be reminded:

"The classroom phase is complete. Beginning next week, you'll have the opportunity to work alongside professionals, observe planning in action, and contribute to real projects with community partners and the City of Boston Streets Cabinet."

The internship phase is where students will move from learning about planning to experiencing how planning happens in the real world.