BUILDINGS FOR PEOPLE

RESPONSIBLE REAL ESTATE DEVELOPMENT AND PLANNING

JUSTIN B. HOLLANDER | NICOLE E. STEPHENS

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Author Bio

Justin B. Hollander is a professor of Urban and Environmental Policy and Planning at Tufts University and is an internationally renowned expert on the planning and design of human settlements. He co-edited the book *Urban Experience and Design: Contemporary Perspectives on Improving the Public Realm* (Routledge, 2021) and is the author of nine other books on urban planning and design. He was recently inducted as a Fellow of the American Institute of Certified Planners and hosts the Apple podcast "Cognitive Urbanism."

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1

An Introduction

Look around. No matter the continent, no matter the country, you will see streets, buildings, utilities, ornamental trees, manicured lawns, maybe even flowers. Some places also have bicycle lanes, trolleys, bridges, parks, or even formal gardens. As a small child might put it: how did this all get here? How are cities and towns built? Who decides and how?

Broadly speaking, this is the aim of the urban studies field to answer. In this book, we take a narrower line of inquiry by asking what the role of the real estate development and planning enterprises are in shaping how places get built and rebuilt. While a multitude of factors play into the design and development of human settlements, real estate and planning have an outsized and oft misunderstood role. The choice of where water lines are laid out, how tall a building is, what trees are planted, these each have their origins in the real estate development and planning professions – an intricate and complex set of customs, techniques, methods, theories, and histories that, situated slightly differently in different geographies reveal the answer to the child's question about the built environment.

It might be easy in telling this story to focus on a series of nameless and faceless ideas (like pro forma analysis, gentrification, or zoning) that propel the shaping and reshaping of places, but people are in fact at the center of this work – we build not because of regulations or profits or because of tradition, we build for humankind. Through this people-first lens, we will explore the practice of real estate planning and development.

The book's title "Building for People" is an homage to the seminal urban planning book *Cities for People* by Danish planner Jan Gehl (2013). Gehl can reasonably be considered the most important urban planner alive today. His work has reshaped cities globally and the impact of *Cities for People* has been profound: using psychological sciences and simple human observation, he has brought attention within the urban design and planning world to how people experience

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cities (Matan and Newman 2016). Through a people-centered lens, Gehl has helped city planners make places more inviting, safer, and more accessible. We hope that this book can make a similar impact on the real estate development and planning fields.

A good deal of research has established how places affect people and how policies and stakeholders have served to produce and reinforce these effects. Understanding real estate development is a fundamental task for using this research as part of a career focused on making places better for people. While most practical guides to real estate development focus on the business side of the proposition, this book presents real estate development more holistically, elucidating the role of both profit and public good. Profit is not necessarily incompatible with social goals and this text serves as a guide to attend to financial and investment concerns, but not at the expense of social ones.[1]

This book provides an introduction to the major components of mainstream and progressive real estate development and their connections to urban planning. We will convey key technical and substantive knowledge, as well as situating the subject within a broader political, economic, and social context. Beginning with some historical and theoretical context on real estate development and planning, then moving to basic financial analysis, site selection, site improvement, architecture, landscape architecture, site planning, construction, and evaluation, this book explores key theories and methods of professional practice. We maintain a critical focus on the role of real estate in the reproduction of social, spatial, and economic inequalities and consider how alternative models function theoretically and practically in the market. We both introduce important players in the development and planning process, including urban planners, lawyers, real estate developers, bankers, community organizers, and others as well as make visible how the built environment is a reflection of the power dynamics between them. The story of real estate development and planning is told here through a multi-level lens, where the systemic factors that govern (and are governed by) the real estate process will be closely examined and interrogated, allowing you to understand how key societal trends like gentrification, affordable housing, inequality, and homelessness are intertwined with the business of real estate development and planning. Through the use of real-world examples, you will become familiar with the nomenclature and skills needed to influence and impact the physical shaping of human settlements, while understanding social, economic, and political dimensions of that work.

When you read this book, you will master new knowledge and develop new skills. This book will help you understand: (1) the historical context of real estate development, (2) what models exist to address a range of social and community goals, and (3) the basic steps of the real estate development process. Readers will master these skills: (1) ability to critically examine the real estate development and planning process, while exploring systematic factors that

shape the industry, (2) determine and calculate the contextual financial and economic factors that frame any real estate development project, (3) conduct a pro forma analysis, and (4) basic site selection, site analysis, planning, design, and evaluation.

The book begins here with an overview of the history of real estate development and planning, how these two fields first professionalized, and were employed to address a range of public problems, including affordable housing. We dive deeper into these questions in Chapter 2 with an exploration of alternative models which consider the role of the public sector as collaborators in development, an Indigenous view of land, defense, and military family housing, and community development corporations (CDCs). Chapters 3 and 4 return to conventional methodologies by reviewing the capitalist perspective on real estate as a commodity, to be bought, sold, and invested in. In the subsequent five chapters, we take on each of the real estate development processes: site selection, site analysis/planning, architecture/landscape architecture, urban design and planning, and construction. For each, we review the key considerations for that process and emphasize what it means to take a people-centered approach. We also include an illustrative case study for each chapter where we examine how the lessons of the chapter come to life in the real world of professional real estate development practice. We made an effort to align the cases with each of the five development processes mentioned above, with some being true exemplars of best practices and others offering broader lessons for practice outside of a single development process. For details on our methodology for conducting these case studies, see Appendix 1.

History and Context of the Real Estate Development and Planning Process

Historically, real estate development and planning were activities that happened at all levels of society, from highly centralized monarchies looking to erect public works to individual farms wanting to build a barn. The early civilizations in Africa and Asia were renowned for their monumental structures like the Great Pyramids in Giza, Egypt that still stand today, thousands of years later (See Figures 1.1–1.3). Likewise, the decentralized building efforts of individual farmers, craftspeople, or merchants have throughout history shaped urbanized communities and continue to shape the paths of roads, locations of parks, and the structure of settlements (Reps 1965). Between those autocratic developments and the pioneers settlers of the Great Plains and the dug-out cliffs of the Anasazi people, there is a rich historical record of a middle ground of formal plans, organized platting of land, and even the equivalent of today's homeowner associations that appears to have shaped much of the planet's built environment (Platt 2014).