

Facilitating Community Conversations on Exclusionary Land-Use Policies and Regulations

Guidance for Community Planning Academy Coordinators and Facilitators

The Reimaging Community Planning Academies Series, Guide No. 1

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Land-use policies, zoning regulations, and development processes have long shaped how cities grow, defining where people live, work, learn, and connect. Emerging in the early 20th century as a way to protect public health, zoning has since influenced nearly every aspect of American life. While the separation of land-uses and the regulation of buildings have benefits, these same land-use systems can also reinforce patterns of exclusion based on income, race, and access to opportunity.

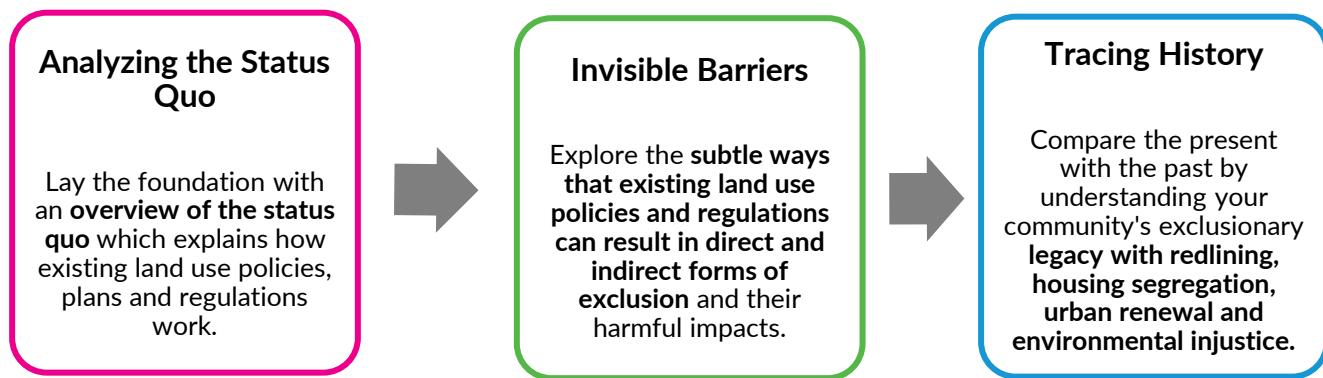
The challenge for many communities today is not to discard existing land-use policies, but to explore their legacy and the avenues of reform so they can better support more inclusive, sustainable, and resilient communities. Community planning academies (CPAs) are community education programs, often run by local governments or coalitions of organizations, that teach residents about urban planning, zoning, development, and how to participate in shaping their community's future by participating in the planning process and engaging with officials and planning boards. They offer a forum for residents to understand how past land-use policies and development decisions continue to shape their neighborhoods, to share diverse perspectives, and to work together to envision a future where land use and development benefit everyone—existing residents along with future generations. Graduates of CPAs can join local planning commissions and zoning boards, serve on advisory committees for specific projects, engage in public hearings and feedback sessions, volunteer with community groups, or even pursue careers as community planners or planning commissioners, using their knowledge to influence zoning, development, and long-term planning for their communities.

How to Use This Guide

This guide is for CPA managers and facilitators who want to enhance their curriculum by incorporating discussions on exclusionary land-use policies, processes, and practices. It provides a flexible agenda, activities, and discussion strategies that can be adapted as part of a broader curriculum or used as a standalone module. Designed to complement other CPA resources, this guide adds historical context to increase understanding of how past decisions and power structures drive planning conversations today. Facilitators can tailor the three-part learning sequence and depth of topics based on participant readiness—whether communities are prepared to address harms from policies like redlining and urban renewal or need to introduce these conversations gradually. While the content is not exhaustive, it offers practical tools and examples to help hold space for these important discussions in ways that fit local needs.

FIGURE 1

Three Stages for Understanding Your Community's History of Exclusionary Land Use



Notes: Our learning sequence illustrates how the content builds from foundational concepts to more complex topics. Most community planning academies (CPAs) start by teaching the basics of zoning and land-use regulations as part of their core curriculum. While this guide includes a brief overview of those fundamentals, its main focus is uncovering the “invisible barriers” within planning systems and tracing the historical roots of exclusionary practices.

As a first step, it is important to ground CPA participants in the mechanics of how land-use and development decisions are made. This provides a practical foundation for later discussions about policies, practices, and how community members can engage in the process. With this baseline in place, facilitators can help participants see not only what happens but also why these processes matter for shaping communities.

Key Steps in the Land Development Process

Land development processes differ significantly from city to city depending on the project type (residential, commercial, industrial), scale, location, and local regulations. However, they share the following key steps: (1) a pre-application meeting is held between city zoning, planning, and building staff to review the project and determine the necessary types of review and permits; (2) a discretionary land-use application is filed with the city along with relevant plans; (3) city departments review the application, which often results in applicant revisions; (4) informal community engagements are made; (5) the planning commission or zoning board holds formal public hearings that result in a recommendation for the legislative body to approve, deny, or impose conditions; and (6) the city council or county commission conducts a final review, makes a final decision, and conditionally approve the project. Building on this understanding of the generic development review process, it is essential to examine the underlying land-use policies and zoning regulations that govern these steps; most CPAs spend significant time laying out these process steps by which all planning and development decisions occur.

The Baseline: Existing Land-Use Policies, Plans, Regulations (Zoning), and Development Processes

Within the first couple of sessions, CPAs generally discuss basic land-use policies and regulations that establish what are permissible uses and the types, placement, and scales of development and structures. They may show examples of comprehensive planning and zoning maps which outline where these uses and buildings can be located within the city, county, or town. Local government officials adopt these policies, plans, regulations, and maps to advance certain public and community goals, such as affordable housing, protection of public health and safety, etc. As mentioned above, property owners and/or developers submit development plans and building and zoning applications for specific projects. Local government officials then review and often revise these projects to ensure they are compatible with the standards set forth in their land-use plans and building regulations and also

consistent with the community's longer-term plans. Local government staff manage the planning, zoning approval, and land development processes. While these policies, plans and regulations are inherently exclusionary (they determine what is and what is not permissible and where uses and buildings can be located), the underlying goal is to ensure that local governments, developers, land-use professionals, and others apply them in a just and fair manner so that they do not cause adverse impacts (short and longer term) on local communities and neighborhoods.

Common Exclusionary Zoning Processes and Practices

Any land-use plan, zoning ordinance, land development process, or permit approval can result in the exclusion of those without knowledge, power and resources. Low-to-moderate-income residents and communities of color often lack the voice or seat at the table to protect their interests and neighborhoods from land uses and development decisions that can cause them harm. Sometimes that harm takes years to surface and can have cumulative impacts, such as life expectancy and other health disparities.

Policymakers, city officials, developers, property owners—those with power and resources—understand how these land-use planning and development systems operate and can leverage that expertise to advance their interests over those without the resources and knowledge about the arcane language and processes of planning, zoning, and land development. CPAs can play a pivotal role in filling that gap with general knowledge and practical guidance on how land-use systems operate and how community groups and individual residents can more effectively engage in their land-use planning, zoning, and land development systems.

Zoning Uses: Exclusive Single-Family Zoning

With the policy goal of protecting families from the environmental impacts of industrial and commercial uses, traditional Euclidean zoning (box 1) elevated single-family zoning as its only permitted use (subject of course to listed accessory uses). Over the years, many local governments expanded the areas in their jurisdictions designated for exclusive single-family zoning, which restricted the development of affordable, healthy, and safe housing options such as duplexes, small apartment buildings, and other types of middle housing for low-to-moderate-income families.

BOX 1

EUCLIDEAN ZONING

Euclidean zoning is a system that divides a community into separate districts for specific land uses—residential, commercial, or industrial—to keep incompatible uses (e.g., having factories next to homes) apart. Named after the Supreme Court case *Village of Euclid v. Ambler Realty Co.* (1926) that upheld it, this single-use zoning creates distinct zones for different activities with the goal of protecting health, safety, and welfare. But the practice promotes sprawl, car dependency, and traffic and limits housing diversity, contributing to higher costs and social segregation. The following are some examples of these negative impacts across the country:

- Ninety-one percent of Connecticut land is zoned exclusively for single-family homes, with only 2 percent allowing multifamily construction by right—a pattern that enforces residential segregation and restricts housing diversity (Freemark, Lo, and Bronin 2023).
- Neighborhoods zoned only for single-family housing have significantly higher median incomes and larger shares of white residents, bachelor's degree holders, and homeowners, compared with areas that permit multifamily units.

- Restrictive single-family zoning exacerbates racial and economic segregation: high-income and white demographics cluster in low “number-of-unit” zones, while low-income people and people of color more frequently reside in multifamily districts.
- In Puget Sound, **74 percent of homes in single-family-zoned areas are owner occupied**, compared with just **24 percent in multifamily zones**—highlighting how zoning directly shapes racial and economic residential patterns.^b
- In Chicago, zoning restrictions have led to sharply unequal development: wealthier, predominantly white neighborhoods used zoning to limit new housing, contributing to a decline in Black homeownership and rising cost burdens among Black renters.

^a Lydia Lo, “Jurisdictions Dominated by Single-Family Zoning Hoard Opportunities, but Bans Aren’t the Only Fix,” (Lydia Lo) -- *Urban Wire* (blog), Urban Institute, <https://www.urban.org/urban-wire/jurisdictions-dominated-single-family-zoning-hoard-opportunities-bans-arent-only-fix>.

^b Yonah Freemark, “Zoning Restrictions and Demand Have Divided Chicago into Three ‘Cities,’ Limiting Housing Availability,” *Urban Wire* (blog), Urban Institute, <https://www.urban.org/urban-wire/zoning-restrictions-and-demand-have-divided-chicago-three-cities-limiting-housing>.

Common Zoning Regulations

Local government planning and zoning commissions may impose supplemental/additional zoning requirements for single-family homes that increase costs and expand the size of the building and property in such ways that make it impossible for low-to-moderate-income households of color to access and afford. For example:

- By limiting the size, height, or density of buildings, **bulk regulations and floor area ratios** restrict how many housing units can be built on a given parcel of land. Lower density means fewer homes are built, even in areas of high demand, which drives up prices and rents. These limits also discourage the construction of smaller, more affordable housing types like duplexes or apartments, making it harder for moderate-income families to find homes in well-resourced neighborhoods.
- **Setback regulations**, meant to preserve light, air, and privacy, increase the amount of land required per unit and reduce the buildable area on each lot. This results in larger lots, bigger homes, and fewer units overall, which raises land and development costs. They make it difficult to add smaller housing, especially in older urban neighborhoods where space is already constrained.
- Minimum **parking requirements** are among the costliest and most space-consuming zoning rules. Each parking space can cost tens of thousands of dollars to build (and far more in structured or underground garages), costs which are then passed on to renters and buyers, even those that don’t own cars. Parking mandates also reduce the amount of land available for housing and make affordable or transit-oriented developments financially unfeasible.

KEY TERMS

Bulk regulations / floor area ratios (FARs) control the size, scale, and density of development in a given area.

Setbacks dictate how far a building must be set back from property lines, streets, and other structures.

Parking regulations determine how much parking must be provided for different types of land uses: homes, offices, shops, and restaurants.

Rezoning is the process of changing the zoning classification of a parcel of land.

A variance is a special permission granted by a local government that allows a property owner to deviate from the standard zoning regulations.

Conditional uses or special exceptions are types of land uses allowed only if certain conditions are met and official approval, usually by a planning commission or zoning board, is given.

Land Development Processes and Discretionary Development Decisionmaking

Local government zoning or land development codes establish the processes and outline the steps that property owners and developers must take to get the formal legal permissions to develop their property—to build a new house, construct an office building, or even put in a new fence. In some cases, the property owner/developer can proceed with minimal review by the local government—this is often known as “by-right” development—when the land uses are consistent with the land-use regulations. Other projects require the local city council/county board, planning commission, or zoning board to hold public hearings and/or meetings to review and approve the proposal where they have the authority to impose specific conditions on the use, operation, buildings, and property—this is known as discretionary approvals. It can take considerable time and resources to navigate the steps, hold the hearings/community meetings, and understand the subtle and complex nature of the terminology, criteria, and legal effects in these land development processes. Thus, routine land development processes and decisions can have an exclusionary effect on those with fewer resources to elevate their voices and less experience with how their local government’s land development systems work. The following are ways local governments have applied their land development processes to exclude those with fewer resources and access:

- Rezoning can impact a community in a variety of ways, including affecting property values, traffic patterns, and infrastructure demands. For example, if a residential area is rezoned to allow mixed-use development, it could lead to the construction of new businesses, such as cafes, shops, and offices, alongside homes. This can increase job creation and local revenue. But it can also introduce challenges like increased traffic, lack of parking, noise, and rising property values, which can lead to long-time residents not being able to afford their homes.
- Variances can occur when strict enforcement of the zoning rules would cause unnecessary hardship because of unique circumstances related to a property (e.g., its shape or size). It enables reasonable development, such as allowing a homeowner to build a wheelchair-accessible ramp that slightly encroaches on a setback, which might otherwise be blocked by rigid regulations. Frequent variances can, however, undermine the integrity of the zoning plan, leading to inconsistent development, reduced property values, or increased tension among neighbors.
- Conditional uses can enable a church, school, or day care center to be built in a residential zone. While these uses are not prohibited, they do require approval to ensure they align with factors like traffic patterns. Conditional uses can raise concerns about parking, noise, or safety.

The Legacy of Exclusionary Practices

Beyond the underlying land-use and zoning regulations, most US cities and towns have long histories where past housing and redevelopment policies led to different forms of economic exclusion, racial segregation, and patterns of disinvestment that still impact neighborhoods. The most common exclusionary policies and programs involve **redlining, urban renewal, and environmental injustice** (the siting of heavy and often toxic industries close to low-income communities of color). While each community has its own stories of how these policies and programs have affected their neighborhoods and families, it’s important to understand and acknowledge these past housing, redevelopment, and environmental decisions to address their current and long-term impacts (e.g., social, economic, healthy, educational disparities). Many of these impacts are well documented with local maps and stories that CPA facilitators can leverage as part of their academy or bootcamp sessions.

Housing Redlining and Predatory Lending

Understanding the history of housing discrimination is essential for anyone working toward more equitable development. Two major practices—redlining and predatory lending—shaped patterns of racial segregation and disinvestment that still affect communities today.

In the 1930s and 1940s, the federal Home Owners' Loan Corporation created maps that labeled Black neighborhoods as "high risk." These areas were systematically denied mortgages, making it nearly impossible for Black families to buy homes and build generational wealth. As a result, it locked entire communities out of opportunity. Research shows that neighborhoods redlined nearly a century ago still experience lower homeownership rates and higher rates of poverty (Aaronson, Hartley, and Mazumder 2018).

Fast forward to the 1990s and early 2000s when the rise of predatory lending practices exacerbated racial disparities in housing stability. Lenders targeted Black and Latinx borrowers with subprime loans—high-interest mortgages with exploitative terms—even when they qualified for better options. These practices culminated in the 2008 housing crisis, which devastated communities of color. Predominantly Black neighborhoods experienced significantly higher rates of foreclosure and housing abandonment than their white counterparts (Rugh, Albright, Massey 2015). Empty homes and buildings weakened communities, lowered property values, and triggered a harmful cycle of disinvestment and crime. For decades, housing policies and practices discriminated against communities of color. These included denying access to credit and targeting historically marginalized neighborhoods with risky, high-cost loans (Caloir et al. 2022). These systemic inequities set the stage for disinvestment and made foreclosures more likely, impacting Black and Brown communities the hardest and causing widespread vacancies and destabilizing entire neighborhoods. In exploring the impact of foreclosed "zombie homes" in New York State, Caloir and coauthors (2022) acknowledge that these systemic inequities disproportionately affected Black and Brown communities, leading to chronic vacancy and destabilization of entire neighborhoods. By situating vacancy within this historical and racialized context, the zombie homes report applies well-established research findings that link housing abandonment not just to economic decline, but to a legacy of institutional exclusion.

Vacant properties aren't just empty houses, they signal economic decline, reduce tax revenue, and create public health risks. Cities like Detroit, Baltimore, and Chicago still bear the scars of these policies, with the highest vacancy rates in areas once redlined or targeted by predatory lending. Research by the Urban Institute has shown that the compounding effects of racial segregation, economic divestment, and housing policy inequities continue to influence where vacancies occur and who bears the brunt of their consequences.¹

These patterns did not happen by accident; they were the result of systemic decisions. Addressing them requires acknowledging the systemic nature of housing discrimination and implementing reparative policies such as advocating for reinvestment in historically marginalized neighborhoods, promoting fair access to homeownership and credit opportunities, and centering community voices in planning and redevelopment.

Urban Renewal, Redevelopment, and Infrastructure Projects

Urban renewal encompasses a range of government policies and programs designed to reverse urban decay and disinvestment by demolishing "blighted" properties or dilapidated areas and then replacing them with new housing, commercial development, infrastructure, or public spaces. Federal and state urban renewal programs in the 1950s and 1960s sought to catalyze economic growth by using the term blight as the legal justification for large-scale infrastructure and redevelopment projects. These new "slum clearance" programs used federal grants to bulldoze a large number of neighborhoods that led to significant displacement and relocation. These practices were repeated year after year in hundreds of cities and towns across the country. For example, in [Los Angeles](#), freeway construction during the mid-20th century displaced thousands of African American and Latino families and destroyed entire blocks along with causing lasting health impacts. Projects like the I-10 and I-110 freeways ran directly through neighborhoods such as Boyle Heights and South Los Angeles—areas home to Latino and Black residents. These decisions were made with little regard for the permanent destruction of thriving communities or the increased exposure to air pollution that led to higher rates of asthma, cardiovascular disease, and shortened life

expectancy. These examples underscore how transportation planning and land-use decisions have disproportionately burdened marginalized communities with environmental health hazards.

With the political and policy resurgence of revitalizing deteriorating downtowns in the 1980s and 1990s, many local governments would charter special redevelopment authorities with the powers of eminent domain to acquire private property for major economic development projects, such as mixed-use office buildings, government complexes, waterfront redevelopments, and even sports stadiums. Many of these projects again had disproportionate impacts on property owners and residents of color that led to their displacement and permanent relocation. The scars of urban renewal still fester under the surface in many communities and neighborhoods.

Contemporary Land Use and Socioeconomic and Health Disparities

Building on the legacy of redlining, urban renewal, and disinvestment, the built environment continues to cause or contribute to a range of socioeconomic and health disparities that even impact the life expectancies of, and exacerbate vulnerabilities for, communities of color. Researchers have created maps that compare physical, civic, and institutional assets in different neighborhoods across the socioeconomic and racial spectrum. These maps often overlay neighborhood data about household income, property values, race, and health disparities across a city or region to illustrate the alignment of these factors in those neighborhoods with less public and private investments, such as fewer assets and amenities, fewer transit routes and trails, fewer functional schools, and more vacant buildings.

KEY TERMS

Environmental injustice is the siting of industrial and other unwanted land uses in poor neighborhoods, often neighborhoods of color.

Land-use policies and land development decisions have been responsible for channeling more public and private investment into certain neighborhoods and away from others. Even when housing markets rebound, neighborhoods of color are often susceptible to the phenomenon of gentrification and displacement as once-disinvested neighborhoods become popular and price out existing families.

While there are many dimensions to how exclusionary land-use/land development systems have adversely impacted the socioeconomic mobility and public health of neighborhoods of color, the two most common disparities are (1) the phenomenon of gentrification and displacement from encroaching and expanding redevelopment, and (2) health disparities caused by inequalities in the built environment.

The following two examples illustrate the intersection of land use and health disparities, particularly how zoning, infrastructure decisions, and environmental exposures have disproportionately impacted marginalized communities:

- In Atlanta, the BeltLine project was conceived as a visionary redevelopment plan to create a 22-mile loop of trails, parks, and transit around the city.² While it improved urban mobility and green space access, it also spurred rapid gentrification in historically Black neighborhoods, such as the Old Fourth Ward. As property values rose, many long-term residents were displaced, losing access to new health-promoting amenities that were built in their communities. This case illustrates how land redevelopment, when not paired with strong antidisplacement policies, can deepen health disparities by uprooting vulnerable populations from neighborhoods improved through public investment.
- Kansas City, Missouri's, Troost Avenue represents a historically entrenched divide shaped by redlining and racially restrictive covenants.³ Troost has long served as a boundary between white and Black neighborhoods, with stark contrasts in public investment, infrastructure, and health outcomes. East of Troost, where many Black residents live, communities face higher rates of chronic disease, food insecurity, substandard housing, and limited health care access. The legacy of racist land-use policies continues to shape the physical and social determinants of health, reinforcing long-standing disparities.

Environmental Injustice

Environmental justice is rooted in the principle that all people, regardless of race, income, or nationality, deserve equal protection from environmental harm and equal access to environmental benefits. However, a long history of discriminatory land-use planning and environmental policy in the United States has resulted in polluting industries, hazardous waste facilities, and other undesirable land uses being disproportionately located in low-income neighborhoods and communities of color. This systemic pattern, often referred to as “environmental racism,” has exposed residents of these communities to elevated health risks, including respiratory illness, lead poisoning, and cancer, while also degrading local ecosystems and limiting economic opportunity.

Studies have consistently shown that race is a stronger predictor than income when it comes to the location of toxic waste facilities and other polluting infrastructure. In its landmark study, *Toxic Wastes and Race in the United States*, the United Church of Christ Commission for Racial Justice (1987) found that race was the most significant factor in the placement of hazardous waste sites, more than socioeconomic status. More recent research has confirmed these patterns persist. For example, a 2018 study by the EPA found that Black Americans are exposed to 1.5 times more particulate matter (PM2.5) than white Americans, largely because of proximity to highways, power plants, and industrial zones (Mikati et al. 2018).

This disproportionate exposure is not accidental. It is often the result of planning and zoning decisions that concentrate industrial activity near neighborhoods with less political clout, less wealth, and fewer resources to organize or litigate against unwanted land uses. In cities like Houston, Chicago, and St. Louis, industrial corridors have been intentionally sited adjacent to historically Black or Latino communities, reinforcing cycles of health disparity and environmental neglect. Moreover, these communities are often excluded from decisionmaking around environmental planning, making it difficult to advocate for cleaner alternatives or to resist harmful developments.

The following two examples illustrate the concepts, principles, and practices of environmental injustice:

- The Flint, Michigan, water crisis is a stark example of environmental racism and the consequences of neglecting infrastructure in marginalized communities.⁴ In 2014, city officials switched Flint’s water source to the Flint River without adequate treatment, exposing residents to lead-contaminated water. The health impacts were profound, especially for children, who suffered from developmental delays and neurological damage. Flint’s population is predominantly Black and low income, and the state’s failure to respond quickly highlighted how land use and infrastructure decisions can reflect and reinforce systemic inequities that affect community health.
- New Orleans offers a clear case of inequitable land use in the wake of disaster. After Hurricane Katrina in 2005, redevelopment policies favored more affluent, predominantly white neighborhoods. In contrast, lower-income Black neighborhoods, including the Lower Ninth Ward, experienced delayed recovery efforts and were often excluded from city rebuilding plans. Residents faced prolonged displacement, limited access to health care, and deteriorating mental health owing to uncertainty and stress (Pastor et al. 2006). New Orleans highlights how disaster response and land-use planning can exacerbate racial and economic health disparities.

Why Is Understanding These Fundamentals Important for CPA Participants?

Getting a handle on exclusionary land-use policies and practices helps CPA participants see how planning systems have played a role in creating unfairness in housing, the environment, and access to opportunities. Things like zoning laws, land-use plans, and development approvals often reflect the interests of people with more power and money. By digging into how these systems have historically decided who gets to live where and what kinds of

buildings go up, participants can start to understand the deeper barriers that have kept low-to-moderate-income folks and communities of color out of safe, affordable, and well-resourced neighborhoods.

This kind of insight also helps connect the dots between land-use decisions and bigger issues like environmental and health equity. For years, planning and zoning have pushed polluting industries and unwanted land uses into low-income areas and communities of color, leading to serious health problems and environmental injustices. When participants recognize these patterns, they can see how past decisions still affect people today—and why changing the system really matters.

Examples from the CPA Field

The [Baltimore Planning Academy](#) is a six-week cohort program that educates residents on zoning, development, and urban planning through the lens of the city's history and context. Its [curriculum](#) discusses structural racism in planning early on (week 1) through a session titled "Racism in the Structure" and it explicitly acknowledges the city's legacy of discriminatory practices as central to its approach to land use and planning. It also includes a module (in week 6) on equitable development that explores what equitable development means in practice, including whether developers can truly act in the community's best interest, who authentically represents the community, and how physical improvements such as parks, schools, retail, or housing can be made without triggering gentrification. The academy supports one of the Baltimore Department of Planning's equity goals by fostering dialogue with underserved communities. More details on its vision, goals, curriculum, and alignment with Baltimore's Equity Action Plan can be found at https://ohioplanning.org/aws/APAOH/asset_manager/get_file/526509 (slides 9–13).

The [Montgomery County Community Planning Academy](#) (also in Maryland) is hosted by the county's planning department and was developed in partnership with the Office of Racial Equity and Social Justice, the Department of Permitting Services, and the Montgomery County Department of Transportation. The [curriculum](#) includes a module on zoning that discusses what zoning is and what it does and does not do, creating space to discuss limitations and injustices.

Including an Exclusionary Land-Use Module in Your CPA Curriculum or as a Special Session

This section provides sample workshop agendas for presenting three core topics: understanding the current system, exploring historical context, and uncovering hidden barriers. These agendas can be integrated into a CPA curriculum at the introductory level (101) for participants who are new to land development or offered as a standalone, advanced module for land-use professionals and CPA alumni (201).

Uncovering Invisible Barriers: How Existing Land-Use Policies Shape Our Communities

Sugested time: 2–3 hours

Key talking points (applicable to 101 and 201):

- What land-use policies and zoning actually do: how they regulate what can be built where, at what scale, and for what purpose; clarify the development process (comprehensive plans, zoning codes, permitting, and public review); emphasize that these rules shape everything from housing supply to transportation patterns to environmental outcomes.
- Why zoning is often "inherently" exclusionary: zoning emerged historically to separate uses—but also to separate people; show how rules that appear neutral (e.g., minimum lot sizes) can restrict who can afford to live in certain areas; highlight the gap between the stated goals of zoning and its real-world impacts on access and opportunity.

- Exclusive single-family zoning and its ripple effects: describe how limiting large areas to single-family homes reduces housing diversity and supply; connect these limits to higher housing costs, racial and economic segregation, and constrained mobility; note how these patterns reinforce generational wealth disparities.
- Supplemental zoning rules that drive up costs: break down how bulk limits, height caps, setbacks, and similar policies restrict buildable space; explain how parking requirements add significant costs and reduce the feasibility of smaller, more affordable homes; show how these rules cumulatively shape the economics of development.
- Discretionary approvals and uneven access to the process: define variances, conditional uses, and special permits and why they matter; discuss how discretionary processes can introduce uncertainty, delay, and cost; highlight how underresourced communities face higher barriers to navigating these systems or advocating for their needs.
- Historical legacies that still shape today's landscape: connect zoning to redlining, urban renewal, etc.; explain how environmental injustice (e.g., siting polluting uses near marginalized communities) continues to affect health and wealth; emphasize that these patterns were intentional and their effects remain embedded in the built environment.
- Why these patterns persist and what can shift them: identify structural forces such as political resistance, homeowner incentives, slow policy change; highlight examples and strategies for equity such as zoning reform, community-led planning, and environmental justice frameworks; stress the importance of aligning land-use decisions with broader goals around affordability, climate resilience, and racial equity.

101 | Draft workshop plan

Description: Through this interactive workshop participants will explore how land-use and zoning regulation and policies can create barriers to fairness. Through case studies, mapping exercises, and reflective discussions, participants will learn to identify exclusionary practices and their long-term impacts on housing, health, and community development.

Learning goals:

1. Explain what land-use policies and zoning regulations do and why they matter.
2. Identify common exclusionary zoning practices and their impacts on housing and equity.
3. Analyze how historical and current policies shape neighborhood demographics and resource access.
4. Reflect on local examples and propose strategies for more inclusive development.

Sample Agenda (2.5 hours)

Time	Topic	Content and activities
15 minutes	Welcome, introductions, and framing	<p>Framing: Understanding the subtle ways in which land-use policies can exclude certain groups is critical for informed participation in planning processes. By learning how to connect zoning decisions to broader issues like housing affordability and environmental justice you will be able to advocate for a fairer, more inclusive development.</p> <p>Agenda overview</p> <p>Icebreaker activity: Rapid Inventory</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Purpose: connect participants' lived experience to the topic. ▪ Materials: community map, sticky notes, markers ▪ Prompt: <i>What developments are currently planned or happening in your community?</i> ▪ Participants add sticky notes to the community map.

20 minutes	Foundations of Land Use	<p>Mini presentation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What are land-use policies and zoning? ▪ Why are they “inherently exclusionary”? ▪ What are examples of exclusionary land use policies? <p>Large group discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What does it mean for a policy to be exclusionary? Who benefits and who is excluded?
30 minutes	Exploring Exclusionary Practices	<p>Small group (3-4 participants) activity:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Materials: case study handouts ▪ Each group reviews one example of exclusionary practices (single-family zoning, setbacks, parking requirements, etc.). ▪ Questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » How does this practice affect affordability and diversity? » Can you identify similar rules locally? ▪ Report out: each group shares their example and key insights from their discussion.
15 minutes	Break	
40 minutes	Mapping History and Impacts	<p>Interactive timeline:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Participants place key historical events (redlining, urban renewal) on a timeline. ▪ Materials: timeline template. <p>Community mapping:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Revisit the community map from the icebreaker. Mark areas of disinvestment, exclusion, and environmental concern. ▪ What patterns do you notice? How do they connect to health and opportunity? ▪ Consider these areas and the developments (planned or in progress) you identified in the icebreaker. How do these developments perpetuate or address inequities?
20 minutes	Debrief	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What are your reflections/key takeaways from our conversations today? ▪ How does this conversation change the way you are thinking about development in your neighborhood, in our city, in our county? ▪ How can you leverage this knowledge to influence how development is done?
5 minutes	Closing reflection	What else do you need to know to be able to advocate for more inclusive development?

201 | Draft workshop plan

Description: This advanced workshop builds on participants’ foundational knowledge of land use and zoning to explore how policies and regulations, often perceived as neutral, can be applied to perpetuate exclusion and inequity. Through case studies, mapping exercises, and collaborative problem-solving, participants will analyze structural barriers, historical legacies, and policy dynamics that shape housing, health, and opportunity.

Learning goals:

1. Analyze how zoning and land use policies create direct and indirect forms of exclusion.
2. Evaluate the cumulative impact of supplemental zoning rules and discretionary approvals on equity.
3. Connect historical legacies (redlining, urban renewal, environmental injustice) to current patterns of segregation and disinvestment.
4. Identify strategies and policy levers for promoting inclusive development.

Sample Agenda (2.5 hours)

Time	Topic	Content and activities
15 minutes	Welcome, introductions and framing	<p>Framing: by understanding how land-use and planning systems really work, you'll gain the insight to influence decisions, not just observe them. You'll be able to spot where policies reinforce inequity, understand how they affect affordability and environmental justice, and use that knowledge to advocate for fairer, more inclusive outcomes in your own community.</p> <p>Agenda overview</p> <p>Icebreaker activity: Rapid Inventory</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Purpose: connect participants' lived experience to the topic. ▪ Materials: community map, sticky notes, markers ▪ Prompt: <i>What developments are currently planned or happening in your community?</i> ▪ Participants add sticky notes to the community map.
25 minutes	Revisiting the Foundations	<p>Mini presentation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Quick recap of zoning basics and development processes. <p>Large group discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What does it mean for a policy to be exclusionary? Who benefits and who is excluded?
10 minutes	Break	
60 minutes	Deep Dive: Exclusionary Practices	<p>Mini presentation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Exclusionary practices <p>Activity: Policy Impact Simulation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Purpose: show how zoning decisions ripple. ▪ Divide participants into stakeholder groups (e.g., city council, developers, residents, advocacy groups). ▪ Present a scenario: "A proposal to upzone a single-family district for mixed-use development." ▪ Each group debates and negotiates based on their interests. ▪ Debrief questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Who gained and who lost? » How did power dynamics shape the outcome? » What equity considerations were overlooked?
10 minutes	Break	
30 minutes	Mapping History and Impacts	<p>Activity: Mapping with Real Data</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Purpose: connect historical legacies, such as redlining and urban renewal, to current disparities. ▪ Provide maps showing zoning districts, demographic data, and health indicators. ▪ Ask participants to identify patterns of exclusion and hypothesize causes. ▪ Debrief questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » What correlations do you see between zoning and health outcomes? » How do these patterns reflect historical policies like redlining?
25 minutes	Group discussion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What are your reflections/key takeaways from our conversations today? ▪ How does this conversation change the way you are thinking about development in your neighborhood, in our city, and in our county? ▪ How can you leverage this knowledge to influence how development is done? Where do you see opportunities for intervention?
5 minutes	Closing Reflection	What else do you need to know to be able to advocate for more inclusive development?

Tracing the Roots: Understanding Your Community's Exclusionary Land-Use Legacy

Sugested time: 2–3 hours

101 | Draft workshop plan

Description: This interactive workshop helps participants apply their understanding of land-use and zoning concepts to their own community context. Through mapping exercises, case analysis, and collaborative problem-solving, participants will uncover exclusionary practices embedded in local policies and development processes. They will then identify actionable strategies to make planning and development more inclusive.

Learning goals:

Looking at their community, participants will do the following:

1. Analyze how local zoning and development processes may perpetuate exclusion.
2. Identify historical and current patterns of inequity in land use.
3. Evaluate the impacts of exclusionary practices on housing, health, and opportunity.
4. Propose strategies for inclusive development and equitable engagement.

Key talking points:

- Why zoning and development processes matter for equity: zoning and development rules decide what gets built and where, shaping housing access, transportation, and environmental quality. These systems often favor those with knowledge, resources, and power, reinforcing inequities in affordability and opportunity.
- Examples of common exclusionary practices (e.g., single-family zoning, setbacks, parking requirements), historical legacies (redlining, urban renewal), and how discretionary approvals and rezoning and their impact on the community: single-family zoning, bulk limits, setbacks, and parking mandates restrict housing diversity and raise costs, while discretionary approvals and rezoning create barriers for underresourced communities. Historic policies like redlining and urban renewal displaced communities of color and entrenched segregation, impacts still visible today.
- Principles of equitable development: transparency, community empowerment, antidisplacement strategies; equitable development requires transparency in decisionmaking, elevating meaningful community voice, and adopting antidisplacement strategies that protect long-term residents while promoting fair access to housing and amenities.
- Examples of reform strategies from other cities (zoning reform, inclusionary housing, community-led planning): cities are adopting zoning reforms to allow diverse housing types, inclusionary housing policies to ensure affordability, and community-led planning programs like Baltimore's CPA to center equity in development decisions.

Sample Agenda (3.5 hours)

Time	Topic	Content and activities
15 min	Welcome and framing	Today's goal: Connecting concepts to your community. Agenda overview
15 min	Icebreaker activity	Recap key concepts from the introductory workshop on zoning and land development. Activity: gamified knowledge check with questions about zoning and land development to assess participant prior knowledge. Facilitator can use jeopardy PowerPoint templates, Kahoot, Menti, or Aha Slides to facilitate activity. Facilitator can expand as needed when providing the answer.
60 min	Exclusionary Practices in Action	Mini-presentation: Provide participants with 1-2 examples of exclusionary practices (e.g., urban renewal, redlining, environmental injustice). Share examples using the same headers/key points participants will have to share about their own findings (see bullets below). Activity: Community snapshot <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Purpose: participants identify past and present exclusionary practices in action in their community. ▪ Materials: device to access the internet (e.g., phone, tablet, laptop) and/or newspapers with articles about local land development projects. ▪ In groups of four, participants look online or in materials provided to identify two local stories about land development and the exclusionary practices that might be in action. Groups record information on chart paper. ▪ Participants share with the larger group: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » their example » where in the community it is happening (facilitator to provide local map and record location or have participants come up and record location of project discussed) » why it is an example of exclusionary practices » what the impact on the community is Debrief activity: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What do you notice about these examples? ▪ What surprised you?
15 min	Break	
30 min	Principles of Equitable Development	Mini-presentation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Principles ▪ Examples of inclusive development across the country
60 min	Pathways to Inclusive Development in Our Community	Activity: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Purpose: identify opportunities to influence/intervene to make land use and development more equitable. ▪ Materials: examples from the Exclusionary Practices in Action activity ▪ Participants rejoin their group of 4. Looking at their examples, they brainstorm: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » What policies or practices could promote more opportunities and fairness? » How can we leverage what we know to advocate for more inclusive practices and policies? ▪ Groups record strategies developed on the chart paper. ▪ Gallery walk: participants visit each group's chart paper and add sticky notes with comments, questions, ideas.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Debrief: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » What have you noticed? » What surprised you? » What are your biggest takeaways from this discussion and activity?
15 min	Closing	Reflection: What else do you need to know to feel prepared to advocate for more inclusive policies and practices?

201 | Draft workshop plan

Description: This advanced workshop builds on participants' foundational understanding of zoning and land development to explore how policies and regulations, often perceived as neutral, perpetuate exclusion and inequity in their community. Some CPAs host special sessions for academy graduate to dive deeper into topics such as the past and present community impacts from redlining and urban renewal. A few also include field trips of the impacted neighborhoods. Through case studies, mapping exercises, and collaborative problem-solving, participants will analyze structural barriers, historical legacies, and policy dynamics that shape housing, health, and opportunity. The session culminates in a policy simulation and strategic action pitch.

Learning goals:

1. Analyze how zoning and land-use policies create direct and indirect forms of exclusion.
2. Evaluate the cumulative impact of supplemental zoning rules and discretionary approvals on equity.
3. Connect historical legacies (redlining, urban renewal, environmental injustice) to current patterns of segregation and disinvestment.
4. Identify strategies and policy levers for promoting inclusive development.
5. Develop and present an actionable equity-focused intervention for their community.

Key talking points:

- How “neutral” policies (e.g., floor area ratios, setbacks, parking mandates) reinforce inequity: bulk regulations and floor area ratios limit density, setbacks reduce buildable space, and parking requirements add significant cost—together these rules can make smaller, affordable housing types financially unfeasible and restrict access for moderate-income families.
- Power dynamics in discretionary approvals and rezoning: discretionary processes like variances, conditional uses, and rezoning can introduce uncertainty, cost, and delay, creating barriers for underresourced communities while amplifying the influence of those with power and resources.
- Historical legacies and their modern manifestations: redlining and urban renewal displaced communities of color and entrenched segregation, and their impacts—such as disinvestment, health disparities, and gentrification—remain visible in today’s housing and neighborhood patterns.
- Structural forces that sustain exclusion (political resistance, homeowner incentives): patterns of exclusion persist because of structural forces like political resistance to zoning reform and homeowner incentives that prioritize property values over equity.
- Policy levers for change: zoning reform, inclusionary housing, antidisplacement strategies; strategies such as eliminating exclusive single-family zoning, adopting inclusionary housing policies, and implementing antidisplacement measures can promote more equitable development.
- Role of community voice and advocacy in shaping outcomes: community-led planning and active participation in zoning and development decisions are essential for ensuring transparency, equity, and policies that reflect the needs of marginalized residents.

Sample Agenda (4 hours)

Time	Topic	Content and activities
15 min	Welcome and framing	Today's goal: moving from understanding to action. Review agenda
45 min	Mapping Local Patterns	<p>Activity:</p> <p>Purpose: create a visual map of the community; check participant knowledge of previous content</p> <p>Materials: local maps and data, community map to annotate, highlighters (1/group)</p> <p>Split participants in groups of 3–4. Provide each group with a different colored highlighter. Using local maps, demographic data, or their own observations, each group is assigned what to identify:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ areas dominated by single-family zoning ▪ areas with limited public investment ▪ areas and signs of gentrification ▪ areas and signs of disinvestment <p>Once areas are identified, one person/group will go up to the community map and highlight the appropriate areas.</p> <p>Large group discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What do you notice? ▪ Who is most impacted? ▪ What correlations do you see between zoning and health outcomes? Or economic prosperity outcomes? ▪ How do these patterns reflect historical policies like redlining?
10 min	Break	
30 min	Revisiting Foundations and Principles of Equitable Development	Mini-presentation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Introduce advanced concepts of cumulative impact, structural barriers, and power imbalances. ▪ Principles and examples of inclusive development across the country.
15 min	Barriers and Pathways	Group brainstorm: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What structural barriers exist? ▪ Where do you see opportunities for intervention? ▪ What policies or practices could promote fairness?
10 min	Break	
50 min	Policy Impact Simulation	<p>Scenario: a proposal to upzone a single-family district for mixed-use development.</p> <p>Purpose: participants experience working through making a decision given current policies and practices.</p> <p>Materials: roles for each stakeholder group; reference sheet with relevant policies and practices that would influence each stakeholder's perspective. <i>*Facilitator tip: you can base this on a real example if you feel participants are prepared to engage. At times, examples removed from their own experience/community can provide more objectivity.</i></p> <p>Participants split into stakeholder groups (city council, developers, residents, advocacy groups). Each group debates and negotiates based on their interests.</p> <p>Debrief:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Who gained and who lost?

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ How did power dynamics shape the outcome? ▪ What equity considerations were overlooked?
10 min	Break	
30 min	Equity Action Pitch	<p>In groups of 3–4, participants prepare a 5-minute presentation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ key findings from mapping and simulation ▪ one priority strategy for promoting inclusion ▪ why it matters for housing, health, and opportunity
25 min	Report out and closing	Groups present their pitches. Facilitator synthesizes themes and highlights next steps for community conversations.

General Facilitation Tips and Techniques

- Set ground rules or community norms for respectful dialogue; acknowledge that these topics can be personal and emotional.
- Avoid jargon; explain technical terms in plain language.
- Ensure all participants have a chance to make their voice heard, especially those from impacted communities.
- Connect discussions back to the learning goals and real-world applications throughout the session.
- Use local policies, events, and examples to make content relevant.
- Incorporate real or realistic local data for mapping exercises to make activities tangible.
- Encourage storytelling and lived experience as valid data for discussion.
- Use structured small-group activities to balance participation and manage dominant voices.
- Prompt participants to think critically about power and process, not just policy.

Below are some common challenges that may arise when facilitating conversations around zoning, land-use development, and equity and strategies to address them.

Challenge	Strategies
Emotional responses and resistance	Set clear ground rules for respectful dialog, normalize discomfort as part of learning, use inclusive language, and validate lived experience.
Lack of local knowledge or data	Prepare a few local case studies or maps in advance; encourage storytelling and personal experiences as valid data; use guiding questions to help participants think about their surroundings.
Managing dominant voices	Use structured activities (e.g., small groups, round robins) to balance participation; actively invite quieter voices to share; monitor group dynamics and intervene if needed.
Topic complexity	Change jargon into plain language; use visuals to simplify concepts; relate content to everyday experiences.
Difficult conversations	Emphasize data, lived experience, and impact and be prepared to redirect if the conversation becomes polarizing.

Resources

Over the past 10 years several national organizations and universities have curated a range of story maps and data on the history and current impacts of exclusionary land-use and redevelopment systems. Many nonprofits, community groups, libraries, historical societies and local media have also collected individual stories that provide a powerful

narrative of exclusion. CPA facilitators and coordinators can leverage these national resources, recent research reports/articles along with local maps and stories that can provide more details about exclusionary land use policies, programs, and decisions in their communities. Below we provide a sample of those resources to start your search.

- Data, Maps and Materials:
 - » [Mapping Inequality—Redlining in the New Deal America](#) (University of Richmond, VA) offers the most comprehensive source of data, mapping tools, and educator guidance. See [2016 NPR story](#) for how the project came about and what it covers.
 - » [National Geographic Map Maker Redlining in the United States](#)
 - » [City Health Dashboard with new feature on Redlining Maps](#)
 - » [Renewing Inequality](#) (University of Richmond) covers urban renewal maps from 1950-1966 that illustrate family displacement from these systematic redevelopment plans and projects.
 - » [Urban Renewal in Virginia Story Maps](#)
 - » Crossroads of the World: [How Urban Renewal Change the Hill](#) (Heinz History Center, Pittsburgh, PA)
 - » [Historical Redlining and Urban Heat Exposure](#) (interactive ArcGIS maps)
- Research and Articles
 - » Exclusionary Zoning
 - [Bringing Zoning into Focus](#)
 - [Addressing the Legacies of Historical Redlining](#)
 - [Jurisdictions Dominated by Single-Family Zoning Hoard Opportunities, but Bans Aren't the Only Fix](#)
 - [Zoning Restrictions and Demand Have Divided Chicago into Three "Cities," Limiting Housing Availability](#)
 - [The Role of Race in Zoning: A History & Policy Review](#)
 - [Zoning Insights: Explore Data from the National Longitudinal Land Use Survey](#)
 - » Equitable Development
 - [Will California's New Zoning Promote Racial and Economic Equity in Los Angeles?](#)
 - [The Role of Single-Family Housing Production and Preservation in Addressing the Affordable Housing Supply Shortage](#)
 - [Breaking Barriers, Boosting Supply: How the Federal Government Can Help Eliminate Exclusionary Zoning](#)
 - [Louisville Is Using Zoning Reform to Tackle Inequity. Could This Work for Other Cities?](#)
 - [Equitable Development Scorecard, Regional Alliance for Equity \(Minneapolis\)](#)
 - » Urban Renewal, Redevelopment, Disinvestment and Climate and Health Disparities
 - [Case Study: Southwest Washington DC—A Cycle of Urban Renewal and Revitalization](#)
 - [The Racists Roots of Urban Renewal and How it Made Cities Less Equal](#)
 - [Mitigating Extreme Heat Risks in Historically Red Lined Areas](#)
 - [Climate Central's Urban Heat Hot Spot in 65 Cities \(Columbia University\)](#)

Notes

- ¹ Margery Austin Turner and Solomon Greene, "Structural Racism Explainer Collection: Causes and Consequences of Separate and Unequal Neighborhoods," Urban Institute, <https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/102348/the-legacy-of-segregation.pdf>.
- ² "Atlanta's BeltLine shows how urban parks can drive 'green gentrification' if cities don't think about affordable housing at the star," Georgia State University, January 25, 2023, <https://urbaninstitute.gsu.edu/2023/01/25/atlantas-beltline-shows-how-urban-parks-can-drive-green-gentrification-if-cities-dont-think-about-affordable-housing-at-the-star/>.

³ Charles Marohn, "The Local Case for Reparations," Resilience, October 1, 2020, <https://www.resilience.org/stories/2020-10-01/the-local-case-for-reparations/>.

⁴ "Flint Water Crisis: Everything You Need to Know," NRDC, July 1, 2025, <https://www.nrdc.org/stories/flint-water-crisis-everything-you-need-know>.

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About This Project and Series

Urban's **Community Planning Academy Project** assists local governments, community leaders, and their nonprofit and philanthropic partners in the design, development, launch, and assessment of community land-use education initiatives. By integrating Urban's land-use, engagement, and capacity-building expertise, our team can support curriculum development, governance, fundraising and provide instructional guidance. This series of guides seeks to support CPA coordinators and facilitators in the design and delivery of complex and sensitive land-use topics, such as exclusionary land-use regulations, to their respective community participants and alumni.

For more information or assistance, contact project leader Joe Schilling at jschilling@urban.org.

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