

AICP Examination Preparation

March 6, 2004

Session Overview

- ❖ Recent Changes in Focus/Exam Format
- ❖ Exam Elements
- ❖ Tips on Answering Narrative Questions
- ❖ Reading Material, Preparation and Study Tips
- ❖ Contacts

Recent Changes in Focus

- ❖ Deliberate shift to applied planning knowledge and experience
- ❖ Reduced emphasis on rote memorization
- ❖ More decision-making

Computer-based Exam Format

- ❖ You're the first!
- ❖ Enhanced graphics/mapping
- ❖ 12-day testing windows at over 300 testing locations
 - May 10–22, 2004
 - November 8-20, 2004
- ❖ 3.5 hour exam, 170 questions

Exam Elements

- ❖ Emerging Trends
- ❖ Plan Making
- ❖ Functional Topics
- ❖ Plan Implementation
- ❖ Ethics, Public Interest and Social Equity
- ❖ Public Sector Planning

Emerging Trends in the Profession

Cannot provide specifics, but one might want to be familiar with:

- ❖ U.S. census accounts
- ❖ emerging design philosophies
- ❖ recent court case decisions at the national level
- ❖ federal legislation and programs

Plan Making

- ❖ Comprehensive v. Strategic
- ❖ Data Collection
- ❖ Citizen Participation
- ❖ Analytical Tools
- ❖ Data Interpretation

Functional Topics

- ❖ Environment
- ❖ Transportation
- ❖ Parks and Open Space
- ❖ Community Services
- ❖ Historic Preservation
- ❖ Economic Development

Plan Implementation

- ❖ Land Use and Zoning
- ❖ Site Plan Review
- ❖ Related Case Law
- ❖ Growth Management
- ❖ Capital Programming
- ❖ Program Evaluation

Ethics, Public Interest and Social Equity

- ❖ AICP Code of Ethics
- ❖ Environmental Justice
- ❖ Communication and Partnerships
- ❖ Advocacy
- ❖ Diversity

Planners' Roles in Public Planning Agencies

Planners play multiple roles

1. Staff to Planning Commissions and Boards
2. Manage Development Review
3. Conduct Planning Studies
4. Coordinate with other Departments within the Jurisdiction
5. Coordinate and Administer Public Outreach
6. Write and Administer Grant Programs

Responsibilities of Planning Commissions and Zoning Boards

- ❖ Planning Commissions (Wider Mandate)
short and long range planning, planning studies, planning review, budgeting
- ❖ Zoning Boards (Narrowly Focused)
variances, appeals of administrative decisions, special permits and recommendations to Planning Commissions

Relationship between Planning Commission, City Council or County Commission

- ❖ Appointed by the city council or the county commission
- ❖ “Advisory” commission
- ❖ Reviews development applications
- ❖ Makes recommendations to the council/commission

Zoning and Decision Making

- ❖ Rezoning is a legislative Act
- ❖ Legislative body will make final decisions (elected officials)
- ❖ Exceptions to this rule (Northern New England)

Decision Making and Planning Commissions

Two basic actions of a planning commission:

- Legislative Actions – set the rules
- Quasi-Judicial Matters – determine compliance with the rules

Elected bodies almost always make decisions on legislative matters. Quasi-Judicial matters are often acted upon by planning commissions

Public Hearing and Review Processes

For a site or subdivision plan:

- ❖ statutory requirements must be followed as specified in state laws
- ❖ public notice must be given
- ❖ there must be a public hearing – open or closed; informational or for discussion
- ❖ decisions must be filed in specific locations

Familiarity with the Public Planning Process

1. Talk to public planners about their roles
2. Call local planning office and ask questions
3. Attend meetings
4. Publications

Familiarity with the Public Planning Process – cont.

- ❖ AICP Exam Committee working to eliminate perceived biases
- ❖ Helpful to be familiar with public planning, but can be successful on the exam working in the private sector

Narrative Question Answering Tips

Narrative Questions – Note Taking Strategy

- ❖ Determine if the question has multiple parts
- ❖ Decide if specific notes would be helpful

Notes should be comprehensive and concise as they must be recorded in exam booklet – No additional paper is permitted

Narrative Questions – Creating Notes

- ❖ Carefully read the narrative (do not skim)
- ❖ Identify main idea
- ❖ Understand the intention of the text
- ❖ Summarize additional paragraphs
- ❖ Note taking strategy should not be used for all questions

Narrative Questions – Using Your Notes

- ❖ Carefully read the question
- ❖ Determine what is being asked
 - Overall topic or scope
 - Specific Details
 - Inference Question

Answering Questions

❖ Topic or Scope

Refer to the main idea in notes

❖ Specific Details

Refer to notes that will lead you correct text

❖ Inference

Refer to and apply knowledge of planning

Inference questions appear frequently and you must feel comfortable applying planning knowledge – not all the relevant information is in the text

Narrative Questions – Effective Preparation

Study through discussion and dialogue about planning topics, processes and trends

Talk with:

1. Superiors, planning professors or colleagues
2. Study groups of others preparing for the exam

Narrative Questions – Subject Matter

The Exam is comprised of various planning topics, trends and issues

How to prepare:

- ❖ Rely on planning school texts and class notes
- ❖ Study the AICP Code of Ethics
(www.planning.org)

Reading Material, Preparation and Study Tips

Regional and Local Variation in Planning Practice

- ❖ There are differences (especially in the East and North Eastern region of the Country)
- ❖ Test is written to a national norm, not based on local standards
- ❖ Beware -- basing rationales on local standards could lead to a wrong answer

Preparation

- ❖ Revised Reading List (www.planning.org)
- ❖ Planning Magazine
- ❖ Journal of the American Planning Association
- ❖ Planetizen (www.planetizen.com)
- ❖ Study Groups and Communication
- ❖ Study Guides/courses

Basic Tips

- ❖ Start Studying Early
- ❖ Make up Flash Cards, Tapes, Whatever Works for You! Memorize the Easy Stuff.
- ❖ Take Practice Exams
- ❖ Do a Dry Run to the Exam Center
- ❖ Get a Good Night's Sleep, Relax

Questions & Answers