

# City by Design

This lesson was created as a supplement to the *City by Design* program at the National Building Museum. It is designed to be used in your classroom independently, or as an activity before or after a school program at the Museum. For more information about and to register for the National Building Museum's school programs, visit <http://www.nbm.org/schools-educators/school-visit/>.

The *City by Design* program introduces kindergarten through sixth grade students to city planning. It encourages young people to explore the complexity of cities and helps them understand the impact of people's everyday decisions on the places where they live, work, and play.

# National Building Museum

Created by an act of Congress in 1980, the National Building Museum explores, celebrates, and illuminates achievements in architecture, design, engineering, construction, and planning. Since opening its doors in 1985, the Museum has become a vital forum for exchanging ideas and information about such topical issues as managing suburban growth, designing and building sustainable communities, and revitalizing urban centers. A private, nonprofit institution, the Museum creates and presents engaging exhibitions and education programs, including innovative curricula for school children.

Over the past two decades, the Museum has created and refined an extensive array of youth programming. Each year, approximately 50,000 young people and their families participate in hands-on learning experiences at the Museum: 2-hour-long school programs for grades K–9; major daylong festivals; drop-in family workshops; programs helping Cub and Girl Scouts earn activity badges; and three innovative outreach programs, lasting between 30 and 60 hours, for secondary school students. The Museum's youth programming has won the Washington, D.C., Mayor's Arts Award for Outstanding Contributions to Arts Education and garnered recognition from the National Endowment for the Arts.



NATIONAL BUILDING MUSEUM  
401 F Street, NW Washington, DC 20001  
202.272.2448/[www.NBM.org](http://www.NBM.org)  
Red Line Metro, Judiciary Square

# Mixing It Up: Zoning Today



**Z**oning is a legally binding tool used by local governments to implement their planning goals and shape their community's physical appearance. For much of the 20th century, zoning practice emphasized the separation of land by use (e.g., commercial, residential). This idea of separating space grew out of concern in the early 20th century about conditions in industrial cities in which smokestack pollution and overcrowded housing caused disease.

Zoning by use kept industry and commercial uses away from housing and emphasized light, air, and open space in residential areas. In the suburbs, zoning by use meant apartment buildings and single family houses could not be in the same neighborhood. This relatively low-density development meant that the best way to get around the suburbs was by car. While separating uses allowed people to have larger homes and yards, it also helped to create the condition known as sprawl—traffic jams, air pollution, the loss of open space, and long distances between homes, stores, parks, and work.

In response to sprawl, urban planners and local governments are beginning to embrace more traditional approaches to community planning that mix rather than separate uses. By educating children about how different types of land uses may be mixed together, we can help students understand how our living environments may be improved.

## **Materials**

Paper or graph paper

Pencils

Rulers

Markers or crayons

## **Brainstorm**

With your students, discuss the pros and cons of mixing different land uses together. Discuss the types of buildings they live near and chart these on the board. Make a list of the ways in which they travel to the grocery store, pharmacy, playground, park, library, hospital, and school. And, document how long it takes. What conclusions can they draw from this information about traveling time and traffic? Would it be better if these places were closer to where they lived? Why?

## **Action**

To help students understand the benefits of a mixed-use community, have them explore the many different uses that exist within their school building. Draw a birds-eye view plan of the school (either provide this to your children or have them draw it themselves), and give one copy to each child or a group of children. Have the students color the school to represent the different activities that occur in the building (see page 17 for the colors assigned to each land use category). For example, they may color the classrooms blue for institutional because this part of the

building helps people learn. They may color the cafeteria red to represent commercial because they can buy food there. And, they may color the playground green because it is a recreational space.

After investigating their own school, they will understand how their building is used for many different functions. Ask them if only children use the building, or if adults use it, too? Do citizens use the school for neighborhood meetings? Do scout troops meet there in the afternoons? Is there an after-school program in one part of the school? Schools are truly mixed-use buildings.

## **Discussion and Analysis**

Discuss the various plans that the students created and the different uses that occur in the school. How do all the services within the building benefit the students and surrounding community? What would their day be like if they had to travel a long distance to play on the playground or eat lunch?

What other kinds of mixed-use buildings or neighborhoods can students think of? See page 17 for ideas about local mixed-use developments, or see if you can discover one on your own.