

# The Five Pillars of Urban Environmental Justice: A Framework for Building Equitable Cities

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## Abstract

Cities face unprecedented challenges in the 21st century, as this age is marked by drastic economic, environmental, and cultural shifts. These issues push stakeholder groups to leverage land use and design in ways aimed at mitigating harms. City planning commissions are tasked with developing and implementing these plans. But not all community changes are equitable; thus it is important to consider potential social impacts. In fact, environmental injustices are often prompted by failures to enforce zoning or to plan properly. Thus, we need to guard against creating “downstream” harms when making land-use changes. The aim of this essay is to provide an equity-grounded framework to help identify potential harms during the planning process. Drawing from environmental justice literature, we identify five common types of equity-focused land use concerns to be considered when striving for equitable land use and design. These are 1) Environmental Health, 2) Essential Amenities Access, 3) Transportation, 4) Housing Opportunity & Displacement, and 5) Equitable Development. They make up the Urban Environmental Justice Framework, a tool designed to guide equity-focused discussions during the planning process. Preventative measures at the city planning stage could protect citizens from future injustices, thus contributing to equity in urban areas.

Keywords: city planning; environmental justice; social determinants of health; public health

## 1. Introduction

Cities face unprecedented challenges in the 21st century, as this age is marked by drastic economic, environmental, and cultural shifts. Even during the last twenty years, urban areas<sup>1</sup> have weathered global financial crises, economic recessions, growing inequality, climate change impacts, and myriad other problems. These issues push stakeholder groups to leverage land use and design in ways

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<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that this paper uses the terms “urban” and “city” interchangeably. We recognize that there are nuances in the literature concerning these terms (Meagher et al. 2020). However, planning is done in all built environments, and so we have taken liberties with terminology.

aimed at mitigating harms. City planning commissions are tasked with developing and implementing these and other plans that impact how their community changes over time. Not all changes are equitable, however, and low-income and minority communities have historically endured unjust distributions of benefits and harms (Bullard 1990; Murdock 2020). Zoning and land-use redesigns could lead to “the unequal distribution of income and wealth, spatial housing segregation, uneven allocation of public goods and services, and unfair exercise of political rights, along lines of class, race, ethnicity, and gender in the context of... metropolitan regions” (Fujita 2020, 377). In this vein, scholars from several disciplines argue that there are connections between city planning decisions, health inequities, and environmental injustices (Brinkley and Wagner 2022; Maantay 2002). Due to these intersections, this paper presents the argument that justice concerns should play a major role throughout the planning process. This first section discusses the history of city planning, its fraught relationship with normative approaches, and what constitutes a “good” city.

We then develop an equity-grounded framework called “The Urban Environmental Justice Framework,” meant to aid city planners and stakeholders during the planning process. In many ways, planning commissions already do this. However, as discussed, not all community changes are equitable. Thus, it is important to consider potential social impacts. This section identifies five common types of land use concerns to be considered when striving for equitable land use and design. These are 1) Environmental Health, 2) Essential Amenities Access, 3) Transportation, 4) Housing Opportunity & Displacement, and 5) Equitable Development. Each captures a prominent type of harm or concern faced by environmental and urban justice movements, as these community groups have decades of experience challenging unjust planning decisions and inequitable conditions. The collective wisdom of those facing injustices in situ provides invaluable insights moving forward. We hope that stakeholders committed to equitable planning will find this framework useful. Preventative measures at the planning stage could protect citizens from future injustices, thus contributing to equity in urban areas.

## 2. City Planning & Visions of a “Good” City

Contemporary city planning is a modest affair, and often prioritizes economic development over other values (Carmon and Fainstein 2013; Krumholz 2019; Fainstein 2009). This is not surprising as the discipline has a fraught history using normative commitments to guide urban land use and design. In many ways, the project of developing the Urban Environmental Justice Framework grapples with an old debate concerning how to design “good” cities. Attempts to define what is a “good” city bring up connected questions, such as what constitutes an improvement, what and who the city is for, etc. Urban areas are often contested, as various groups attempt to shape the context in ways that align with their ideals. For example, the process of city planning is historically steeped in normative considerations of the cityscape. Drawing from Norman Krumholz’s (2019) and Susan Fainstein’s (2009) overviews of the discipline, its roots lie in the radicalism of 19th century urban progressives, such as the English urban planner Ebenezer Howard and his peers, the French official Baron Haussmann, and their technocratic European counterparts. While each approach differed greatly, they all started from the position that cities of their time were unhealthy and chaotic and thus needed to be reformed. Howard’s garden city movement was motivated by the desire to create utopian cities where people live in a harmonious balance with nature (Gataric et al. 2019). By the 2000s, the community development movement (which started in the 1960s) had taken root, maturing into a community development industry (Krumholz 2019). This new generation of city

planners focused on building projects aimed at helping the poor, such as developing mixed-income housing and giving new life to commercial corridors.

Historically, a handful of well-known planners embraced the view that design has the power to improve the lives of residents in their cities. However, due to these conflicting visions, as well as historical design failures, planners were increasingly skeptical that they could ever agree on what constitutes a “good” city. Today, cities are shaped by the constant need for new jobs and taxes and what Krumholz (2019, 4) calls the “dialectics of growth”. During recessions, cities typically respond by stimulating new investment in real estate projects in downtown areas, hoping that benefits will “trickle down” to other segments of the population. Beyond growth, it is accepted that stakeholders involved in city planning should not impose their values on the public. According to Fainstein (2009), “attacks on the visionary approach have come from across the ideological spectrum” (1). The right attacked planning for denying freedom (Hayek 1944), reducing efficiency (Anderson 1964), and not relying on the market to allocate urban space (Klosterman 1985). The left is worried about the top-down nature of planning (Davidoff and Reiner 1962; Yiftachel 1998), that the process smuggles in class bias (Harvey 1978, Gans 1968), and that it does not consider difference (Thomas 1996). Finally, centrists argue that comprehensive planning is unattainable (Altshuler 1965), destructive to the urban fabric, and indifferent to stakeholder desires (Hall 2002; Jacobs 1961). These historical yet powerful critiques were taken seriously. For the last forty years economic competitiveness now “tops every city’s list of objectives [and] causes planning to give priority to growth at the expense of all other values” (Fainstein 2009, 3). The result is a proliferation of new hotels, office buildings, and convention centers, but the benefits have not “trickled down” (Krumholz 2019).

This change in priorities led to the relative lack of interest in social-equity issues. In response, the scholars Tietz and Chapple (2013) wonder if “planners hate the poor,” as their idealistic rationales for actions often don’t line up with the irresistible lure of building large projects “no matter the cost in human suffering,” (pg. 205). Echoing this sentiment, scholars increasingly argue that planning often serves developer interests “at the expense of everyone else” (Fainstein 2009, 3). However, this myopic focus on economics led to a resurgence of calls for a just and democratic city, both within city planning circles and beyond. These calls permeate prominent debates in planning, such as the one over “smart cities,” which claims to include social justice as a key commitment (Alizadeh and Sharifi 2023; Kitchin 2018). Yet detractors argue that this approach tends to focus on technological and physical elements of planning, potentially at the expense of democratic values and social justice (Rosol & Blue 2022).

Echoing these calls for a just city, this paper argues that normative considerations should again play a role throughout the planning process, as the myopic focus on economic growth is harmful. Both scholars and citizen groups argue that there are connections between city planning decisions, health inequities, and environmental injustices faced by low-income and historically marginalized communities (Brinkley and Wagner 2022; Maantay 2002). If so, then adopting a “trickle-down” economic structure does not protect against bias or harm. Rather, it allows for inequitable land use. Examples to support this view are not hard to find. For instance, United States citizens have been protesting environmental harms for nearly half a century (Murdock 2020; Bullard, 1990). Environmental justice (EJ) protests and collective resistance were carried out, starting in the 1970s and early 1980s, by diverse communities to challenge unfair placement practices of environmental externalities, including chemical waste dumps, landfills, oil refineries, and other noxious facilities. According to Murdock (2020), “communities of color and poor communities identified their neighborhoods as being overburdened with particular environmental ills, especially those linked with

toxicity and pollution related to the fossil fuel and petrochemical industries” (7). Grounded in the realities of these events, environmental justice movements demanded the application of fair strategies and processes in the resolution of inequality related to environmental contamination. Life in marginalized neighborhoods is often correlated with substandard services, unhealthy housing and water, degraded infrastructure, and serious environmental hazards (Anguelovski 2013). In contrast to wealthier communities that often exclude cultural and ethnic minorities, low-income neighborhoods generally receive fewer services and resources (Pellow 2009; Landry and Chakraborty 2009). According to the American Planning Association, many environmental injustices are prompted by either a failure to enforce zoning or a failure to plan (Eley 2016). This critique implies that planning could do otherwise; thus, normative considerations still play a major role in planning circles.

### 3. What is “Just” City Planning?

Today, a growing number of professionals are embracing equity-focused or “just” city planning, thus returning to the normative roots of their discipline. Like historical debates on what constitutes a “good” city, understanding the connection between a “good city” and a “just city” plays an important role in contemporary discussions. Urban scholars have a long history of critically engaging with concepts of social justice (Rosol & Blue 2022). Important scholarship includes Lefebvre’s (1970) work on the right to the city, which was further developed by Marcuse et al. (2009), and Harvey’s (1973) highly influential work on justice and the city, which informs contemporary debates, such as those on smart cities (Vanolo 2019). Discussions of spatial justice (Marcuse 2009) and participatory engagement also feature prominently in the literature (Fainstein 2009). Despite the richness of this scholarship, questions of ethics and justice are often intertwined, and the distinction between the two is sometimes muddled. For example, Fainstein (2005) defines the just city in terms of equity, democracy, growth, diversity, and sustainability, even though she acknowledges that philosophers might find fault with the intermingling of “good” and “just.” She is correct that philosophers are careful to describe and separate distinct types of justice claims and other types of normative claims (Noll and Murdock 2020). However, in the pragmatic context of city zoning and land-use decisions, many options that bring about equitable outcomes would be considered good in the colloquial sense of the word. For example, zoning or design changes that do not negatively impact the residents of the municipality within which these are made (while providing the desired benefit prompting the change) would constitute a “good” planning decision. Here, the normative status of the change depends on the consequences or outcome. And, as planning commissions are committed to serving the needs of their specific communities, the normative determinations of these outcomes depend on whether the specific goals have been met and duties have been discharged. If city planners are committed to equitable design, then justice outcomes become important criteria for determining whether or not particular land-use decisions are good. Thus, a “good” city would be one where inequities are addressed.

But which types of justice are considered important for the design of good cities? According to Marit Rosol and Gwendolyn Blue (2022, 685), most of the literature critiquing cities “directly or indirectly invoke questions of justice; however, they rarely define its meaning”. Drawing from Nancy Fraser’s (2005) conceptual model of justice, they argue that social justice has three dimensions that are equally important. These include 1) redistribution (who gets what), 2) recognition (who is heard), and 3) representation (how and where decisions are made). For Fraser (2005), these dimensions are connected: “redistribution is the acknowledgment and remedy for economic

inequality, recognition for a failure to treat all social groups as equivalent, and representation for a failure to ensure due process across multiple scales” (Rosol and Blue 2022, 685). These align well with Fainstien’s list of 5 criteria, as equity, democracy, and diversity play important roles in Fraser’s conceptual model. However, sustainability appears to be adding further dimensions to the conception of justice.

Another area of scholarship particularly sensitive to environmental harm and sustainability is the environmental justice literature. As discussed above, EJ movements contributed greatly to the resurgence of calls for a just city, and they are careful to outline how environmental harms are specific types of injustices (Bullard 1990; Murdock 2020; Whyte 2017). Global environmental justice movements also use a threefold conceptual model (Schlosberg 2004). The dimensions are 1) the distribution of environmental risks, 2) recognition of the experiences of impacted communities, and 3) participation in the creation and application of environmental policies. Each aligns well with Rosol and Blue’s (2022) justice model, as it also stresses how benefits and harms are distributed, who is heard, and how decisions are made. Thus, both urban justice and EJ scholars recognize the importance of distributive justice, procedural justice, and justice as recognition, though they are framed slightly differently, depending on the conceptual model. Each of these three frameworks are well represented in both literatures and forms the basis for determining if an environmental change is a justice issue.

This overlap is not surprising, as scholarship on urban justice and environmental justice share common theoretical roots. Importantly for this essay, each draws from the work of Axel Honneth and Nancy Fraser, especially concerning theories of recognition and procedural justice, defined as the demand that decision-making processes be fair and include impacted parties (Coolsaet and Neron 2020; Rosol and Blue 2022).<sup>2</sup> The idea of recognition is complex and has a long philosophical history, yet both Honneth and Fraser provide important insights for populations facing injustices. Honneth describes recognition as the “moral grammar of social conflicts,” as it grapples with the ways we respect diverse people, their cultural practices, their identities, and systems of knowledge, but is also sensitive to issues of self-worth and self-respect (Coolsaet and Neron 2020). For Honneth (2000), recognition and participation are intertwined. He identifies three forms of recognition in his typology, the second of which is respect in legitimate institutional interactions. Here, being respected in these spheres is important for the dignity of people. The third form includes the social esteem that you gain when you are a part of “networks of solidarity,” or community groups with shared values. Similarly, Fraser argues that the “most general meaning of justice is parity of participation” (Fraser 2005, 5). Parity occurs when adult members of society can interact with each other as peers (2001). There are ways that parity of participation can be impeded, however, as social subordination (cultural injustice), material exploitation (economic injustice), and political disenfranchisement could render citizens unable to participate (Coolsaet and Neron 2020; Fraser 1995; Fraser and Honneth 2003). Recognition and participation play an important role in each of the conceptual models of justice discussed above, irrespective of whether they are coming out of work on urban or environmental justice. This makes sense, as parity of participation is needed to bring about just environments and is harmed by injustices *in situ*, such as disenfranchisement that allows for material exploitation.

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<sup>2</sup> Though it should be noted here that environmental movements embraced justice as recognition throughout its history, as a strategy to identify that injustice is occurring (Murdock 2020; Whyte 2017).

## 4. EJ and the Distribution of Environmental Risks Contextualized

While scholarship on urban justice and EJ utilize similar theoretical frameworks, they are unique in that they often provide novel insights concerning justice. For example, each model above includes distribution (of resources and risks and benefits, etc.) as a key dimension. However, these frameworks are largely theoretical, as they are conceptual in nature. This is because specific circumstances (surrounding unjust distribution) change depending on context. We typically agree that situations where one group shoulders harms, while another group enjoys the benefits of an action is unjust (Bullard 1990; Murdock 2020). Thus, it is an important part of theoretical work on justice. (Though even this position is contested in theoretical literature.) EJ scholars agree, as they clearly embrace a distributional justice framework built on the idea that social and economic benefits and harms should be equitably distributed across populations (Noll and Murdock 2020; Svarstad et al. 2011). In addition, EJ movements also have over fifty years of experience identifying specific examples of unjust distributions of harms on the ground. Even during the early days of the EJ movement, citizens' concerns highlighted city planning failures, including untenable practices in land use, housing, sanitation, and infrastructure. While the particulars fall outside the scope of discussions defining justice, they are very useful for planners who are committed to equitable design. According to Brinkley and Wagner (2022) justice-focused planning and policy are being hampered by a lack of data and evaluation-focused tools. We argue that one way to address this barrier is to provide decision-makers with examples of the most common injustices faced by communities as a heuristic to facilitate implementing justice criteria during the planning process. Specifically, we argue that a) identifying these concerns and b) keeping them in mind during the planning process could help address future harms before they become an issue.

As will be discussed below, the five categories that make up the Urban Environmental Justice Framework are grounded in EJ and urban justice scholars' normative commitments yet also provide a more detailed overview of historical lessons gleaned by EJ movements. These categories are 1) Environmental Health, 2) Essential Amenities Access, 3) Transportation, 4) Housing Opportunity & Displacement, and 5) Equitable Development. While the categories do not at first blush appear to be normative, each concerns themselves with the "on the ground" harms communities have endured when distributive, procedural, and/or recognition justice are violated.

The last category prompts city planners to grapple with parity of participation or whether impacted parties are recognized and represented. As Kyle Whyte (2017) so aptly argues, activists, politicians, scholars, and others use the recognition paradigm as a way to identify that an injustice is occurring. When actualized in an EJ framework, it helps to raise awareness of wrongdoing and motivate policy and political solutions aimed at improving impacted peoples' futures. Thus, this framework includes lessons concerning recognition from Fraser's (2005) and Honneth's (2000) conceptual justice models while drawing from EJ insights to flesh out the distribution dimension. As such, the subsequent discussion will refer to these theoretical foundations as we move forward.

## 5. Urban EJ & Social Determinants of Health

The collective wisdom of communities facing injustices in situ provides invaluable insights moving forward. If cities hope to address challenges in an equitable fashion, the EJ literature provides concrete examples of injustices to be avoided when making planning decisions. The following section of the essay distills these into a framework to help guide discussion-making during the public

planning and policy process. In a recent analysis of the future of urban EJ, these movements were roughly broken down into two categories helpful for our analysis. According to Anguelovski (2013), early EJ movements focused on remediation projects or cases where communities were disproportionately exposed to environmental toxins and other related health risks, such as water contamination, air pollution, toxic spills, etc. (Bullard 1990, Carruthers 2008, Murdock 2020). This category of environmental injustices aimed at addressing harms is already impacting communities. In this way, they can be understood as a type of backward-looking project addressing unjust situations in place. However, EJ scholarship also focuses on providing forward-looking recommendations. Struggles to obtain “green” environmental justice include projects aimed at creating greater community livability through the creation of parks, urban agriculture, and other open spaces. These projects embrace the goal of improving spaces to alleviate future harms. Thus, green EJ projects are preventative in nature. While forward-looking projects are important, Anguelovski (2013) argues that green EJ projects are just beginning to be taken seriously in the literature. However, we argue that city planners should adopt a forward-looking stance concerning urban justice. In addition to focusing on addressing remediation cases, we should also be deeply committed to the goal of ensuring that these types of injustice never occur. One way of doing this is by fostering “green” projects, though it should be noted that they can be problematic (Kato 2018). Another way is by taking justice considerations into account during city planning processes. Thus, we can work towards a future where remediation projects are a thing of the past. Environmental realization is only achievable if we address injustices before they begin.

The same lessons hold concerning urban injustices more generally. With this goal in mind, literature on social determinants of health (SDOH) also provides insights moving forward. EJ movements are aware of the importance of SDOHs, as communities bearing a disproportionate burden of environmental risks are also impacted by nonmedical factors influencing health (Prochaska et al. 2014; Wakefield and Baxter 2010). These nonmedical factors (including risk exposure, health knowledge and attitudes, etc.) are social determinants of health or “upstream” factors that play a causal role in poor health outcomes (Williams et al. 2008). In this metaphor, “downstream” realities can be understood as health emergencies that medical professionals face in clinical settings. Health outcomes can be improved by addressing the causes (aka “upstream” factors) of health emergencies before they become emergencies. Prochaska et al. (2014) argue that environmental risks and social determinants are inextricably linked, and thus cumulative risk assessments need to include both. Socioeconomically disadvantaged populations tend to experience higher rates of mortality and morbidity “due to the cumulative effects of exposure to environmental stressors, including chemical agents (*e.g.*, benzene), physical agents (*e.g.*, noise, build environment), biological agents (*e.g.*, disease vectors), and psychosocial agents (*e.g.*, unemployment, lack of access to health care)” (Prochaska et al. 2014, 980). City planners should be cognizant of both EJ and SDOH impacts, as both are connected to environmental factors. As stakeholders who prioritize EJ and SDOH are concerned that communities could bear disproportionate burdens, both can be placed under the umbrella of urban justice. As such, the pragmatic strategy to address the causes of harms is an important one. We argue that urban justice emergencies of various kinds can also be mitigated if we address the causes of these injustices. However, stakeholders involved in urban planning decisions need to be cognizant of various potential equity-related impacts. This aligns with justice-oriented movements, as an important aspect of the resolution of inequality includes fair strategies and processes (Holifield 2012). It is the authors’ hope that this essay provides a useful tool and shared vocabulary for fruitful discussion.

Urban Environmental Justice Categories	Sample Concerns	Examples of Common Questions
Environmental Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Proximity to environmental contaminants (such as poor air quality &amp; toxins), heavy industrial sites, transportation infrastructure, and floodplains.</li> <li>Health burdens, such as low life expectancy elevated health risks, and pollution burdens.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Will the planning decision place industrial facilities or infrastructure in or near residential communities?</li> <li>Could changes to zoning potentially cause environmental harms in the area?</li> <li>What steps will be taken to mitigate potential environmental health impacts?</li> <li>How will the involved parties assess and document potential impacts?</li> </ul>
Essential Amenities Access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Access to safe drinking water, food, and other essentials.</li> <li>Access to childcare services, proximity to parks and greenspaces, community facilities access, proximity to health care, proximity to financial resources, and access to the internet.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Will the proposed changes impact or disrupt water, food, or sewage systems?</li> <li>Does the proposed change improve community proximity to necessary services?</li> <li>Will environmental sustainability and livability be impacted?</li> </ul>
Transportation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The distribution of transportation services.</li> <li>Access to affordable transportation.</li> <li>Environmental hazards associated with transportation systems.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Will transportation services be disrupted due to this change? If so, how?</li> <li>How are transportation services distributed?</li> <li>Will the proposed project impact access, especially for marginalized and disadvantaged groups?</li> <li>If transportation infrastructure is impacted, how will any environmental harms be distributed?</li> </ul>
Housing Opportunity & Displacement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Access to affordable housing.</li> <li>Resident displacement.</li> <li>Land value impacts and shifting retail landscapes.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Will this decision impact property values?</li> <li>Could residents be displaced from the neighborhood? If so, are there any protections in place to mitigate harms?</li> <li>Will the retail landscape shift? If so, who could be impacted by this shift?</li> </ul>
Equitable Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Inclusion of impacted residents in development decisions.</li> <li>Authentically engaging with stakeholders.</li> <li>Prioritizing equity-focused investments and projects.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Who is at the table? Have key stakeholder groups been included in the process?</li> <li>Are community concerns being respected and seriously considered?</li> <li>Will the proposal help to address a current inequity?</li> </ul>



## 6. A Heuristic Framework for Just City Planning

EJ metrics are being used throughout Europe (Heyen 2020) and the United States (Koniski et al. 2021) to help identify potential areas where residents may be facing a justice issue. For example, Oregon State's Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) uses EJ metrics to guide outreach when aiding communities and when issuing relief funding and loans (Department of Environmental Quality 2022). The framework specifically focuses on the following categories: Whether a community is a) economically distressed, b) health burdened, and/or c) pollution burdened. These categories are then linked to criteria, which refer to a specific metric. Tools, such as Oregon's framework, are increasingly being adopted as governments continue to recognize the importance of shielding citizens from environmental harms. They are excellent for identifying potential areas where residents face these types of challenges and for prioritizing institutional resources. However, like Anguelovski's (2013) analysis of EJ above, cases where communities are disproportionately exposed to environmental toxins are typically prioritized over preventative projects. This isn't surprising, as it is imperative that downstream emergencies (such as water contamination, air pollution, toxic spills) should be given precedence. However, this is problematic when placed in a larger context, where city planning commissions tend to emphasize economic competitiveness at the expense of other values and concerns (Krumholz 2019; Fainstein 2006). As discussed above, injustices are often prompted by failures to enforce zoning or failures to properly plan, as the American Planning Association recognizes. If this is the case, then justice-related concerns should be taken seriously during the planning process.

In this vein, city planners, planning commissions, and land use and zoning committees all make decisions that can drastically impact urban environments. This isn't surprising as they typically make choices that impact economic growth and development, street and road design, transportation systems, land use regulations, zoning, etc. (Vicuna and Galland 2018). Drawing from Fujita's (2020) analysis of urban injustices, this could lead to "the unequal distribution of income and wealth, spatial housing segregation, uneven allocation of public goods and services, and unfair exercise of political rights, along the lines of class, race, ethnicity, and gender in the context of... metropolitan regions" (377). The literature on urban justice and EJ is filled with accounts of injustices faced by communities. However, before many of these cases became examples of injustices, city planning commissions made specific decisions that contributed to the manifestation of community harms. So, what does just city planning look like? How can injustices be mitigated before they become harms? Due to the connections between planning and equity, we argue that a basic urban equity-focused framework can be used to help identify a) potential areas where residents may be facing a justice issue and b) potential negative impacts that could arise after land use decisions are made. Unlike the metrics discussed above, where categories are linked with specific standards or measurements, this paper highlights key normative concerns that should be discussed. It is our hope that these value-focused categories will be connected to standards. However, we recognize that contextual factors matter when developing measurement tools and thus request that city planning groups develop them

Rather than a metric, our framework should be understood as a heuristic or ethos. A heuristic acts as a conceptual tool that helps stakeholder groups discuss potential injustices by providing a shared vocabulary and a starting point for discussion. For instance, medical professionals typically use the four principles of biomedical ethics outlined by Beauchamp and Childress (2001) to guide ethics-focused discussions in clinical settings. In this context, various experts, patients,

and family members are often faced with tough ethical decisions that need to be made quickly. The four principles act as a type of shorthand or shared vocabulary to discuss ethically important considerations that should be considered during the decision-making process. In this example, professional discourse on normative impacts begins with this shared vocabulary, as well as a professional commitment to continuing conversation for the sake of continued growth and expansion of understanding. Clinical settings and biomedical frameworks are great example of how ethical frameworks can be used to achieve better decision outcomes. The Urban Environmental Justice Framework outlined below is intended to do similar work in planning contexts, where decisions are being made that could greatly impact the lives of citizens. Drawing from several local EJ and equitable justice frameworks, we've identified five common types of land use concerns that should be considered when striving for equitable land use and design.

These are 1) Environmental Health, 2) Essential Amenities Access, 3) Transportation, 4) Housing Opportunity & Displacement, and 5) Equitable Development. This list is not exhaustive and can be expanded depending on the needs of the community. In addition, these concerns could be prioritized differently based on the individual project or proposal. However, each captures potential types of harm identified by communities facing environmental and urban injustices, more generally. Concerning environmental health, different metrics focus on different considerations. Oregon, for example, focuses on health burdens, such as low life expectancy, elevated health risks, and pollution burdens, including proximity to contaminated water and heavy industrial zones (Department of Environmental Quality 2022). The city of Charlotte uses five measures, including tree canopy, density of impervious surfaces, proximity to heavy industrial sites, proximity to transportation infrastructure, and floodplain (Charlotte Future 2023). In contrast, the City of St. Paul asks more general questions, such as how the project assesses and documents beneficial and harmful impacts to environmental health in partnership with impacted communities. (Ramsey County 2023). These examples highlight how cases, where communities are disproportionately exposed to environmental toxins, differ from context to context. One area might be concerned with water contamination, while others might be worried about air pollution or toxic spills (Bullard 1990). While the specifics may change, it is important to take environmental health impacts into account when making land use decisions, as community health is deeply connected to place-based factors (Murdock 2020; Prochaska et al. 2014).

Similarly, EJ movements are concerned with access to safe drinking water, food, and other essentials. Low-income and minority communities often face disproportionately high pollutant exposures, and these realities are reflected in the EJ literature of the last forty years (Bullard 1990; Murdock 2020). A stark example is the public health crisis in Flint, Michigan, where water for the city was contaminated with high levels of lead and legionella bacteria (Campbell et al. 2016). In addition to clean water, the lack of access to fresh fruits and vegetables is a major justice issue in urban contexts (Alkon 2012, Noll 2020). Local food collectives, urban gardens, and other green projects can often be understood as community-based solutions to unjust distribution in the city. Other necessary goods and services discussed in equity-focused literature include access to child-care services, proximity to parks, community facilities access, proximity to health care, proximity to financial resources, and access to the internet (Ramsey County 2023). Access to amenities is an emerging theme in EJ scholarship, as "green" environmental justice includes projects aimed at improving community livability (Anguelovski 2013).

Transportation systems also feature prominently in both the EJ and urban justice literature. For example, Epting (2020, 2021) argues that transportation policy and infrastructure have extensive

histories in social justice movements. For urban residents, “such concerns include environmental factors such as climate change that affect people in several regions and across the globe. There are also topics such as subsidies, disability services, land use regulations, distribution of services, urban sprawl, and zoning issues that require consideration for transportation decisions that are not immediately known” (360). In many ways, transportation is a double-edged sword for urban EJ movements. On the one hand, lack of transportation falls under the previous category, as this is an access issue. Many of the goods and services necessary for living a good life in the city require that individuals have a means of transportation. On the other hand, living too close to infrastructure could produce environmental health hazards, such as air and water pollution. Thus, while this topic was historically neglected, transportation justice is now an area of importance within EJ and urban justice movements. City planning commissions should ask themselves whether zoning changes or development plans could be beneficial or harmful to neighborhoods, with an eye toward mobility.

Similarly, housing concerns have been also gaining traction in EJ movements. For example, gentrification caused by various planning initiatives has greatly impacted urban areas. Green projects aimed at creating open spaces, planting trees, and enlarging city parks are common strategies for making cities more sustainable and increasing neighborhood access to amenities that could improve city life (Silva et al. 2018). However, some planning decisions have not been executed with justice in mind, impacting housing access in urban neighborhoods. According to Kato (2018), sustainability rationales can “enhance, rather than ameliorate, environmental injustices in the city, and this is why we must critically examine the social impacts of sustainability policies” (1). The term “ecological gentrification” (Dooling 2009) signifies how sustainability rationales for urban redevelopment have been used to remove unhoused populations from public spaces. In addition, the rhetoric of “greening” has been used to increase urban development with the goal of attracting businesses and wealthy, educated people into neighborhoods. This leads to gentrification, where residents are displaced from neighborhoods due to property value hikes, shifting retail landscapes, and changes in demographics (Kato 2018). EJ asks us to think about how the benefits and harms of projects are distributed across groups (Bullard 1990; Murdock 2020). As Kato (2018) argues, “the mantra of “*green it and people will come*” seems to be working. We must pause, however, and ask—what happened to the people who used to live there? They are being priced out and moving into the areas that are less *sustainable*, environmentally, and economically”. If neighborhoods could be displaced due to a planning decision, then justice considerations arise. Gentrification is increasingly a priority for EJ and SDOH (Smith & Thorpe 2020) and should be discussed during planning discussions.

Finally, equitable development brings up other important considerations during the planning process. The inclusion of this category doesn’t mean that we should return to the days where city planners emphasized economic competitiveness and growth at the expense of all other concerns (Fainstein 2006). Developer interests shouldn’t be given priority above communities, but equitable development can be beneficial. EJ communities are concerned with SDOH, as environmental exposures and health outcomes are deeply connected (Prochaska et al. 2015). For these groups, neighborhood quality of life and community health outcomes are connected to contextual factors and thus justice-sensitive economic development could improve various outcomes for communities (Curren et al. 2015). The Government Alliance on Race and Equity (2015) states it well when it argues that equitable development is achieved when there is “fair and just inclusion of all residents into a region’s economic, social, and political life—an essential component of planning for sustainable and thriving regions” (5). Environmental equity is achieved when your neighborhood

can no longer be used to predict life outcomes for individuals and communities. Policy recommendations on this subject typically involve fair and just inclusion of community members in the decision-making process, authentically listening to community needs, and prioritizing investments and projects that support those who need it most. Equitable development also embraces place-based actions that aim to create resilient and livable communities (epa.gov).

The following chart provides an overview of the Urban Environmental Justice Framework, as well as examples of common questions that could arise in planning contexts. This framework is not exhaustive, as communities could face additional inequities and there is a diverse array of potential impacts. Thus, it is not meant to capture every potentiality. Rather, the framework is intended to provide a common vocabulary during planning discussions and highlight common equity considerations identified by communities on the ground. These should be on the table during the process if equitable planning is a goal. Planning commission's primary roles often include acting as an advisory group to the municipal governing body concerning issues related to land use, community development, and other planning decisions (Vicuna et al. 2018). They are tasked with developing and implementing plans that impact how their community changes over time. But, not all community changes are equitable; thus it is important to consider potential social impacts (see table).

## 7. Conclusion

City planning commissions are tasked with developing and implementing plans that greatly impact the makeup of built environments. But not all community changes are equitable; thus it is important to consider potential social impacts from a justice perspective. In fact, environmental injustices are often prompted by failures to enforce zoning or failures to plan properly. Thus, we need to guard against creating "downstream" harms when making land-use changes. The aim of this essay was to provide an equity-grounded framework to help identify potential harms during the planning process. Drawing from EJ literature, we identified five common types of equity-focused land use concerns that should be considered when striving for equitable land use and design. These are 1) Environmental Health, 2) Essential Amenities Access, 3) Transportation, 4) Housing Opportunity & Displacement, and 5) Equitable Development. They make up the Urban Environmental Justice Framework, a tool designed to guide equity-focused discussions during the planning process. We also provided an example of how this framework could be useful during zoning decisions and planning processes, more generally. We hope that stakeholders committed to equitable planning will find this framework useful. Preventative measures at the city planning stage could protect citizens from future injustices, thus contributing to equity in urban areas.

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