

AICP Functional Areas of Planning Practice Test (Sample)

Study Guide



Everything you need from our exam experts!

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Introduction

Preparing for a certification exam can feel overwhelming, but with the right tools, it becomes an opportunity to build confidence, sharpen your skills, and move one step closer to your goals. At Examzify, we believe that effective exam preparation isn't just about memorization, it's about understanding the material, identifying knowledge gaps, and building the test-taking strategies that lead to success.

This guide was designed to help you do exactly that.

Whether you're preparing for a licensing exam, professional certification, or entry-level qualification, this book offers structured practice to reinforce key concepts. You'll find a wide range of multiple-choice questions, each followed by clear explanations to help you understand not just the right answer, but why it's correct.

The content in this guide is based on real-world exam objectives and aligned with the types of questions and topics commonly found on official tests. It's ideal for learners who want to:

- Practice answering questions under realistic conditions,
- Improve accuracy and speed,
- Review explanations to strengthen weak areas, and
- Approach the exam with greater confidence.

We recommend using this book not as a stand-alone study tool, but alongside other resources like flashcards, textbooks, or hands-on training. For best results, we recommend working through each question, reflecting on the explanation provided, and revisiting the topics that challenge you most.

Remember: successful test preparation isn't about getting every question right the first time, it's about learning from your mistakes and improving over time. Stay focused, trust the process, and know that every page you turn brings you closer to success.

Let's begin.

How to Use This Guide

This guide is designed to help you study more effectively and approach your exam with confidence. Whether you're reviewing for the first time or doing a final refresh, here's how to get the most out of your Examzify study guide:

1. Start with a Diagnostic Review

Skim through the questions to get a sense of what you know and what you need to focus on. Your goal is to identify knowledge gaps early.

2. Study in Short, Focused Sessions

Break your study time into manageable blocks (e.g. 30 - 45 minutes). Review a handful of questions, reflect on the explanations.

3. Learn from the Explanations

After answering a question, always read the explanation, even if you got it right. It reinforces key points, corrects misunderstandings, and teaches subtle distinctions between similar answers.

4. Track Your Progress

Use bookmarks or notes (if reading digitally) to mark difficult questions. Revisit these regularly and track improvements over time.

5. Simulate the Real Exam

Once you're comfortable, try taking a full set of questions without pausing. Set a timer and simulate test-day conditions to build confidence and time management skills.

6. Repeat and Review

Don't just study once, repetition builds retention. Re-attempt questions after a few days and revisit explanations to reinforce learning. Pair this guide with other Examzify tools like flashcards, and digital practice tests to strengthen your preparation across formats.

There's no single right way to study, but consistent, thoughtful effort always wins. Use this guide flexibly, adapt the tips above to fit your pace and learning style. You've got this!

Questions

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- 1. What best describes the relationship between zoning and the comprehensive plan?**
 - A. Zoning regulates land use and dimensional standards; the plan provides policy guidance and zoning must be consistent with the plan.**
 - B. They are unrelated tools.**
 - C. The plan overrides zoning in all cases.**
 - D. Zoning portrays only aesthetics.**

- 2. Which budgeting technique has been used for over fifty years and has stand-alone packages or programs?**
 - A. Capital Improvement Program**
 - B. Capital Budgeting**
 - C. PPBS**
 - D. PM**

- 3. What is the purpose of phasing in plan implementation?**
 - A. To delay all projects indefinitely.**
 - B. To assign property taxes.**
 - C. To change city boundaries.**
 - D. To sequence projects over time in line with financing capacity and readiness.**

- 4. In land-use planning, which practice best minimizes flood risk?**
 - A. Build densely in floodplains**
 - B. Avoid development in flood-prone areas and implement flood-resilient design and green infrastructure**
 - C. Rely solely on levees**
 - D. Allow unrestricted development**

- 5. Which city is the wettest in the United States by average annual rainfall?**
 - A. San Francisco**
 - B. Seattle**
 - C. New Orleans**
 - D. Buffalo**

- 6. Which public participation technique is most effective for reaching underrepresented populations?**
- A. Public hearings with no translation**
 - B. Targeted outreach with multilingual materials, trusted community partners, and accessible formats**
 - C. Online surveys only in English**
 - D. General surveys delivered by mail**
- 7. Performance zoning can conserve energy by limiting inappropriate site disturbance.**
- A. True**
 - B. False**
 - C. Not specified**
 - D. It increases energy use**
- 8. Which housing type has the second-highest average vehicle trips per unit?**
- A. Duplexes and Townhomes**
 - B. Planned Unit Developments**
 - C. Apartments**
 - D. Condominiums**
- 9. In equity planning, what is a core goal?**
- A. An approach prioritizing reducing disparities and ensuring meaningful involvement of marginalized communities**
 - B. An approach to maximize overall city growth**
 - C. A method to expedite decisions with less public input**
 - D. A technique to standardize zoning**
- 10. What is the primary effect of an ADU policy?**
- A. Increases automobile traffic**
 - B. Increases housing supply and affordability by permitting additional units on existing lots**
 - C. Decreases property values**
 - D. Reduces zoning flexibility**

Answers

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1. A
2. B
3. D
4. B
5. C
6. B
7. A
8. B
9. C
10. B

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Explanations

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1. What best describes the relationship between zoning and the comprehensive plan?

A. Zoning regulates land use and dimensional standards; the plan provides policy guidance and zoning must be consistent with the plan.

B. They are unrelated tools.

C. The plan overrides zoning in all cases.

D. Zoning portrays only aesthetics.

The main idea here is how zoning fits with the comprehensive plan: the comprehensive plan sets the community's long-range direction and policy, while zoning is the regulatory tool that turns that policy into actual land-use rules. Zoning translates the plan's vision into what uses are allowed where and under what standards, such as density, setbacks, and building height. Because these rules guide how development occurs, they must be consistent with the plan. If the plan is updated, zoning should be adjusted to stay aligned with the new direction. The plan doesn't automatically override zoning in every instance; instead, zoning should reflect the plan's guidance. And zoning is about more than aesthetics—it governs land uses and development standards, not just appearance.

2. Which budgeting technique has been used for over fifty years and has stand-alone packages or programs?

A. Capital Improvement Program

B. Capital Budgeting

C. PPBS

D. PM

Capital budgeting is the budgeting approach that centers on evaluating long-term investments by treating each proposed project as its own stand-alone package of costs and benefits. This stand-alone mindset has been a hallmark of the technique for many decades, allowing planners to isolate the incremental cash flows and economic merit of a single investment—using metrics like net present value or internal rate of return to decide which projects to fund within the overall capital plan. The idea is to assess each investment independently rather than mixing its finances with other activities, which is why the description emphasizes stand-alone packages or programs. Other options relate to planning horizons or organizational budgeting structure rather than the independent, project-by-project evaluation that characterizes capital budgeting.

3. What is the purpose of phasing in plan implementation?

- A. To delay all projects indefinitely.
- B. To assign property taxes.
- C. To change city boundaries.
- D. To sequence projects over time in line with financing capacity and readiness.**

Phasing in plan implementation means sequencing projects over time to match financing capacity and readiness. This approach ensures that the rollout of capital investments aligns with how much money is actually available—through budgets, debt capacity, and grant timing—and with how prepared the projects are to proceed, including permitting, land acquisition, and community approvals. By staging work, a plan reduces the risk of funding gaps or delays, lets progress be monitored and adjusted as conditions change, and often allows earlier, foundational projects to unlock or enable later ones. Phasing is not about delaying everything forever, assigning property taxes, or redrawing city boundaries; those actions serve different purposes and don't describe the intentional, budget- and readiness-driven sequencing that phasing provides.

4. In land-use planning, which practice best minimizes flood risk?

- A. Build densely in floodplains
- B. Avoid development in flood-prone areas and implement flood-resilient design and green infrastructure**
- C. Rely solely on levees
- D. Allow unrestricted development

Minimizing flood risk in land-use planning hinges on reducing exposure to flooding and increasing resilience through design and nature-based solutions. The best approach is to avoid development in flood-prone areas and pair flood-resilient design with green infrastructure. By not placing buildings and people in known flood zones, communities prevent the highest potential losses and preserve natural floodplains that can absorb surge and store water. Flood-resilient design then adds layers of protection and functionality. This includes elevating structures, designing floodproof key elements, using flood-resistant materials, and ensuring critical facilities (like hospitals and emergency services) can operate during and after flood events. Such measures improve a community's ability to withstand and recover from floods without relying on a single protective measure. Green infrastructure complements these efforts by slowing and infiltrating stormwater where it falls. Permeable pavements, rain gardens, bioswales, wetlands, green roofs, and urban trees reduce runoff, delay peak flows, and provide space to store water. This not only lowers flood risk but also enhances water quality, habitat, and urban livability. In contrast, building densely in floodplains puts more people and property directly in harm's way and increases potential damages. Relying solely on levees gives a false sense of security and can fail during extreme events, especially as climate change alters flood patterns. Allowing unrestricted development expands exposure and undermines risk reduction efforts. So, the strongest strategy combines avoidance of flood-prone areas with designs and nature-based solutions that manage water and bolster resilience.

5. Which city is the wettest in the United States by average annual rainfall?

- A. San Francisco**
- B. Seattle**
- C. New Orleans**
- D. Buffalo**

Understanding how we measure wetness in cities means looking at average annual precipitation, which includes rain and melted snow. This total is what many climate rankings use, not rainfall alone. Among these cities, San Francisco and Seattle are relatively dry compared with the others. San Francisco gets only about 20 inches of precipitation per year. Seattle is wetter, around 40 inches. New Orleans is very rainy, with roughly 60 inches annually, especially muddying the late-summer and hurricane season. Buffalo stands out because its annual precipitation is among the highest in these options—roughly in the 80s to 90s inches—largely thanks to lake-effect precipitation from nearby Lake Erie, which brings a lot of snow in winter that adds to the yearly total when melted. So, when considering average annual precipitation (rain plus snow), Buffalo is the wettest among the listed cities. If you were measuring rainfall alone (excluding snow), rankings could shift, but total precipitation is the common measure used for “wettest.”

6. Which public participation technique is most effective for reaching underrepresented populations?

- A. Public hearings with no translation**
- B. Targeted outreach with multilingual materials, trusted community partners, and accessible formats**
- C. Online surveys only in English**
- D. General surveys delivered by mail**

Public participation is most effective for reaching underrepresented populations when barriers to access are lowered and trusted channels are used. Multilingual materials ensure language access so people can understand and engage. Partnering with trusted community organizations helps overcome distrust and leverages existing networks that people already rely on. Accessible formats address disabilities and varying literacy levels, making participation feasible for a broader range of individuals. Targeted outreach tailors messages, venues, and timing to fit the habits and needs of specific communities, boosting relevance and response rates. Other approaches often fall short because they assume everyone can access or relate to the process—public hearings without translation, English-only online surveys, or general mail surveys can exclude non-English speakers, those without internet access, and people with literacy or accessibility challenges.

7. Performance zoning can conserve energy by limiting inappropriate site disturbance.

A. True

B. False

C. Not specified

D. It increases energy use

Performance zoning uses outcomes-based standards to guide development, allowing flexibility in how a project meets energy and environmental goals. Limiting inappropriate site disturbance helps conserve energy because it preserves natural features that regulate the local microclimate. Retaining mature trees and vegetation provides shading and cooling, reducing a building's cooling needs. Avoiding excessive grading and clearing keeps soils intact, supports natural drainage, and reduces heat island effects that would otherwise require more energy for cooling. It also reduces the energy that would be spent on site preparation and infrastructure. Because the approach aims to achieve energy efficiency by protecting the site's natural characteristics, the statement that performance zoning can conserve energy by limiting inappropriate site disturbance is true. The other options run counter to that idea or are ambiguous.

8. Which housing type has the second-highest average vehicle trips per unit?

A. Duplexes and Townhomes

B. Planned Unit Developments

C. Apartments

D. Condominiums

Vehicle trips per dwelling unit vary with how a housing type is designed and how people typically get around in that development. In trip-generation studies, dense, walkable forms like apartments and condominiums usually generate fewer vehicle trips per unit because residents can satisfy many needs on foot or with shared facilities, and there's less reliance on private cars per household. Among the options, duplexes and townhomes tend to produce the most trips per unit, while planned unit developments fall in the middle. PUDs often mix housing with some density but are not always as pedestrian-friendly or as compact as the densest multifamily forms, so their per-unit trips are higher than apartments or condominiums but lower than the highest category. That placement makes planned unit developments the second-highest in average vehicle trips per unit.

9. In equity planning, what is a core goal?

- A. An approach prioritizing reducing disparities and ensuring meaningful involvement of marginalized communities**
- B. An approach to maximize overall city growth**
- C. A method to expedite decisions with less public input**
- D. A technique to standardize zoning**

Equity planning focuses on fairness in both outcomes and processes. The core goal is to reduce disparities in opportunities, services, and outcomes among different groups, with particular emphasis on including marginalized communities in decision-making. This means designing policies and processes that actively involve those historically left out, using equity-focused metrics to track progress, and adjusting actions to close gaps in housing, transportation, health, and economic opportunities. Choosing growth for growth's sake misses the point of equity planning because it looks only at overall expansion, not at who benefits or who is left behind. Expediting decisions with less public input undermines inclusive participation, which is essential to equitable outcomes. Standardizing zoning can overlook local needs and fail to address unequal impacts across communities.

10. What is the primary effect of an ADU policy?

- A. Increases automobile traffic**
- B. Increases housing supply and affordability by permitting additional units on existing lots**
- C. Decreases property values**
- D. Reduces zoning flexibility**

The primary effect of an ADU policy is to increase housing supply and affordability by permitting additional units on existing lots. Allowing accessory dwelling units—such as backyard cottages, basement apartments, or garage apartments—lets more units be added within already developed areas, using land and infrastructure that are already in place. This expands the overall stock of homes and provides more affordable options for renters and buyers, often with lower construction or land costs than new detached homes. In most cases, the goal is to create more housing options without changing the neighborhood's overall character or requiring new parcels of land. The other options describe potential secondary or incidental outcomes, but they're not the policy's main aim: traffic impacts, changes in property values, or shifts in zoning flexibility can occur but are not the core purpose of permitting ADUs.

Next Steps

Congratulations on reaching the final section of this guide. You've taken a meaningful step toward passing your certification exam and advancing your career.

As you continue preparing, remember that consistent practice, review, and self-reflection are key to success. Make time to revisit difficult topics, simulate exam conditions, and track your progress along the way.

If you need help, have suggestions, or want to share feedback, we'd love to hear from you. Reach out to our team at hello@examzify.com.

Or visit your dedicated course page for more study tools and resources:

<https://aicpfunctionalareasofplanning.examzify.com>

We wish you the very best on your exam journey. You've got this!

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