C40 & UN-HABITAT URBAN PLANNING ACCELERATOR

How cities are creating a climate-responive urban planning model

SIGNATORY CITIES

Accra, Amman, Athens, Barcelona, Bogotá, Buenos Aires, Cape Town, Chicago, Copenhagen, Curitiba, Dar es Salaam, Durban/eThekwini, Fortaleza, Freetown, Guadalajara, Istanbul, Johannesburg, Karachi, Lima, Madrid, Medellín, Milan, Paris, Portland, Quezon City, Quito, Rio de Janeiro, Tokyo, Tshwane, Vancouver

WHAT IS IT

To support cities in achieving their climate goals and building better cities, C40 & UN-Habitat co-created the C40 and UN-Habitat Urban Planning Accelerator, a climate-responsive approach that prioritises people, the planet, and shared prosperity. The dominant urban planning model of the 20th century is characterised by sprawl, car-oriented development, and rigid land-use zoning. This has made cities highly emissions-intensive, and negatively impacted the health and quality of life of many residents. Rapid population growth, combined with unplanned expansion, has also dramatically increased cities' exposure to climate hazards. Reimagining how cities are planned and designed is key to addressing the climate crisis and building urban environments that are more inclusive, just and people-centred.

Signing this Accelerator confirms that mayors are committed to planning cities that are less emissions-intensive, protecting communities from climate risks and creating vibrant, inclusive places where everyone can thrive. Together, signatory cities of the Accelerator will work to advance six key commitments, striving for compact, connected cities that are polycentric (i.e, with multiple centres), alongside risk-informed, nature-positive and inclusive development.

The C40 and UN-Habitat Urban Planning Accelerator offers a dedicated framework for action, providing mayors and their technical teams with the knowledge and tools needed to move beyond outdated planning models, and instead set cities on a lower-carbon, climate-resilient pathway for decades to come.

WHY IT'S NEEDED

Urban land area is now expanding up to 50% faster than population growth. If current trends continue, urban areas could triple in size by 2050.

The IPCC reported that adopting a better urban planning model that is compact, mixed-use and transit-oriented, could cut emissions by up to 25% by 2050.

Between 1990 and 2020, **green spaces in and around cities have** shrunk by 28.7%.

Some **20% of the world's population live in inadequate housing** – with more than 1 billion urban residents residing in slums and informal settlements.

Urban planning is one of the most powerful tools for climate action. Through spatial plans, policies, legislation, building codes and municipal by-laws, urban planning sets the blueprint for how cities grow and evolve. That is why good urban planners are the best climate leaders. The choices they make today will determine whether cities can meet climate targets and deliver healthier, more equitable lives for generations to come.

Climate-responsive urban planning is about enabling sustainable and resilient development. This means designing and regulating urban areas to create places that allow people to live happy and healthy lives, without compromising the needs of future generations. By integrating environmental considerations in all the planning and design steps for the urban fabric, climate-responsive planning directly promotes climate action.

Urban planning is a city function that crosscuts all urban systems, from transport to buildings, natural environment, public space and community development. It regulates the urban landscape through a framework comprising spatial plans, policies and legislation. Additionally, it may be complemented by separate regulations, such as building codes or by-laws. Urban planning can therefore be understood as a multi-level and multidisciplinary process that shapes urban and territorial development. Effective planning requires coordination across sectors and collaboration between municipalities, particularly when addressing cross-cutting challenges such as the climate crisis.

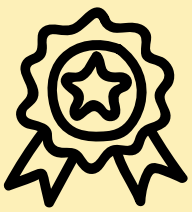
COMMITMENTS BY MAYORS

We commit to adopting a climate-responsive urban planning model by 2035 by:

- Reducing greenhouse gas emissions through **compact, polycentric, and connected development.**
- Reducing climate vulnerability through **risk-informed, nature-positive, and inclusive planning.**

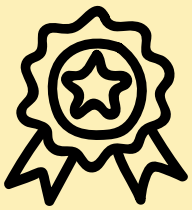
Within 10 years (by 2035), we commit to incorporating the following objectives into the city's master plan and/or other relevant land-use plans:

- **Compact:** Prioritise regeneration and densification over urban sprawl.
- **Polycentric:** Adopt a polycentric model and foster mixed-use neighbourhoods.
- **Connected:** Steer new development near transit hubs to encourage residents to adopt sustainable mobility patterns.
- **Risk-informed:** Restrict new development in areas of high climate risk.
- **Nature-positive:** Secure and protect land for nature to shield against extreme weather events.
- **Inclusive:** Mandate adequate and affordable housing to improve resilience for the most vulnerable.



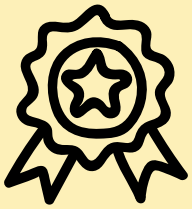
CAPE TOWN

Since the early 2000s, the City of Cape Town has leveraged its statutory Urban Development Edge (UDE) as the core planning instrument to manage metropolitan growth and actively counter low-density urban sprawl. The UDE establishes a legally defined perimeter, which facilitates containment, preservation and inward densification. This containment strategy has helped to preserve the city's 81,775 hectares of critical biodiversity and conservation land. The complementary Coastal Edge policy further reinforces this compact strategy by precluding urban development in the high-risk coastal zone, ensuring the city's outward expansion is simultaneously constrained both on the landward (sprawl) and seaward (climate risk) boundaries.



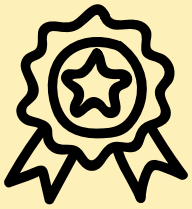
BARCELONA

Barcelona's Superblock (Superilla) model reclaims urban space to foster polycentricity and mixed-use neighbourhoods. The strategy severely restricts vehicle traffic, reallocating an estimated 60% of street space for social, cultural, and commercial uses like green areas and plazas. Simultaneously, Local Plans (Pla d'Usos) govern ground-floor activities to ensure functional diversity and 'urban mixticity'. This combination has measurably boosted commercial vitality, with the number of local shops in Superblock areas rising by up to 30%, supporting vibrant and decentralised local economies.



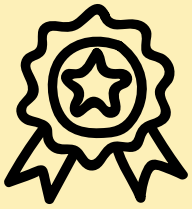
CURITIBA

In the 1960s, Curitiba pioneered the comprehensive use of transit-oriented development (TOD), integrating transport and land-use planning to manage rapid urban growth and shift the city's evolution away from a radial, car-centric model to one centred on its high-capacity Bus Rapid Transit corridors. Zoning and land-use regulations were strictly implemented along these corridors mandating high-density, mixed-use development immediately adjacent to the transit lines. This strategy has incentivised residential and commercial growth around high-capacity transit, leading to a more compact urban form, high public transport ridership rates and reductions in transport related CO_2 emissions (eliminating around 27 million automobile trips annually). While Curitiba's current TOD efforts remain largely consistent with its origins, recent focus has expanded to include measures to address equity and displacement concerns.



QUEZON CITY

Quezon City has established a robust model for proactive urban development by making disaster risk reduction central to its Comprehensive Land Use Plan. This strategy is fundamentally driven by an understanding of environmental risk, aiming to safely accommodate urban population growth without exacerbating existing exposure or putting new development at risk. Central to this effort is the classification of over 3,000 hectares as strictly 'non-buildable' zones. These designated zones specifically encompass high-risk sites like steep landslide-prone slopes and introduce mandatory easements along waterways.



AMMAN

Amman is promoting nature and green space through mandatory quotas embedded directly into its zoning and building regulations. This metric identifies the minimum percentage of green infrastructure required on a new development plot, with different levels for different land-use categories. The calculation includes dedicated landscaped and planted areas, with requirements scaled by construction project type: industrial sites must allocate a minimum of 5%, while residential, mixed-use, and service facilities (such as hospitals and schools) must dedicate 10% to 15% of the plot area to nature respectively. The residential quota introduces a sustainability measure, by demanding the use of low-water-demand plant varieties. This ensures private developers prioritise and allocate space for urban nature and water resilience, with the Green Building Standards further encouraging the voluntary adoption of measures like permeable surfaces for better stormwater management.

PORTLAND

The City of Portland utilises a robust Inclusionary Housing (IH) Programme to confront a significant housing deficit, estimated at 63,000 units needed by 2045 for low- and moderate-income households. The IH mandate requires developers to apply for permits to either provide affordable units or pay a substantial fee-in-lieu. The programme strategically links affordability requirements to financial incentives under the Transit-Oriented Development programme, concentrating new low-income housing in transit-accessible, opportunity-rich neighbourhoods. The inclusion mandates are high, requiring, for example, up to 50% of units to be affordable at 80% Area Median Income (AMI), or 25% at 60% AMI.