

Revitalizing Cities Series

Allowing a fox in the henhouse can have serious consequences. Likewise, conflicts of interest have the potential to compromise downtown planning projects.

What are typical conflict situations?

Consultants or oversight committee members have a conflict of interest if they stand to profit from a plan's recommendations. Conflicts of interest may exist when individuals in leadership positions:

- Own property within a planning area.
- Are or anticipate being under contract with a private developer or public agency owning property within the planning area.

Are there different kinds of conflicts?

Yes. Conflicts of interest can be grouped into two categories:

- *Real conflicts* - when project recommendations are influenced by individuals who receive immediate or future benefits.
- *Perceived conflicts* - when the public believes that some project recommendations may be shaped by the potential for financial gain by consultants or people in leadership positions.



What are the consequences of potential conflicts?

If the public believes a conflict of interest exists, the planning effort will be compromised and its credibility will be questioned, making plan adoption difficult and plan implementation improbable.

Are there professional codes of ethics relating to conflicts of interest?

Yes. The American Planning Association's position is typical: in its code of ethics, the section titled "Our Responsibility to Our Clients and Employers" states: "We shall avoid a conflict of interest or even the appearance of a conflict of interest in accepting assignments from clients or employers." The American Institute of Architects' code is equally clear: "A Member shall not render professional services if the Member's professional judgment could be affected by responsibilities to another project or person, or by the Member's own interests, unless all those who rely on the Member's judgment consent after full disclosure."

How can conflicts be avoided?

Disclosure is an essential first step. Agencies should request that consultants or candidates for oversight committees identify property they own or contracts they have with developers or other public agencies that have interests within a study area. With this information in hand, agencies reviewing proposals and appointments can determine if the potential for a conflict of interest and project complications exist.

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