

History of Urban Planning

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Key periods, ideas, and figures that shaped the way cities are designed and managed.

1. Ancient Foundations (c.3000BC – 500AD)

Civilization	Core Concepts	Notable Projects / Features
Mesopotamia (Sumer, Babylon)	Grid-like street layouts around temples; zoning for residential, commercial, and religious functions.	The Ishtar Gate and city walls of Babylon.
Indus Valley (Harappa, Mohenjo-daro)	Highly regular orthogonal grids, sophisticated drainage, standardized brick sizes.	Grid of streets 3m wide; centralized water management system.
Ancient Egypt	Centralized planning around monumental complexes; use of axial avenues.	The Avenue of Sphinxes linking pyramids and temples.
Classical Greece	Hippodamian (grid) plan; separation of public, private, and sacred spaces.	Miletus (planned by Hippodamus) – first known “grid city”.
Roman Empire	Castra (military camp) layout for civilian towns; orthogonal grid, cardo (north-south) & decumanus (east-west) streets; public amenities (forums, baths, aqueducts).	Timgad (Algeria), Jerash (Jordan).
Pre-colonial Americas (e.g., Maya, Aztec)	Central plazas, ceremonial precincts, water control, hierarchical zoning.	Tenochtitlán – causeways, canals, and a central island temple complex.

Takeaway: Early cities already used systematic layouts, zoning, and infrastructure—principles that persist today.

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2. Medieval & Early Modern Period (500?–?1800)

Era / Region	Planning Characteristics	Influential Developments
European Medieval Towns	Organic growth around a market square, church, or castle; narrow winding streets for defense.	Defensive walls; guild-based districts.
Islamic Cities	Central mosque and souk , hierarchical street network, emphasis on climate-responsive design (courtyards, wind-towers).	Fez, Cairo medinas.
Renaissance Italy	Revival of classical geometry; use of <i>perspective</i> and <i>proportion</i> ; emphasis on public squares and vistas.	Palmanova (star fort city), Pienza (ideal city).
Baroque Planning	Grand axial boulevards, monumental vistas, formal gardens; meant to showcase power.	Versailles, Paris under Haussmann (mid-19th c.).
Colonial Grid (Spanish, Portuguese, British)	Orthogonal grid imposed on new settlements; central plaza or “square” as administrative hub.	Philadelphia (William Penn, 1682), Mexico City (Zócalo).

Takeaway: Planning became a tool of authority, aesthetics, and social order, moving from purely defensive layouts to more symbolic, monumental designs.

3. The Industrial Age (1800?–?1945)

3.1. Challenges

- Rapid urbanization → overcrowding, slums, poor sanitation.
- New transportation (railways, trams) reshaped city form.
- Public health crises (cholera, tuberculosis) highlighted need for regulation.

3.2. Key Movements & Figures

| Movement / Theory