

# Land Use and Development Law



## What is Land Use and Development Law?

Land use and development laws are primarily local statutory laws that control industry, commerce, and housing development in cities and towns. These laws can also protect historic sites and regulate environmental impacts of development projects. Local zoning laws define certain areas as ideal for certain types of building projects such as single-family housing, multifamily housing, commercial, industrial, and open spaces. Zoning maps may also dictate lot sizes, height regulations of buildings and signs, and parking lot sizes. These regulations are overseen by local regulators. Land use and development lawyers advise contractors and developers regarding these local regulations. They also may represent individual landowners in disputes over the sale or development of their property ([Cornell](#)).

While some variations exist among local zoning laws, these laws are generally similar across various cities and states ([Wolf](#)). Land use and development law is also impacted by national laws, including the [1966 National Preservation Act](#) and the [1969 National Environmental Policy Act](#), which protect the historicity and natural value of certain lands. Administrators of the Department of the Interior often work directly with local leaders to implement land use laws ([Nolon et al](#)). Land use and development lawyers are also involved in such negotiations and should thus have a background in administrative law and environmental law as well. The Property Clause in the United States Constitution provides Congress the authority to manage certain federal property. The Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management, the Fish and Wildlife Service, and the National Park Service together manage 640 million acres of land. Land use lawyers may also work for these agencies to enforce federal land protections ([Hoover](#)).

## Where Do Land Use and Development Lawyers Work?

### Government

Department of the Interior—[Internships and Careers](#)

Environmental Protection Administration—[Law Internships and Fellowships](#)

National Park Service

[Memphis and Shelby County Division of Planning and Development](#)

### Private Sector

Firms that handle development and related cases

In-house for development companies

### Types of Clients

Homeowners

Businessowners

Developers, contractors

Local or national government (as an administrator or adviser)

# Land Use and Development Law Resources



## Resume Boosters for Land Use and Development Law

Participate in the Neighborhood Preservation Clinic

Intern or extern with a firm that handles land use and development cases

Intern or extern with a land development company

Get experience in real estate, property, or environmental law

If you are interested in public land management, consider participating in the [Public Land Corps](#) or an [AmeriCorps program](#)

## What Classes Should I Take?

Administrative Law  
Environmental Law  
Land Use Law  
Property II  
Realty Transactions

## Professional Associations

### American Bar Association

All University of Memphis law students have free membership to the [American Bar Association](#). Their website provides routinely updated information and interest-specific career advice. Join different sections to find out what they offer. Check out the [Land Use Planning and Zoning Committee](#) of the [Section of State and Local Government Law](#).

## Land Use and Development Law Links

### [“Are National Monuments the Right Way to Manage Federal Public Lands?”](#)

This article by Matthew J. Sanders examines challenges to federal land management. American Bar Association, June 1, 2017.

### [“The Land-Use Solution to Climate Change”](#)

This article by Jim Murphy proposes how modifications to land use and development policies can combat the effects of climate change. American Bar Association, April 23, 2019.