

Lilly Wilson – Senior Development Manager, Community Land Trust Group of Societies

What is or was your ULI involvement and what motivated you to volunteer for UrbanPlan?

I began my involvement with ULI in 2020 at the advice of mentors, specifically seeking opportunities for virtual education sessions and webinars. Looking to become more involved, I was intrigued by the UrbanPlan program and the request for volunteers. Having stumbled upon urban planning and development as a career path rather accidentally, I have always been a strong proponent of expanding planning education to younger populations. Given the impact planning has on children and youth, I know that incorporating their voices into planning decisions is imperative to the advancement of more just planning practice and policy. I further believe that programs like UrbanPlan can equip younger generations to be more comfortable engaging in and influencing planning related discussions.

What has been a memorable part of your experience volunteering for UrbanPlan?

My favourite part of working with students is helping them think through tough challenges and come up with solutions they may not have previously thought of. Seeing groups actively open to receiving feedback, taking challenges and turning them into opportunities for improvement of their plans, and coming up with quite progressive solutions within the confines of the program is very rewarding.

How does being a volunteer/member affect your understanding of ULI's work and impact?

What continues to intrigue me about ULI is the broad range of members, working in all facets of the built environment all over the globe, whom I wouldn't necessarily have the opportunity to hear from or interact with in my day-to-day work. This speaks to the value of ULI's work across disciplines and borders, simultaneously shedding light on both hyper-local and global initiatives and points-of-view.

What is your approach to volunteering and connecting with young people?

Building trust is vital in any engagement or facilitation situation. This is no different when working with younger populations, though challenging to do depending on the time you have to spend with each group. With UrbanPlan, my approach is to attempt to meet the group where they are at, being as flexible as possible while still helping them meet project expectations. Having relaxed body language and limiting jargon only to instances where it can be sufficiently explained also helps to reduce any anxiety the students may be feeling, assisting in setting an appropriate tone for constructive feedback and more difficult discussions.

What have you learned about yourself or from students through volunteering and being involved with ULI/UrbanPlan?

I've learned that working with students can be energizing and inspiring. I am continuously impressed with the knowledge and progressive approaches younger generations have towards planning-related topics.

What do you see for the future of UrbanPlan?

I see UrbanPlan as a module within standard geography, politics, economics, or other similar classes, with various adjustments to allow for learning at different ages, with increasing complexities depending on grade level. Incorporating planning education grounded in financial and political realities is so fundamental to helping younger and younger populations influence these major decisions which are ultimately about their future.