

Veronique Turner, Development Manager, Headwater

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

I have been a ULI member throughout my career but recently I was looking for opportunities to become more involved in the industry and give back in some way. I read about the UrbanPlan program on a ULI email blast, and it sounded like a perfect fit. I have an educational background in urban planning and currently work in development, so I felt that I had something to contribute to this initiative. It's a course that I wish I had access to in high school or even in my undergraduate years at university, so I was excited at the prospect of getting involved and am so glad I did.

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

Once pandemic restrictions allowed, connecting with the students and teachers in-person has been the best part of this experience. It allowed me to see their enthusiasm and have more in-depth conversations about their site plans and decision-making processes for the project. I am constantly impressed by the students' grasp of land use planning and economic concepts in such a condensed course, and to see their progress from the start of the program to the final City Council challenge.

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

I have always valued ULI's educational offerings and research in the field, but volunteering with this program showed me how invested ULI is at making a real impact in the communities where it operates. Getting to be a small part of that impact, through UrbanPlan, has been really rewarding.

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

I really try to not give my opinions on the students site plans, even when they ask for it, which can be hard! Instead, I try to keep asking questions to help them to better understand the consequences of their choices and to be able to defend them, especially once they have to answer to the mock city council. I like to remind the students that there is no right or wrong way to plan their neighborhood; what matters is that their plan reflects their vision, and to continually assess to make sure those two are connected.

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

I have learned that I really enjoy working with students and it has been inspiring for me to be involved. I think it's so important to be in tune with and listen to the perspectives of the younger generation – our future leaders. I hope that some of them also leave the program inspired to get more involved in the field of urban planning or development in some capacity, whether through their next steps in education, professionally or to simply feel empowered to use their voice to effect change in their communities.

What do you see for the future of UrbanPlan?

I would love to see this program grow and be adopted by more school boards throughout Vancouver and BC. I also think it would be an excellent program for other groups such as community organizations, city councillors and members of the public to take part in, so that they can experience the process from all sides. I think ULI has done an amazing job of creating a realistic and comprehensive course that represents all of the various interests, which can oftentimes be competing, in planning a single development or new neighbourhood plan.

I am also looking forward to seeing and applying the updated curriculum that is currently in the works, including more detailed inputs around affordable housing targets, sustainability, traffic and parking, which will make UrbanPlan that much more relevant to navigating today's realities of the climate and affordability crises.