6. *How Planners can manage and mitigate the risks of AI*

*In **2001: A Space Odyssey,** HAL eventually kills the crew in order to preserve the mission intent. Dave Bowman survives and is forced to manually disconnect HAL's higher 'intelligence' capabilities.*

Just for fun – [here's the scene]. Does this seem perhaps a little more plausible in 2026 than it was over 50 years ago when the movie was made? Did you watch [The Thinking Game] linked in the Preface?

2. Prioritize Data Ethics and Quality

AI is only as fair as the data it learns from. City datasets often contain historical bias — reflecting decades of unequal investment, policing, or zoning.

How to do this:
- Audit datasets before use: check for underrepresented neighborhoods, demographic gaps, or outdated sources.

- Include social scientists and community representatives in data evaluation.

- Use "fairness constraints" or bias-detection tools in AI workflows.

- If you must use biased data, explicitly note its limitations and avoid using it for high-stakes policy decisions.

Why it matters: You can't fix bias after the fact — it has to be identified and managed at the beginning.

1. Demand Transparency and Explainability

Never accept AI as a "black box." When adopting AI tools or platforms (for zoning analysis, mobility modeling, or citizen engagement), insist on explainable AI — systems that can show why they made a particular recommendation.

How to do this:
- Ask vendors or data teams to provide model documentation: data sources, assumptions, limitations, and algorithms used.

- Require "model cards" or "impact statements" for any AI-driven decision-making tool.

- Involve planners and stakeholders in testing and interpreting model outputs, not just data scientists.

Why it matters: Transparent systems build accountability — and allow planners to defend decisions to the public and policymakers.

3. Human Judgment & Community Voices

AI should support, not replace, human decision-making. Cities are social ecosystems, not just data systems.

How to do this:
- Use AI to augment your analysis — to explore scenarios, visualize outcomes, or test "what-ifs" — but keep human priorities in charge.
- Combine AI insights with participatory planning: citizen workshops, surveys, and local consultations.
- Involve communities in data collection and validation to reflect lived realities, not just sensor data.

Why it matters: Urban justice and livability depend on empathy, ethics, and social understanding — qualities AI lacks.

6. *How Planners can manage and mitigate the risks of AI*

4. Protect Privacy and Data Governance

Smart city data is valuable but sensitive. Without clear policies, cities risk sliding toward surveillance or data misuse.

How to do this:
- Develop a data ethics charter or governance framework for your department.

- Store personally identifiable data securely, anonymize location data, and use differential privacy where possible.

- Share only aggregated data when engaging the public.

- Partner with legal experts to ensure compliance with privacy regulations (like GDPR or local equivalents).

Why it matters: Public trust is the foundation of smart governance — once it's lost, innovation becomes harder to sustain.

5. Build Internal Capacity and Cross-Disciplinary Teams

AI tools can be complex, but city planners don't have to be computer scientists. Instead, you can collaborate across disciplines.

How to do this:
- Form teams that include urban planners, data scientists, GIS specialists, sociologists, and ethicists.

- Invest in training: short courses on AI literacy, data ethics, and algorithmic decision-making.

- Encourage staff to question model outputs — "Does this make sense from a planning perspective?"

Why it matters: Technical systems are only as good as the humans who interpret and apply them.

6. Advocate for Open, Equitable Technology

Cities often rely on private AI vendors who may not share their code or data practices. To reduce dependency and promote fairness, support open and transparent technologies.

How to do this:
- Favor open-source or open-data AI tools where feasible.

- Negotiate contracts that include transparency, public auditing rights, and data ownership clauses.

- Collaborate with universities or civic tech groups to develop local, context-specific AI models.

Why it matters: Open systems empower cities — closed ones lock them into vendor dependence and opaque practices.

7. Conduct Ethical Impact Assessments

Before implementing AI-based policies or tools, evaluate their potential social consequences.

How to do this:
- Introduce an AI impact assessment process, similar to environmental impact assessments (EIA).

- Ask: Who benefits? Who might be harmed? Whose data is being used?

- Use scenario planning to test equity outcomes before deployment.

Why it matters: Ethical foresight prevents harm before it happens — and helps ensure technology aligns with human-centered planning values.

The goal isn't to resist AI—it's to govern it wisely. City planners have a crucial role as translators between data and people: making sure AI serves public interest, not just efficiency or profit.

Used thoughtfully, AI can become a tool for more just, inclusive, and sustainable urban futures—but only if planners lead with ethics, not algorithms.