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City of Medford, UO students partner on array of projects as part of Sustainable City Year Program

FROM DOWNTOWN WAYFINDING AND NEIGHBORHOOD circulation plans to emergency preparedness and outreach to minority communities, this year's Sustainable City Year Program (SCYP) promises to educate municipal leaders, community members and university students alike.

As Medford embarks upon its year of partnership with the University of Oregon's Sustainable Cities Initiative, it also will witness its strategic plan move from behemoth visioning to actual implementation, said Jim Huber, director of the city's planning department.

"Our vision plan was huge, so we identified four themes and the goals for each theme," he said, noting the four core areas are community safety, economic health, quality public services and responsive leadership. "Then we looked at our strategic plan and asked how we could partner with the UO to implement it in an innovative way."

The SCYP is part of the Sustainable Cities Initiative, a cross-disciplinary organization at the UO that seeks to promote education, service, public

outreach and research on the design and development of sustainable cities. SCYP faculty and students work with a community partner through a variety of studio projects and applied learning programs to provide students with a real-world project to investigate, apply their training, and provide real service and movement to a local entity ready to transition to a more sustainable and accessible future. Previous participant cities include Gresham, Salem and Springfield.

Over the next year, UO students from several disciplines will help Medford with the following projects described by the UO:

Downtown wayfinding

The downtown area, or civic center, is filled with government and business offices, retail establishments, restaurants, entertainment venues and educational institutions. Still, many people who come to Medford to shop and do business have no idea where the core downtown is and how to get there, and the same can even be said of some local residents. In addition, it is not clear when one enters and leaves the

downtown area. Students will survey the area's current network of signage and propose wayfinding improvements and options, including the city's east and west sides and extending north and south to the two freeway interchanges.

New development

A key component of the city's economic development strategy is to retain and help existing businesses expand. Often, land development costs associated with new development and expansion of businesses is prohibitive. In many situations, it is cheaper to develop in closer proximity to other businesses where infrastructure already is in place. This project will provide several development plans for one or more of the more difficult sites. This project ties directly into a sustainability goal of using land efficiently by redeveloping existing structures and sites.

Neighborhood circulation plans

Neighborhood circulation plans that could be formally adopted or used as conceptual plans are helpful to developers as they prepare subdivision proposals. Students will develop a circulation plan for the Genesee and East Main Street neighborhood that will include opportunities for multimodal forms of transportation and vehicles.

Analysis of activity centers

Students will use GIS to analyze several or all of the existing, identified activity centers in Medford to determine specific

public and private actions needed to increase the level of multimodal (pedestrian/bike/transit) activity. Students might suggest improved safety measures, appropriate services, and land-use plans recommending a balance of employment, housing and other uses.

Revision of the Housing Code

The City of Medford is transitioning responsibility for administering the Housing Code from The Building Safety Department to the Police Department's Code Enforcement Division. The Housing Code, in use by the city for over 30 years, is based on the 1979 Uniform Housing Code, last updated in 1997. To better enforce substandard housing issues, students will identify and analyze best practices in housing codes.

Emergency preparedness public relations campaigns

The city has expended time and resources in preparing for natural disasters. Citizen awareness and preparedness on a community-wide basis must be part of the overall plan. Students would assess what has been accomplished in this area thus far and determine what additional steps must be taken to develop partnerships and increase public awareness and involvement. An outreach plan would be developed with a specific, programmatic approach to involving the entire community in emergency preparedness.



Medford City Manager Eric Swanson with Josh LeBombard of the Oregon Department of Land Conservation and Development and SCI co-director Marc Schlossberg discuss past SCYP projects during an Oct. 9 event to launch Medford's partnership with the UO.



Josh LeBombard of the Oregon Department of Land Conservation and Lori Cooper, deputy city attorney for Medford, talk about SCYP while viewing newspaper coverage of previous years' projects.



Students view SCYP project boards done for the City of Springfield in 2012-13, along with upcoming concepts for the City of Medford.

Open space program

This project will identify, inventory and analyze lands within the city's urban growth boundary and urban reserves that are potentially suitable for preservation as open space. It would research policies and regulations that aid cities in preserving and providing various types of open space. It would provide recommendations of open space policies and regulations suitable for Medford that are not already in place, and identify ways to implement policies for open space preservation and acquisition methods.

Fire Department strategic plan

The Fire Department has recently completed an Emergency Services Master Plan and Facilities Master Plan. The department now needs a detailed strategic plan for the next five to seven years to guide specific action to be taken to implement the recommendations from each of these plans, and to guide the overall decision making methodology.

Neighborhood Watch program

Approximately 90 neighborhoods in Medford have active Neighborhood Watch programs. These programs are vital to the safety of individual neighborhoods, as well as being an excellent relationship builder for the police and the community.

This process would involve identifying and mapping the locations of all active Neighborhood Watch programs and writing a plan for developing new programs in areas experiencing increased crime. It would also assist in developing this program in neighborhoods that do have one at this time. There are also needs and opportunities to analyze the relative effectiveness of the Police Department's volunteer programs and identify new opportunities for volunteerism.

Fire Department facility design

The city needs to update all of the facilities identified in the Fire Facilities Master Plan in a multiyear, phased approach. Using information from work that already has been done in previous studies, students would develop an outreach program and campaign approach for explaining the need to the public and gathering support over an extended five- to 10-year facilities expansion and improvement program. Architecture students would design a Silver LEED-certified station that would demonstrate maximum efficient

use of space and energy to be used in demonstrations to gain public support.

Connections to Bear Creek Greenway

The Bear Creek Greenway is an 18-mile trail from Ashland to Central Point. As the trail passes through Medford, there may be opportunities to increase connectivity between it and Medford's parks, trails and bicycle paths. Students will examine the possibilities of increasing connectivity to support recreation, transportation and economic development.

Outreach to minority communities

Like many cities, Medford has a growing Hispanic population that may not be well integrated into the larger community. This project will engage attendees at the Greater Medford Multicultural Fair in an innovative activity led by James Rojas to identify ways to increase outreach and enhance and build community among all city residents.

Journalism Fellows

SCYP engagement generates numerous possibilities for press coverage in the host city, but local newspapers don't always have the capacity to track a one-year project that includes numerous projects across a city that engages hundreds of students. Journalism Fellows will work with the Medford Mail Tribune to generate stories and videos that document the wide range of activities that comprise the Sustainable City Year.

West Main transit-oriented development

Transit-oriented developments attempt to incorporate a mix of uses that include a variety of transportation options. GIS students using agent-based modeling will examine a Medford neighborhood to look at a variety of development options over the next 20 years to see the impact of a variety of development options on traffic, travel times, density and more.

Demonstration water conservation garden

Good landscape design and plant selection, as well as effective and efficient irrigation design and installation, are key to effective water conservation. Students will design a demonstration garden on public

property that features low-water plants, a state-of-the-art irrigation system and low maintenance.

Rogue Valley Transit District (RVTD) Bus Rapid Transit

As the population of southern Oregon continues to grow, traditional bus transit may not be an effective option to move people along the congested Highway 99 corridor. Students will begin examining the feasibility of bus rapid transit along the corridor.

RVTD public relations campaign

The RVTD is considering putting a serial levy before voters in November 2014. Students will develop a public relations campaign to help RVTD get their message out to voters to increase public knowledge and support prior to the vote.

Medford recently implemented a new Strategic Plan that incorporates sustainability into each of its four core areas: Safe Community, Healthy Economy, Quality Public Services, Responsive Leadership.

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"One of the fun things about this program is that classes come from the UO to Medford to talk to members of the community, city planners and other people who live and work here," Huber said, adding students began their research in the fall and are slated to present initial findings to city officials at the start of the year.

Nico Larco, Sustainable Cities Initiative co-founder and co-director and associate professor in the UO's Department of Architecture, called this engagement valuable for students, faculty and the community.

"We're thrilled to match the passion of city officials for making Medford

a more livable community with the fresh thinking and energy of students," Larco said. "For students, the ability to work on real projects – while facing all the real-world economic, political and social constraints – constitutes a powerful learning experience."

Although working with communities outside of Eugene has been standard practice at the UO for decades, the scale of engagement with SCYP is very different – and universities across the country are beginning to notice. In addition to SCYP's work with Medford this year, the Sustainable Cities Initiative is training other universities how to adopt and adapt the SCYP model.

"With universities in twelve other states now implementing a version of

the Sustainable City Year Program, or 'the Oregon Model' as many of them call it, we are not only helping communities throughout Oregon, but are also changing the landscape of higher education across the country," said Marc Schlossberg, associate professor of Planning, Public Policy & Management and co-director of the Sustainable Cities Initiative.

In early September, members of the Sustainable Cities Initiative visited Chengdu, China, and in March will travel to Gabon, Africa. The program is exploring interest in India, and continues to develop relationships with institutions in England, France, Spain and Denmark. •

In a typical year, 400+ students from 10–12 disciplines across 20–30 classes might work on 15–20 partner-directed projects, devoting 40,000+ hours of work to helping a local entity transition to a more sustainable future.

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