County Planning Land Use With Students (PLUS) Symposiums

Collaborative Projects

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Presented at the Hudson River Environmental Society Meeting 5/07
Mix of Local & Regional Partners

**Rockland County**
- Hudson Basin River Watch
- Keep Rockland Beautiful
- Lamont Doherty Earth Observatory
- Cornell Cooperative Extension of Rockland County
- Rockland County Americorps
- Rockland County Planning Department

**Westchester County**
- Hudson Basin River Watch
- Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory
- Westchester County Department of Parks & Conservation
- Westchester County Planning Department
- Cornell Cooperative Extension of Westchester County
- Greenburgh Nature Center
What is A Land Use Symposium?

• Students from participating schools analyze a land use issue/decision that is:
  CURRENT - ACTIVE - LOCAL
  as a lens for looking at the land planning process
• Meet with mentors from the community & the project
• Debate and discuss site impacts & mitigations
• Work with other students to redesign the project site - minimizing impacts and focus on enhancing the community
**Land Use Issue**

• **Current, active or recently active & local**
  – Environmental Impact Statement (Draft or Final) available for use in developing Case File Booklet
  – Additional materials readily available
  – Possibly something that is making the press - relevance & ‘face’ recognition
  – Relevance of activity - feel they are making a difference
  – Connect to student’s everyday life through ‘Sense of Place’ and provide them with an entry point to their local community planning process
Alignment with Environmental Science & Public Policy

- Important to view the environment within the context of human influences - examining the economic, culture, political structure, & social equity AS WELL AS the environment -the natural processes & systems. Planning for sustainable communities.

Issues are often short term answers with long term effects
Meet with Mentors

- Exposure to actual individuals who are involved in this process
  - Environmental Attorney’s
  - Brownfield Clean Up Engineers
  - Local Planning Board members
  - Local Housing authority members
  - Community business owners
  - Residents
  - Youth from the community
Meet with Mentors

• Deconstruct the players’ roles in the process
• Exposure to fields of employment
  – ‘I never knew there was such a thing as a watershed specialist’
• Recognize the role of citizens in the process
• Interviewing and information gathering - looking for positions and counter arguments
• Assuming a single perspective for further discussion
• Land Planning ‘charrette’ representing a specific community role
• Formulating a position and representing it
• Learning to think not only of your position but how to sell it to others
• Thinking ahead to counter arguments

• There are students for whom this is not a comfortable role. Some benefit from observing the process rather than jumping into the debate.
Land Planning Activity

• Students work ‘hands on’ with a site map
• Focus is on synthesizing the information and discussion

May need facilitation to encourage full participation by all students
Case File Booklet

Student & Teacher Background Information
Case File Booklet

- Community Information - historic & current
- Prior site history
  - Some sites have multiple prior uses
- Proposed Development Plan
- Environmental Impacts & Proposed Mitigations
- Community Benefits & Impacts
- Economic Issues
- Introduction to the Land Planning Process -
  - SEQR\(A\)
  - Participating Groups
Case File Booklet

- Generated from Original Documents
- Peppered with questions to open discussion for in class debate OR to encourage thinking
- Present multiple perspectives - pros and cons of varied actions
- Study Guide
Pre-event Classroom Visits

• Goals -
  – Introduction to maps & other tools available as part of the Land Use Process
  – Explanation of SEQRA
  – Introduction to concept of land use as a means of enhancing existing community
    • What does the community need?
    • How can this use benefit the entire community?

Each of these activities has an Environmental, an Economic a Community, and a Political Science Component
Results

• Help them develop a sense of self-efficacy -
  – “I felt empowered!”
• School Group respond by tackling local land use decisions
  – Pearl River students attended local hearing & stopped a rezoning
  – Spring Valley students energized to tackle a ‘big box’ installation

Develop confidence in their ability to affect change in their surroundings
Overarching Goals of the Event

• Connect Students to local Land Use Issues/Decisions
• Review environmental, economic and community impacts and examine both pro & con perspectives

• Deconstruct the Land Planning Process for accessibility
• Establish a pathway for involvement (current or future)
Process Goals

- Analyze materials from a variety of mediums and synthesize the information (maps, graphs, charts, presentations, mentors, EIS)
- Establish critical thinking
- Debate with students from other schools
- Collaborate and compromise to reach a decision
Learning or Instructional Techniques

- Learner centered instruction
- Close to home - forges connections to immediate surrounding -
  - Strong Imprint connection
- Moves learning beyond the walls of the classroom
- Different methods of learning involved
- Issues encompass large geographic scale (water and air move across boundaries) & temporal scale (long-term impacts)
- Interdisciplinary
Challenges

• For each environmental issue there is not just one right answer or solution.
  – Uncertainty
  – Many perspectives

• Requires higher order thinking & processing to
  – Recognize uncertainty
  – Envision alternative scenarios
  – Adopt to changing conditions & information

Includes both critical and creative thinking
Education or Advocacy?
Education

- Education -
  - Gives students access to information, opinions, interpretations, individuals & poses questions so they can reach their OWN conclusions
  - Specific land issue is used as a lens to examine the land planning process, not for a call to action
  - Presents different viewpoints - balanced representation, not biased
  - Provides the tools for future involvement
Thank you