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 -
  • SEQRA
  • 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** -
  – 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