

Syllabus
Planning Studio UAP 5124
Eco-City Alexandria, Phase II

Alexandria Center
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University
Urban Affairs and Planning

CLASS LOCATION:

Virginia Tech Alexandria Center
1021 Prince Street, Alexandria, VA

MEETING TIMES:

Wednesdays, 4:15 – 6:45
August 23, 2007 – December 12th, 2007

INSTRUCTORS:

Joe Schilling, L.L.M. Environmental Law, (703) 706-8102 jms33@vt.edu
Shelley S. Mastran Ph.D., (703) 318-0276, shellmast@comcast.net

COURSE PREREQUISITES: Students should have some course work (can include undergraduate level) and/or work experience with environmental issues, plans, regulations, and policies. Students from the Phase I studio (spring of 2007) are encouraged to enroll.

COURSE BACKGROUND:

Throughout 1998 city and community leaders engaged in a collaborative process to produce the City of Alexandria's first environmental strategic plan. Building on the plan, more than 200 residents, business leaders, civic activists, and elected officials participated in the Environmental/Quality of Life Summit. The summit and the plan set forth dozens of ideas and recommendations to enhance existing, and develop new environmental programs and policies.

With the passage of almost 10 years, the time is ripe for Alexandria to design a new environmental action plan that sets forth goals and priorities for the next ten years:

- The city and the region confront new environmental challenges ranging from climate change and energy supply/demand to aging stormwater infrastructure and dwindling habitat/open space.
- Political support of the environment continues to grow. Mayor Euille endorsed a series of national resolutions on the environment that were formally adopted by the U.S. Conference of Mayors.
- Alexandria, like many communities, has launched new environmental policies related to open space, urban forestry, Chesapeake Bay watershed protection, recycling, and green building design.
- Dozens of cities across the nation have also created model environmental programs. Several cities have devised holistic ecological plans that Alexandria could adapt to fit local needs.

The Phase II *Eco-City Studio* will build upon the work of the spring 2007 Phase I studio. During Phase I, students developed an inventory of the City's current and past programs, policies, and plans related to the following environmental themes:

- Water Quality
- Open Space
- Land Use
- Solid Waste
- Energy
- Green Buildings
- Transportation
- Air Quality
- Environmental Health
- Green City Services and Facilities

Phase I students also collected model practices and programs, related to the themes above, from other cities through internet searches and telephone and email contact with the program leaders. Students tried to identify cities that were similar to Alexandria in terms of size and geography.

During the summer of 2007 Professors Mastran and Schilling and graduate research assistant Sara Hamberg refined, edited, and expanded the environmental inventory and compendium of model practices. They met with staff from departments across the city and got feedback on the documents from the staff and the current Environmental Policy Commission (EPC).¹

COURSE OBJECTIVES

1. To explore and understand what constitutes an Eco-City; what are the policy, political, and practical barriers to making cities and urban regions more ecologically sound and sensitive; and what are the planning and policy strategies for overcoming these barriers.
2. To understand the range of environmental plans, policies, programs, and practices that other U.S. cities have instituted with a special focus on cross-cutting sustainability programs and plans.
3. To develop and refine a menu of recommendations for the City of Alexandria that will provide a framework for developing an Environmental Action Plan; and
4. To better understand the strategic policy planning processes for local governments.

SCHEDULE & PRELIMINARY TOPICS

➤ Background/Introductions (August 22 – October 10)

¹ The EPC, which studies and makes recommendations on the environmental impact of various projects and program initiatives in the City of Alexandria, has been tasked with working with us and the Department of Transportation & Environmental Services (TES) on this project. In many ways we have two clients—EPC and TES. Our primary point of contact with the EPC is the chair (Danielle Fidler). Our primary contact for TES is the Bill Skrabak.

Tasks:

1. **Review the work and findings of Phase I (Alexandria Inventory and Model Practices documents).** Review structure of Alexandria's city government, the Strategic Plan, Master Plan, and discuss how these plans relate or do not relate to each other and how they shape current city policy. Identify the important stakeholders along with their positions and underlying interests and understand the planning, policy, and political dynamics surrounding the process of creating an environmental action plan.
 2. **Conduct a literature review** of academic, policy, and practitioner journals on sustainability, producing an annotated bibliography to be included with final reports. We will send out specific instructions about the format and number of articles for the annotated bibliography. **Students will informally present findings to class on September 12th.**
 3. **Research content and process for development of environmental action plans in other cities;** e.g., Fairfax County, Arlington County, Montgomery County, Austin, Boulder, Portland, Seattle, etc. Students will select one of the environment action plans and provide a five-page policy profile that dissects the plan based on their analysis of the plan and interviews with city staff. **Students will give formal, 10 minute PowerPoint presentations on their local government plan to class on October 10th.**
- **Work with City Staff and Environmental Policy Commission (October 17th – November 14)**

Tasks:

1. Research and read articles/book excerpts about the strategic planning process.
2. Meet with Alexandria departments/offices to discuss their visions, goals, gather input for model programs. (Shelley, Joe and/or Sara will attend these meetings; students are encouraged to attend as well, though many may be during the workday). Simultaneously, students will research and expand upon compendium of model programs, identifying which programs are part of larger, more comprehensive programs and researching overarching organizational structures for environmental management.
3. Attend and assist with the preparation for workshops and formal meetings with the City Council, City Manager/Department Directors, and the Environmental Policy Commission (we anticipate meeting at least once with each of these entities during the semester; note that EPC workshops and meetings happen on Monday evenings at 7:30 pm and City Council Workshops tend to happen on Tuesday afternoons from 4:30 to 6:30 pm).

- **Draft EPC Report with Recommendations (October 24 – November 21; note: Thanksgiving Holiday, November 17-25) and Final Student Papers (by December 12th).**

Tasks:

1. Draft preliminary framework for the Environmental Action Plan based on feedback from City Staff and class research.
2. Continue to research and refine Model Programs.
3. Amend draft list of model practices to reflect research and staff and Council feedback.
4. Work on final student papers that are due on Monday, December 10th.
5. Make formal Power Point presentation on final student papers (December 12th)

CLASS TIME: We will primarily devote our class time to wide-ranging discussions of the readings and current environmental events and how they connect or do not connect with what the research teams are gathering. Occasionally we will have guest speakers to address contemporary environmental issues as they relate to our research and inventory work. We will reserve a small amount of time for the research teams to huddle, but do not plan on having much class time to discuss research work in depth or do research.

GRADING

- Annotated Bibliography – 20%
- Five-page Policy Profile and Presentation on model Sustainability Action Plans/Environmental Action Plans – 30%
- Final Paper (drawing on the research of model plans and the literature, offer commentary and policy observations about one or more of the work sessions with the EPC or City Council, or City Manager) – 20%
- Participation in class, research on Model Programs, preparation for formal workshops and meetings with City leaders and staff – 30%

GRADUATE HONOR CODE:

The tenets of the Virginia Tech Graduate Honor Code will be strictly enforced in this course, and all assignments shall be subject to the stipulations of the Graduate Honor Code as outlined in the 2006-2007 Graduate Catalog. For more information on the Graduate Honor Code, please refer to the GHS Constitution, located online at

<http://fbox.vt.edu/studentinfo/gradhonor>. Please contact the instructor immediately if you have questions.

SPECIAL ACCOMMODATIONS:

Students with special needs or circumstances are encouraged to meet with the instructor after the first class or a.s.a.p. Please do not wait until later in the semester. In all cases, please feel free to contact the instructor, should you have any questions.

TEXT

We will also compile a series of supplemental articles and resources for each module and post them on Blackboard roughly one week ahead, but the content will vary depending on the level of research and inventory activities with Alexandria.