475/575 – PSU Urban Design Workshop

The Portland Green Loop: A Placemaking Armature for the 21st Century City

3-5-19

Overview

A city is a complex human-made organism, a continuously unfolding drama that, at its best, inspires the imagination and enriches the human prospect. By the year 2030 it is estimated that about 60% of humanity will be urban residents while in the US the number will be closer to 90%. Historically cities have been the loci of social, cultural, economic, and ecological innovation enabled by an intense metabolism of knowledge, energy, nutrient, material, financial and cultural flows and interactions that animate complex and vibrant forms of community life.

This workshop will explore the role of public infrastructure in city-making – how elements of the public realm can become more multifunctional, equitable and resilient and catalyze the (re)generation of whole and beautiful city districts and neighborhoods.

Workshop Assignment

The laboratory for this exploration will be the 6-mile long Green Loop—a linear park envisioned for Portland’s central city area. Spanning the Willamette River and touching a variety of close-in districts and neighborhoods this pedestrian-centric facility is envisioned as a park, green infrastructure transportation corridor, urban placemaking catalyst, water quality and flood control facility, habitat and social experiment. It is intended to link regional attractions, cultural institutions, open spaces, employment centers, shopping districts, transit opportunities and neighborhoods by means of a carless, safe, attractive, well-designed corridor. Car-free districts have become increasingly popular in global cities while in America, New York’s High Line, Atlanta’s Beltway and even Google’s Green Loop have proven that if you build it they will come.

Our assignment will be to clarify the urban design vision of the Portland Green Loop, and to guide its function, alignment, and design through precedent studies, place design and the creation of design guidelines, standards and methods for evolving its design over time. We will craft diagrams and policies to ensure that this experiment in public fabric can become a pedestrian friendly, vibrant, equitable and sustainable corridor over the next 20 years and beyond.
Our placemaking work will define the desired physical and programmatic attributes of the Green Loop and its many activity nodes, delineate its underlying resource flows, or civic ecology (i.e., energy, water, resource recovery systems, food inputs, lighting, signage, wayfinding, landscape materiality and information systems) that will animate it and synthesize these into a policy framework that will guide implementation. This will be a hands-on workshop. Students will participate in public realm design with a variety of stakeholders -- City of Portland planners and policy-makers, the Friends of the Green Loop, local design professionals and area businesses and residents. Students will craft public policy to guide the design, construction and management of the Green Loop as it evolves over time.

Specific issues to be addressed

The Green Loop is at a critical point in its evolution. It exists as a bold concept but lacks specific implementation strategies. Meanwhile numerous development projects fronting the Green Loop alignment have applied for building permits and both the City and private sector need specific design guidance on how to implement the concept as part of a diverse array of projects. Toward that end this workshop will explore, test and help determine the design language for the Green Loop, a language that will be used by City staff, the design and landmarks commissions and designers/developers with projects adjacent to the alignment.

The workshop will focus on the following work areas:

1. Determining the key nodes, places and special areas along the Loop -- locations for new open spaces, building setbacks (with new development), places to integrate water, support citywide resilience, enhance the freight/new industrial/food network economy, and add to functional natural habitat resources in the city. These and other systems will become the fabric of a Green Loop civic ecology.

2. Proposing/establishing the design "elements of continuity" of the Green Loop. What are the design elements that should appear somewhat consistently along the entire linear park? Elements such as specific tree types -- bigger? Taller? Coniferous? etc.; specialized paving patterns and/or materials; street lighting and signage; building setbacks with stopping and gathering places; unique color(s).

3. Proposing specific design treatments that strengthen local character. This might happen in several ways: a) at the district scale -- what makes the Lloyd the Lloyd? or the Pearl the Pearl? South Downtown? etc...how could the elements from #2 above be augmented with local texture, and b) at the even more localized level -- when the Loop passes through (or adjacent to) historic districts, around the Halprin open spaces, through a freight district or along the Park Blocks....what is the appropriate design response of the Loop facilities and adjacent new buildings in these conditions?

Workshop Learning Focus

In this workshop students will:

- Focus on a large, real-world project with transformative potential;
- Complete one cycle through an urban design process from research to design to policy creation;
- Immerse themselves in the complexity of spatial-cultural-temporal urban design problems;
- Learn to synthesize complex issues into concepts for action;
- Learn how to structure and present urban design arguments; and
- Gain hands-on insight into the studio’s focal intellectual departure points outlined below.
Key issues/departure points

In this workshop we will explore:

*Urban design as a distinct activity:* Urban design is the art and science of designing cities – their physical fabric, underlying systems and places -- and guiding this change over time. This is often accomplished not by designing specific buildings but by creating visions, systems and policies that clearly and powerfully convey inspiration and intent. Urban design plans are implemented over time by a variety of change agents: developers, planners, public agencies, architects, landscape architects, engineers, citizens, artists, politicians and others. In this workshop we will refine an urban framework of places and systems comprised of spatial typologies, movement and open space systems and resource flow patterns that we will describe in an urban design language -- a “kit of parts.” Students will draw upon a reading list of relevant and seminal texts that will inform the workshop’s primary intellectual departure points.

*Nature in the city:* We will explore Biophilic design principles as a way of structuring the Green Loop. How can our work enhance opportunities for life-affirming environments for present and future inhabitants, human and otherwise?

*Holistic Placemaking:* The workshop will aim to make whole and beautiful places that are culturally-supportive, legible, climate-appropriate, equitable, healthy and safe. Toward that end we will integrate built environment approaches (e.g. cognitive mapping, defensible space design, Pattern Language and others) with community vitality frameworks (Civic Ecology, Jane Jacobs/neighborhood culture).

*Systems Design:* We will use the Civic Ecology framework to incorporate systems of energy, nutrient, water, food, waste, money, information, materials and cultural flows into our planning and urban design concepts. These will complement land use, infrastructure, mobility and open space systems design.

*Resilience and Disaster Preparedness:* The course will explore incorporation of strategies and technologies into the Green Loop to assist in disaster preparedness and resilience planning for both seismic events and climate change impacts.
Equitable mobility: The course will explore impacts of infrastructure change on transportation accessibility, street design for future forms of mobility and how to ensure the Green Loop is welcoming to a diverse group of users.

Organic change: Great urban design has the power to drive change over time by leveraging strategically situated, catalytic projects. We will identify potentially transformative interventions and speculate on their impact over time.

Presenting urban design arguments: Effective urban design ideas must be inspiring and be presented clearly and logically. We will explore the power of the diagram and learn how to structure a logical urban design argument and effectively present it.

Schedule

Phase 1: Discovery and Design

4/1: Introduction, organization, research assignments

Introduction to assignment, presentation by City of Portland, Friends of the Green Loop (FoGL) and others, discussion.

Assignment: students create base maps, download and review previous reports, presentations and initiate precedent studies. Prepare base maps for study area tour.

4/8: Conduct Green Loop site tour and analysis.

Study area tour to include data gathering, discussions with City, FoGL and others. Focus: What is the Green Loop?

Assignment: Review reports, write a story depicting a future vision for the Green Loop, annotate maps from tour to delineate opportunities and constraints.

4/15: Review Green Loop Vision, opportunities and constraints

Review stories, discuss and critique vision, map opportunities and constraints

Assignment: Prepare materials for workshops

4/22: Conduct area specific design workshops

Work with City, FoGL and local design professionals to create design concepts for selected Green Loop areas. Workshop to include Civic Ecology resource flow mapping, programming, block-specific physical design work and overall urban design framework for the Green Loop.

Assignment: Synthesize workshop design work, prepare presentations for mid-term

4/29: Midterm presentation

Presentation of study area analysis, opportunities and constraints, resource flow mapping, lessons and principles learned from precedent studies and conceptual design and programming to City, FoGL, others.

Phase 2: Policy Development
5/6: Design standards and guidelines

Presentation/discussion of design guidelines and the “kit of parts.” Wayfinding, furniture, lighting, etc. What is common to the entire loop? What is neighborhood-specific?

Assignment: Create draft design policy template—how do we want to organize design policy?

5/13: Public space use, Guidelines prep and review

Review template. Discuss how people use public space, how to incorporate human behavior and design patterns into the Green Loop

Assignment: Identify specific patterns and design guidelines.

5/20: Guidelines prep and review

Revise framework as necessary. Students work individually to develop concepts, principles, places, prototypes, patterns and guidelines for their selected sub-area

Assignment: Create draft sub-area concepts, principles and guidelines

5/27: Holiday (Hold class on alternate day?) Guidelines prep and review

Continue design guidelines

Assignment: Prepare for final presentation.

6/3: Last Class, Final Presentation (Tentative)

Review of final presentation materials

Assignment: Revise guidelines per final review

6/10: Final Guideline package due and Summary discussion

Final submittal to City, FoGL and other stakeholder

Resources

We are drowning in information, while starving for wisdom. The world henceforth will be run by synthesizers, people able to put together the right information at the right time, think critically about it, and make important choices wisely.

--E. O. Wilson

General Urban Design Reading Resources:

• A Theory of Good City Form, Lynch
• The Image of the City, Lynch
• The Death and Life of Great American Cities, Jacobs
• Making EcoDistricts: Concepts and Methods for Advancing Sustainability in Neighborhoods, Seltzer, Smith, Cortright et al
• Cities as Sustainable Ecosystems, Newman and Jennings
• Biophilic Cities: Integrating Nature into Urban Design and Planning, Beatley
• A Pattern Language, Alexander, Ishikawa, Silverstein et. al.
• A New Theory of Urban Design, Alexander, Neis, Anninou and King
• Defensible Space, Newman
• Great Streets, Jacobs
• City Planning According to Artistic Principles, Sitte
• City Comforts: How to Build an Urban Village, Sucher
• Going Public: Public Architecture, Urbanism and interventions, Gestalten
• The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces, Whyte
• Life Between Buildings, Gehl
• How to Study Public Life, Gehl and Svarre
• Street Fight: Handbook for an Urban Revolution, Sadik-Khan
• Tactical Urbanism: Short-Term Action for Long-Term Change, Lydon & Garcia
• The Poetics of Space, Bachelard
• Welcome to Your World: How the Built Environment Shapes Our Lives, Goldhagen

Project Specific References

• Mapping, reports, background information provided by the City of Portland and the Friends of the Green Loop.

PSU Workshop Instruction

Timothy W. Smith, AIA, AICP

Tim Smith is Principal and founder of the Urban Design and Planning Studio at SERA Architects, a Portland firm that offers integrated services in architecture, urban design, planning, and sustainability consulting. He is a registered architect and a certified planner with over 35 years of professional experience. Tim is passionate about the art and science of placemaking and his work is aimed at creating whole and beautiful places that enrich the human experience and integrate nature at the aesthetic and systemic levels. His work spans a variety of scales, from the site, block and neighborhood to the community, campus, city and region.

His recent work includes the master plan and development guidelines for Liwa, a new capital city for the Western Region of Abu Dhabi, concept and development planning for several new communities in Oregon, numerous campus plans for many of the universities in the Oregon University System including the framework plan for Portland State University and award-winning projects and research in sustainable urban design and city planning. Currently he is engaged in long-range framework planning and urban design for both Google and Stanford University in Silicon Valley, California. Tim has served as urban design advisor to the San Francisco Mayor’s Office for the Redevelopment of Treasure Island in San Francisco Bay and to the Portland Development Commission for the Redevelopment of the South Waterfront in Portland. He was the lead urban designer for the Avenue of the Arts, the one-mile long, primary north-south streetscape that anchors Philadelphia’s downtown arts district.
Tim developed Civic Ecology, a citizen-driven, whole systems framework for community design and has helped implement the framework in numerous communities nationally and internationally. He co-authored *Making EcoDistricts: Concepts and Methods for Advancing Sustainability in Neighborhoods*, authored *Civic Ecology: A Citizen-Driven Framework for Transforming Suburban Communities*, delivered a TEDx talk on Civic Ecology and lectures widely on the topic.

Tim has served as Vice President of the Portland Planning Commission, on the Portland Chapter AIA Urban Design Committee, the Portland Mayor’s Central City Roundtable, as Chairman of the Portland Metro Construction Excise Tax/Community Planning and Development Grants Advisory Committee and as a member of the City of Portland EcoDistrict Technical Advisory Committee.

Tim holds a B.S. and an M. Arch. from the University of Michigan and an M. C. P. and M. Arch. in Urban Design from the University of Pennsylvania where he taught urban design studios in the School of Design. He is an adjunct instructor at the University of Oregon -- Portland where he teaches studio and field courses in urban design.