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PORTLAND METRO GOVERNANCE MODEL SHARED WITH VIETNAMESE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY IN PLANNING BILL WORKSHOP

HANOI, VIETNAM -- Portland State University Masters in Urban and Regional Planning students contributed to a landmark workshop on a proposed national planning law at the Vietnamese National Assembly in Hanoi on September 24th. The students’ participation in the event furthers longstanding academic, diplomatic and professional exchange between Vietnam and Portland State, and precedes a visit to Hanoi by Governor Kate Brown in October.

The workshop, “Drafting of the Planning Bill: International Best Practices and Suggestions for Vietnam”, took place at the Vietnamese National Assembly with 150 participants. In attendance were representatives from the National Assembly, Ministry of Construction, Ministry of Planning and Investment, and local and international stakeholders and experts on planning, governance, and the environment. The proposed law has the potential to dramatically reshape the hierarchical planning processes in Vietnam, and longstanding international experts on Vietnamese planning and governance expressed optimism that this bill could be a turning point in over twenty years of work towards reforming planning in the country.

While Vietnam has been experiencing a shift to a market-based economy for over two decades, its planning framework has largely maintained a central planning model over the same period. Currently, most planning decisions are made at the national level, with various ministries responsible for the different aspects of strategic and physical planning. This model has produced over 19,000 active plans in the country, and a corresponding lack of coordination between plans and ministries has led to a system wrought with overlap and dysfunction. The proposed bill would create an “umbrella” planning organization aimed at increased coordination of land use decisions, and would decentralize major planning functions in the country. This change would aim for enhanced implementation and autonomy at the local and regional level, allowing for local governments to react to market situations in their cities.

The goal of the workshop was to provide commentary and debate on the proposed law before being submitted to the National Assembly, Vietnam’s legislative body. Mr. David Fiske and Ms. Grace Stainback introduced the foundations of Portland’s regional planning and governance model, and suggested best practices to implement similar institutions in Vietnam. Mr. Fiske, who sat on a panel discussion on regional
governance, provided commentary on Oregon’s Statewide Planning Law, and Metro’s role as the only directly elected regional government in the United States. Delegates from Vietnam's central government planning agency, the Ministry of Planning and Investment, responded positively to the discussion; the Deputy Minister mentioned the Oregon model as an exemplar of Vietnam’s vision during his closing remarks for the workshop. The bill is now under revision, following criticisms and recommendations made at the workshop; the National Assembly and Prime Minister will decide whether to adopt the bill as law within the coming months.

Mr. Fiske and Ms. Stainback are second-year Master’s candidates in the Urban and Regional Planning program at PSU. They have spent two months as interns in the UN-Habitat Vietnam office in Hanoi, primarily assisting with GIS and spatial analysis capacity development for a City Development Strategy in two coastal cities, Tam Ky and Quy Nhon. Their work is a continuation of longstanding academic and professional exchange between PSU and major Vietnamese agencies, coordinated primarily through PSU’s Center for Public Service and Institute for Sustainable Solutions. The next major visit to Vietnam organized by PSU will count Oregon Governor Kate Brown among its attendees, and will occur in October.