



The City of Othello

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RE: City of Othello and Washing State Department of Commerce - Youth In Planning/APA
Ambassador program work with the Othello School District 147 (OSD 147)

Greetings,

Dee Caputo from the Department of Commerce and I had the chance to provide an introduction to planning to the Othello High School Design & Beyond class as well as its AVID program. The AVID program is for kids intending to be the first in their family to graduate college while the other class is a CAD class. (More on these below).

Planning Exercise Description

Instructors selected a development project occurring within the City. In this case it was a 77,000 square foot medical clinic which is currently performing site grading and utility work. The clinic is a non-profit organization serving Othello and several of the small rural agricultural communities within the school district. As a result, every student in the class uses the clinic and has a personal connection to the project.

The students were asked to perform small group exercises in one of three disciplines: planning; engineering; or environmental protection. After forming groups (of 2 to 8), each group was given a packet of information focused on their selected discipline. (Instructors made a point to ensure that each class had at least one group in each discipline.) Students were then given a series of questions to answer.

Instructors floated from group to group in order to answer questions and provide guidance as needed.

After an appropriate time for the exercise, the instructors refocused the class for a debrief session which started with each group identifying themselves by discipline.

One by one each group was asked to identify at least one issue they were asked to consider and how the group felt that issue was addressed by the proposed development.

As the instructors progressed through the groups, they asked questions or pressed the other groups to weigh in on the issues raised and whether other disciplines could provide the answers for the questions being discussed. In some cases, the instructors had to provide some legal

advice or interpretations. In other cases, the class concluded that there was insufficient information in the submittal packet to address their concerns. (This, incidentally, was by design.)

In summation, the instructors discussed the importance of having a fair and open process; an understanding of the community's goals and policy framework; and a (multi-)disciplined approach to the application of planning practices. The instructors also took the opportunity to tie specific site decisions to community wide impacts.

As a final step, the instructors provided the real-life answers to how their issues were solved for this project. Staff advised the students to think about their issues as they watch the building constructed and as the site development progressed.

Results

As the small group discussions progressed, students were able to progress through the questions and quickly began to understand the relationship between the regulations, the design standards, and the applicant's proposal packet.

What began as a race to finish first, ended up in a critical thinking exercise as each question made the students reevaluate their previous assumptions.

During the class de-brief, students literally had "ah-ha" moments as each discipline brought its piece of the puzzle to bear on the problem.

The resulting "ah-ha" moments were transformed into excitement as they talked about their conclusions. Even to the point where students living near the site commented about how they had personally experienced development impacts (but hadn't realized it).

Given the goal of the AVID program is to help students explore their interests, the exercise was very successful.

The ability to self-select what discipline they wanted to pursue helped the students select a role they were comfortable with. As the exercise progressed, each group was introduced to the idea that a multi-discipline approach was needed. And by extension, each student was eventually asked to stretch their thinking into a technical field which might have been uncomfortable before the exercise started.

By design, the exercise was both open-ended but focused with information that was detailed but simplified. Additionally, it was tied to a property the students knew and a medical service provider they had all used. This made it personal and relevant to their life.

Supplies and packets

Staff generated discipline packets that included:

All groups got...

- Site Plans (24x36)
- Building elevations (to they could visualize the project)

- Aerial photo (with the site identified)
- Development standards (relevant to the discipline and simplified to address the questions) (2 large print pages with tables)

Some groups got:

- Zoning map (planners only)
- Landscaping Plans (letter or poster sized depending on the discipline)
- Zoning regulations (planners only) (2 large print pages max. streamlined)
- Environmental maps (floodplain, habitat, and wetlands)
- Sheets of questions (different for each discipline but interlocking by design)
 - Designed to start easy but progressing to inter-disciplinary thought.
 - Designed to be easily answered, if the student refers to the code and finds the applicable section.
 - Designed to have answers that can be found on the face of the site plan if the student reads the code. (E.G. – Students were asked if the project provided enough parking. Parking codes require 1 space per employee PLUS 3 spaces per 2 exam rooms.)
 - Designed to ask second level questions which require not only a yes/no answer but that solicit how and why answers. (I.e. Do you feel “_____” is adequate? or If “_____” (sidewalks) are present, do you see problems with the design? First level answers are “yes, they have sidewalks” but second level thinking answers point out that the plaza, meditation garden, and walk path tract aren’t even connected to the building by paths, let alone to the sidewalks.)

Target Audiences

The Design & Beyond class is an elective course which involves students learning and using CAD programs to complete structural and site design exercises. The class’s focus on site development made it a natural companion for discussing how planning integrates multiple disciplines and a holistic view of how the natural and built environment interact.

AVID is a program for students who will be the first person in their family to attend college. This ongoing program has classes at each grade level from eight through twelfth grade. The purpose of the program is to bring in college graduates from all walks of life to discuss their personal college experience, and to give students and understanding of how different fields of study can lead to different professions and career paths.

In all, approximately 100 students in six AVID classes were given the opportunity to participate in the planning exercises.

Planning was introduced as a highly engaging activity that required multiple disciplines from multiple fields of college studies, and as a function of government/private sector partnership which benefited the community.

BONUS...Engaging underrepresented citizens

Othello is a small agricultural community with a high number of Hispanic citizens. (84% by Census data) Like many other jurisdictions, Othello is constantly trying different ways to engage this part of our population, but mostly to unsuccessful ends.

This lack of engagement is thought to be caused by three main factors. First, the agricultural job base has a highly seasonal nature which could mean that workers are not invested in this community. Second, it is possible that a large number of the workforce does not have legal immigration status and therefore fears interaction with government employees. And thirdly, anecdotal testimony implies that disengagement or distrust of government is a cultural factor that can be passed on from parents to children. Especially from parents who are “illegal” even if the children are US born citizens.

Our program gave us a chance to break this chain and engage an important part of our population. Specifically, that first generation of US-born Hispanic children.

The fact that the participating AVID students have already determined they want to be college educated means our presentation could have influenced the most important leaders coming out of our 9th, 10th, 11th, or 12th grades.

If you have any questions about this information, please feel free to contact me at 509-488-5686, or by e-mailing me at tgoddard@othellowa.gov. I look forward to answering any questions you might have.

Respectfully,

Travis Goddard
Community Development Director