Welcome to this issue of Newsbytes which brings together discussions of Peak Oil & Deep Democracy as well as presenting news of student led initiatives, graduates and our newest faculty member - Mark Stevens. As always your comments and contributions are most appreciated - newsbytes@gmail.com. Enjoy.

ALUMNI, GRADUATING STUDENTS, & FAMILIES OF GRADUATES OF THE SCHOOL OF COMMUNITY AND REGIONAL PLANNING are invited to a reception to honour

SCARP GRADUATES FROM SPRING 2009

Tuesday, May 26th, 5:30-7:00pm
CK Choi Building, Lounge
1855 West Mall, UBC

Please RSVP May 18th
Sherli Mah, SCARP Secretary  604-822-3276
phdscarp@interchange.ubc.ca
Metro Vancouver and Fraser Valley communities are growing and are expected to continue on this path for some time. But not all communities within the region are projected to grow at the same rates; communities south of the Fraser River are expected to absorb a disproportionate share of the growth. This will mean a need for more planning and infrastructure development in these areas, many of which have received less than their share of transportation infrastructure for private vehicles, goods movement and public transit. Local roads and the highway are congested with local and commercial traffic and very little public transit services these communities. BC’s Gateway Program is seen as a golden opportunity to upgrade existing road capacity by those planning for and representing communities south of the Fraser.

Some of the goals for the Gateway Program are to address congestion, improve the movement of people and goods through the region, improve the quality of life in communities by keeping regional traffic on regional roads instead of local streets, reduce vehicle emissions by reducing congestion-related idling and facilitate better connections to other modes of transportation such as public transit. The Program plans to do this by widening the Port Mann and the Highway that crosses it, constructing a new South Fraser Perimeter road from Delta to Langley, improving existing road infrastructure to better connect New Westminster to Maple Ridge and providing rapid bus service over the expanded Port Mann Bridge.

The Gateway Program however continues to receive strong opposition by those who point out that road expansion rarely results in reduced congestion over the long run, that enhanced mobility can be better achieved at a lower cost by investing in more public transit over road infrastructure and that providing more capacity for automobile use will increase Greenhouse Gas emissions and is therefore inconsistent with the Province’s target of 33% fewer GHG emissions (than 2007) by 2020. There is also the matter of how Peak Oil is affecting our mobility and will shape our transportation options in the future, which we gathered to discuss at the January PlanTalk event.

Anthony Pearl, Professor and Director of Simon Fraser University’s Urban Studies Program and

Jordan Bateman, Councillor of Langley and contributor to the groups Get Moving BC and South Fraser OnTrax (groups dedicated to exploring transportation solutions with an emphasis on communities south of the Fraser River), each discussed from their point of view the merits and pitfalls of the Gateway Program.

In researching his recent book, Transport Revolutions: Moving People and Freight without Oil, Pearl projects that globally we will reach the peak of oil production by 2012 give or take 5 years, which means we may already be there. He reminds us that the oil that remains is physically different than what we have grown accustomed to using. What oil remains is much more costly, energy intensive and ecologically destructive to remove. This will
not only affect how much we pay at the pump, but also the viability of massive infrastructure projects which require a lot of fossil energy to build. Therefore he sees the Gateway as an opportunity to invest in our region’s infrastructure before such actions become economically unviable, but that the Program must better balance transit and road improvements.

Bateman also supported this view by pointing out that communities south of the Fraser River receive directly on their local roads much of goods movement transportation as goods are moved between the major nodes of the port, the rail yard and the US border. This makes for unsafe and unliveable conditions in their communities. Local residents are eager to see this traffic diverted to regional routes. A lack of public transit is also resulting in a lack of approval for more compact development. Port Moody’s experience with providing compact mixed-use development without the essential transit has resulted in serious congestion problems on local roads and lack of adequate parking. Other communities are quick to learn from such examples. The rapid bus line over the Port Mann is seen as an improvement to current transit conditions, although admittedly it is not enough.

The discussion with the planners in the audience revealed much scepticism of the Program with its over emphasis on road expansion. A show of hands, however, revealed that most of us in attendance were from north of the Fraser. Bateman pointed out that because the dynamics, development and transportation pressures on each side of the river are different, it’s easy for us north of the Fraser to overlook the needs of those to the south which are in favour of a more ‘balanced’ transportation investment of both roads and transit. A number of discussion points were raised such as: “What does a balanced approach look like when the transportation system is already out of balance in favour of private automobiles?” And in the face of Peak Oil, could the Gateway Program actually double short change communities south of the Fraser in that they will continue to be poorly serviced by transit at the expense of more roads, which will become obsolete in the future?

A number of possible approaches to planning for a less oil dependent future emerged out of the discussion:

- Enacting policies that support an equal balance of transit to road funding (1:1) for all transportation investments.
- Implementing road pricing such as in Oslo and London. This would indicate whether roads are necessary and what using them is worth to people.
- Creating more affordable housing close to the Metro Vancouver core so that residents do not need to commute from south of the Fraser. It should be noted, however, that 70% of car trips in Langley are within the township and that the community already provides a good balance of jobs to homes.
- Using disasters to understand how transportation behaviour changes when traditional routes are diverted. For example, we could have used the recent closing of the Pattullo Bridge due to fire as an opportunity to focus public attention on transit needs.
- Investing in more trolley busses that run on electricity. Pearl noted that electric infrastructure is relatively cheap and can be operationalized in a hurry.
- Preparing for car and fuel rationing as was the case during WWII. Pearl pointed out that in failing to plan for the inevitable decrease in oil availability, the unpleasant act of rationing may become necessary.

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The School of Community & Regional Planning UBC

- Planning Pool - Democratizing Planning Information

Micheal Demarco

In December of this past year, a group of SCARP students began work on a website to explore new media approaches to participatory planning. Inspiration for the endeavor grew out of a shared desire to make planning issues accessible to a wide audience through video, but the breadth of the project quickly expanded to include a diversity of media. By the end of March, the Planning Pool was up and running.
Using a broad definition of planning, the originators of the Planning Pool set out to create a format by which anyone from any locale could express ideas about how cities and regions take shape. Additionally, the format is intended to be as accessible as possible, requiring minimal technical know-how from contributors. Posts may come in the form of audio, video, photographic or written submission. The site also includes Plan-Map, a running asset-map that allows contributors to share their thoughts and ideas in geographical dimensions. The Planning Pool hosts user-generated media while also directing visitors to interesting external content.

What makes the Planning Pool different from other urban blogs or planning-related websites is the participatory nature of its content. The aim of the site’s creators is to forge a repository for media that allows self-identified contributors a voice in planning discourse. Ideally, the site will feature contributions for an unbounded array of locations and people not necessarily associated with institutional planning, thus presenting a deeper and more accessible window into planning issues. The Planning Pool’s content and strategy will be presented at the 2009 CIP/OPPI Conference in Niagara Falls.

The Planning Pool is currently accepting contributions at www.planningpool.com.

CONVERSATION ACROSS THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC DIVIDE
(DEEP DEMOCRACY IN ACTION)

Aftab Erfan

Earlier this year I was invited to South Africa to experience something called the Conversation Across the Socio-Economic Divide. The invitation came from Myrna Lewis, a South African psychologist who has developed an advanced facilitation methodology called Deep Democracy for working with groups. The conversation She was hosting would bring the well-intentioned “haves” of the world to Africa and introduce them to the “have-nots”, so that the two could meet, explore and be in relationship together.

South Africa is a particularly fascinating setting for a conversation among the have vs. the have-nots, as divisions are visible on several levels. Within South Africa there is a distinct division between a majority that lives “below the bread-line” and a minority that lives in luxury. Despite the efforts to build a more egalitarian society over the past 15 years, the gap between the rich of poor continues to widen, characterized by the emergence of a new upper class made up of blacks and people of colour. The Conversation Across the Socio-Economic Divide was as much about the first world meeting the third, as it was about the whites meeting people of colour, and the privileged meeting their underprivileged country men and women, in some cases for the first time.

The Conversation took place on a hot summer day in a simple school gymnasium in the middle of Mitchells Plain, a township on the edge of Cape Town. About 100 people showed up, exceeding expectations and the supply of name -tags at the registration desk. The group was clearly diverse in many ways according to race, age, language, class, ability and gender among other factors. As a Canadian, among the 25 or so over-seas guests, I entered the Conversation space with trepidation. How would I come across? Would I be seen as a spoiled North American university-educated kid by the people who could not afford to send their kids to school with a full belly? Would I be attacked for selfishness, for the failure of my country to even live up to its foreign aid obligations? Would my admiration for the local culture be interpreted as blind romantici-
zation, my attempt to sympathize as false, and my desire to help as patronizing?

I was not alone in my discomfort; many of us were struggling with our feelings. Some white South Africans talked about what it had took for them to come to the township that day, a place that they had been told all their lives was unsafe for their kind. They talked also about the shame that they carried with them from the Apartheid era and their embarrassment at living exclusively white lives within a “rainbow nation”. The people from the township on the other hand spoke about the anger and helplessness they felt at their situation. Some were noticeably shy, struggling to enter the conversation, finding it strange to be asked to give their opinion or talk about themselves.

Given the depth and variety of feelings brought into the room, it is rather remarkable what happened next. Using the methodology of Deep Democracy*, we were lead first into a conversation on feet (a special technique Myrna calls Soft Shoe Shuffle) and then into a full-blown facilitated argument. Lucky for us, Deep Democracy has been developed specifically for working with emotionally charged situations. Sensitive subjects become easy to talk about and groups quickly find themselves in the midst of direct and honest conversations about topics that may seem unapproachable in other situations.

As we began to talk it became clear that the terms “have” and “have-not” did not mean all that much, as those of us who felt ourselves to be “haves” began to get in touch with those parts of ourselves that are deprived and needy, while those who initially identified as the “have-nots” began to own their own wealth and ability. I remember listening with envy to one woman from the township who declared: “We may not have money but we know how to take care of ourselves. We know about local remedies. We know about ubuntu (an African concept meaning, roughly, interconnectedness). We know how to love.”

At the end of the argument there was a noticeable shift in the energy of the room. People had moved from hesitation to bluntness, had aired their grievances, had been exposed to new knowledge, and had genuinely “met” others. The day ended in the sharing of our new understandings, our “grains of truth”. They included acknowledgement of the sadness about our divisions, the admission that despite our good intentions we often don’t take the time to help each other and that ultimately what changes the world is a person giving another person a break – a small chance for breaking out of the structures that inhibit us.

The event was seen to be an important part of the healing that needs to happen in South Africa, perhaps continuing in the spirit of Truth and Reconciliation but bringing it to the level of the community and individual healing and there was a request for it to continue. It remains to be seen what comes from the Conversation. Will an increased level of awareness lead to positive action? Will an increased understanding of “others” help repair the divisions in this small community? Will the foreigners find more effective ways to help? Deep Democracy does not guarantee that any of this will happen; but it does suggest that the grains of truth that were gathered at the end of the Conversation contain the kind of wisdom that is needed to effectively address the socio-economic divide. In a sense, this kind of Conversation is not about solving social problems, rather it is about preparing the ground for working together.

This was epitomized for me in the words of one 14 year-old girl from the township in Cape Town, who offered this in her check-out: “When I came this morning I felt like a lighty (South African slang for “the young one”). I felt timid because of my age. But then I felt that I was able to talk and people actually listened to me. For once in my life people actually heard what I had to say. For the first time I felt I was heard.”
We are happy to welcome Mark Stevens, SCARP’s new Assistant Professor. Newsbytes took the opportunity to ask Dr. Stevens a few questions as a way to introduce him to the SCARP community:

Originally from Oregon, where he completed a master’s degree in community and regional planning at the University of Oregon, Dr. Stevens is now moving to Vancouver from Durham, North Carolina. He earned a doctoral degree in city and regional planning at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in May of 2008, after which he has recently completed a one-year instructor position in the same department.

Dr. Stevens responsibilities at SCARP will include (1) teaching courses in land use and environmental policy and quantitative research methods; (2) conducting new as well as ongoing research in land use and environmental planning, New Urbanism, sustainable development, natural hazards, and plan quality assessment; and (3) advising SCARP students informally and on committees.

What interests/excites you about SCARP/UBC/Vancouver - what pulled you to apply and accept the position?

I applied for and accepted the position at SCARP because it is a highly-regarded program in a world-class university in an attractive city. I am looking forward to working with a strong faculty in a school where my interests are compatible but not redundant. I particularly like the emphasis that SCARP and CFIS place on interdisciplinary approaches to promoting sustainability. Lastly, I am originally from Oregon, so returning to the Pacific Northwest (or Southwest, from Canada’s point of view) is a sort of homecoming for me.

What are some of the highlights of your planning career to date?

This is something I have never really thought of before, but I suppose I could say that I am happy to have experienced the field of planning in multiple environments: as a masters student, as a planner for a city government, as a planner for a regional government, as a doctoral student, and as an academic researcher. I would like to think that this diversity has afforded me the opportunity to experience and appreciate planning practice and theory in a way that I may not have been able to do otherwise.

What do you see as critical areas for advancement within the planning community?

I see climate change as one of THE hot issues for planners right now (no pun intended). Given the direct theoretical connection between climate and land use, transportation, etc., it seems not only appropriate but critical for planning researchers and practitioners to be heavily involved in the ongoing debate regarding what is happening, what is likely to happen, and what we can do about it. I think that planning research can (and should) better clarify the impacts of our lifestyles, behaviors, development patterns, etc. on the factors that contribute to climate change, thus producing valuable knowledge to inform public and private decision-making at all relevant levels.

What skills are necessary for planning students to acquire so that they might be successful in the field?

From what I understand, this is a question that has plagued planning educators since the field of planning began. Part of the difficulty in answering it arises from the fact that graduates of planning programs end up pursuing a wide range of diverse careers that often require a wider set of skills than planning students can reasonably be expected to learn in a two-year planning program. Based on my own experience as a planning practitioner, I
can say that my own two-year planning program did a better job of fostering theoretical knowledge and analytical skills than it did “street smarts” and communicative skills. While some of the skills that planning students need will necessarily have to be learned on the job, I would like to see planning programs place more emphasis on helping future-graduates become more comfortable and competent dealing with conflict situations in which multiple parties with different interests nevertheless must work together to make decisions that are acceptable (or at least, applicable) to all parties involved. In addition to courses in negotiation and conflict resolution (which have become increasingly common in recent decades), I would like to see more courses that build skills in leadership and assertiveness, both of which are valuable for planners in the “real world”.

In November, Newsbytes reported on the research project “Examining the Use of Multi-Media and 3-D Visualization Technology in Communicating High Density Housing Scenarios” that was being led by Maged Senbel exploring the question of how do multi-media and visualization tools affect participants’ access to information in participatory urban design planning?

Two classes were developing projects connected to the research – creating a 3-D physical model, producing 2 videos and developing computer simulation models of the Marpole community.

On April 1 Marpole residents and professional planners were invited to come and provide feedback on how the tools affect their access to the information being communicated. Over 40 community members & planners attended and were led through a series of stations where students introduced the different technologies and responded to questions. Participants were then asked to fill out surveys in order to capture their impressions and understanding of the issues as presented with the various tools. The data from the surveys is still being processed, but overall response was generally enthusiastic and engaging.
SCARP NEWS:

SCARP Graduates of Spring 2009

Courtney Campbell, MScP
Paola Cassaigne, MAP
Jeff Deby, MAP
Jeff Ginalias, MScP
Jeca Glor-Bell, MAP
Diana Hurford, MAP
Lang Lang, MAP
Tamsin Mills, MScP
Shawn Natrasony, MAP
Claire Wilkinson, MAP

CONGRATULATIONS!

Dr. Margo Fryer who has been jointly appointed with SCARP (as Assistant Professor) and the UBC Learning Exchange (as Director) since 2006 has decided to return to the Learning Exchange full-time effective July 1, 2009 due to the increasing demands of her role at the Learning Exchange. Unfortunately, due to Margo’s other commitments, she will no longer be able to offer the Social Learning Studio course, but she will have a continuing involvement at SCARP as an Adjunct Professor.

The following three summer courses are being offered:

• PLAN 548O- Participatory Planning with Peter Boothroyd, starts May 12
• PLAN 548Z- Urban Food Systems Policy & Planning with Wendy Mendes, starts June 9th
• PLAN 583-Housing Policy with Michael Gordon, starts August 6th

Summer course schedule can be found at: www.scarp.ubc.ca/corslistsummer_2009.

A visual recording of a World Cafe conversation on Sustainability that was led by Aftab Erfan and included over 50 SCARP students, faculty and staff. A similar exercise was held at the end of the very successful SCARP Symposium Sustain-a-what to Sustain-a-how (March 13 & 14th) which brought together 80 participants and their ideas after a full day of panels presentations & discussions.