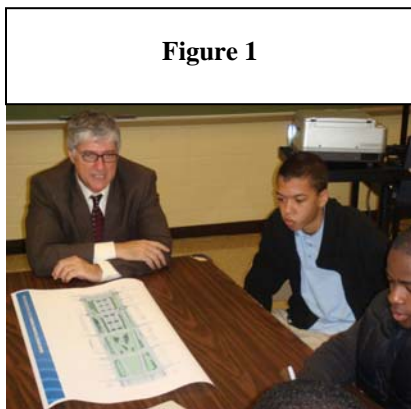


Connecting Youth to Planning Initiative, 2010  
Sponsored by Maryland APA Chapter and the  
Urban Studies and Planning Program, UMD  
Alex Chen  
(November 8, 2010)

October 2010 was National Community Planning Month and from October 21 to October 28<sup>th</sup>, professional planners from the public and private sector, as well as students and faculty from the Urban Studies and Planning Program visited schools in Anne Arundel County (Annapolis High School), Baltimore City (Civitas High School, the Waldorf School of Baltimore, and Edmondson High School and Patterson High School (combined)), Montgomery County (Wheaton High School) and Prince George's County (Parkdale High School) to talk about planning and demonstrate the tools and techniques of the profession. In total, we met with over 130 high school students across six schools. The goal was to show what planners do, engage students in planning issues, and highlight opportunities in planning in terms of future studies and career opportunities. The event was sponsored by the Maryland APA Chapter and the Urban Studies and Planning Program at the University of Maryland with support from the Maryland Department of Planning.

For 90 minutes our team of professional and student planners interacted with high school students to describe the planning profession. With lectures, small group discussions, student presentations and interactive planning exercises, students were introduced to the planning experience and the challenges that planners face. A standard agenda was adopted for all the participating schools to minimize the burden of preparation on our volunteers. It was comprised of four elements, (1) Introductions; (2) Plan Maryland presented by the Maryland Department of Planning; (3) a Small Group Exercise (4) Visual Preference Survey.

Introductions allowed each of us to describe who we are, what we do, and how got involved in planning. The objective was to highlight that though planners are engaged in a variety of activities and come from different backgrounds, we all share a commitment to people and community.



**Figure 1**

This was followed by the Maryland Department of Planning who took the stage to share with the students their Plan Maryland efforts and the development of a State Plan. (*Figure 1 with Peter Conrad discussing neighborhood planning issues with students*). The objective was to give students an opportunity to see how planning works at the State level with a focus on current issues and concerns. Notably, the Maryland Department of Planning generously providing planners (Peter Conrad, La Verne Gray, Richard Josephson,

Shawn Kiernan, Mike Paone) for every session and in no small part contributed to the success of this effort.

To balance the State perspective, planners from both the private and public sector provided different local planning scenarios that students could explore in small groups. Each group was facilitated by one of our volunteer planners. We were fortunate to have representatives from private firms including Kerri Corderman (McCormick - Taylor), Ron Reitman (AECOM), and Michael Flood (Parsons Brinckerhoff), as well as from the non-profit sector, Chris Ryer (the Southeast Baltimore CDC), and the public sector including Cindy Carrier (Anne Arundel Planning and Zoning Department), Crystal Prater (MNCPPC-Prince George's County Planning), Tranelle Guthrie (MTA) and the Julie Morris (Montgomery

**Figure 2**



County Public Schools, Long Range Facilities Planning Office).

*(Figure 2 with Kerri Corderman working with students on Highway to Nowhere exercise).*

Notably, we were delighted to see that three of our professionals were alums of our program. The planning scenario would vary depending on the school, but addressed such local issues as neighborhood and transportation planning as it related to Baltimore City's

"Highway to Nowhere", to small area planning in the Annapolis Small Neck area, to the modernization of the student's own school in Silver Spring, to addressing issues raised in the Envision Prince George's County initiative.

*(Figure 3 with Chris Ryer discussing results of visual preference survey).*

In many instances, our volunteer planners took it upon themselves to prepare special materials including large maps and information brochures to facilitate the student discussion. These small group discussions enabled us to bring planning issues closer to home to students. We are extremely thankful for our volunteer planning professions.

They graciously shared their time, insight and experience and provided students with an up close and personal view of the profession and practice.

**Figure 3**



To aid the planners in the small groups, we were fortunate to have a corps of graduate planning students from the Urban Studies and Planning Program who provided support for this effort. Second year graduate planning students, Pamela Eichenbaum, Lisa Govoni, and Raymond Hayhurst, as well as first year planning student Graham Petto volunteered their time to join our team. *(Figure 4 with Lisa Govoni and Graham Petto (center) analyzing Visual Preference Survey results with students).* Needless, to say, their

**Figure 4**



participation was invaluable not only in terms of helping to facilitate the discussion, but also in terms of providing the high school students with insight into the college experience.

**Figure 5**



*(Figure 5 with Pam Eichenbaum working on neighborhood planning exercise)*

**Figure 6**



*(Figure 6 with Graham Petto reviewing Visual Preference Survey results with student)*

Finally, time permitting we administered a visual preference survey where students rated their preferences (or satisfaction) with images depicting sidewalks, parks and open spaces, retail centers and housing. We used the results to focus a discussion on student visions of the ideal community and to highlight to students the variety of values that an image can elicit

**Figure 7**



*(Figure 7 with Alex Chen discussing school modernization efforts with students)*

Needless to say, a crucial element of the success of this initiative lies with the participating schools and their administrators and teachers. The willingness of the schools to carve 90 minutes out of a very busy school day demonstrates their commitment to their students, and willingness to explore innovative ways to introduce different ideas and concepts to their students. Finally, we are very appreciative of the participating students, who took an active interest in what we had to say. We hope that we were able to open new doors for the future for them.

Though a formal post-evaluation was not conducted with participants from either the planning side or the school side, direct observations and anecdotal evidence suggest that this initiative was a success. Both teachers and planners observed that the participating students appeared engaged and interested in the tasks placed before them. We also noted the many insightful comments that students were able to provide during the small group activities. In some instances, planners chose to take the observations made by the students back to the office. At the very least, this initiative allowed us to give a face to the planning profession.

The experience demonstrates that (1) a partnership between the Chapter and University can result in a successful outreach effort to young people; and that (2) it is feasible to coordinate professional practicing planners from both the public and private sector with student planning volunteers to work with area schools. This effort highlights the commitment of the planning profession to educating our youth about the issues and challenges that face our communities. Moreover, it serves to underscore the commitment of the individuals who make up the profession, and who graciously volunteered their time and energy to reach out to our community's youth. Indeed, when a volunteer asked what should he talk about, my response was that the objective was to show that "Planners are people, too"—I think at the very least, this objective was achieved.