PS 195/UEP 294-03
Seminar on the Politics of Sustainable Cities and Communities
Spring Term, 2009

Kent E. Portney

Wednesday, 1:30 – 4:00 p.m.

A Dallas, TX, Brownfield Development Project:
Does This Contribute to Creating a Sustainable City?

Austin Energy’s Wind Turbine Farm in West Texas:
Is the Development of Renewable Energy Sources the Way for Sustainable Cities to go?

A Green Roof in Atlanta

An electric bus manufactured and used in Chattanooga, TN
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About this Course

This is an advanced research seminar that is dedicated to the study of the relationship between local political processes and the pursuit of sustainable development. It focuses on the theoretical underpinnings of the concepts of sustainability and sustainable development as applied in the local city context of the United States. It examines the ways that these concepts actually get defined through local political and policy making processes. Readings and class discussions are designed to interweave several themes, including the obvious tension between maximizing economic growth and protecting the environment, local politics and policy decision making in the context of the U.S. federal system, and the practice of planning for the environment.

This is referred to as a research seminar because students will engage in conducting original research as a capstone experience. After addressing important issues of research design and hypothesis testing, the class will assemble a series of case studies describing communities such as Seattle, Santa Monica, Pittsburgh, Chattanooga, Tampa, or others that are in the process of working toward sustainability in some fashion. The case studies will be selected and developed with an eye toward examining specific hypotheses. The central hypothesis concerns the ability of sustainable cities efforts to integrate their activities with those of the more mainstream economic development activities that typically occur without regard for the environment. So the initial question is “to what extent are sustainable communities activities integrated with core economic development activities?” Extending this question, the class will seek to uncover situations where such integration has been more successful, and to understand what kinds of political processes were able to achieve this integration. Finally, the class will examine to what extent sustainable communities activities are fueled by broad-based citizen and nonprofit participation, and to the extent they are, to what extent does that participation make it easier or more difficult to integrate these activities with traditional economic development efforts. Students will take responsibility for assembling the relevant data necessary to collectively address these hypotheses. While this class will be centrally concerned with sustainable communities efforts in the United States, students who wish to develop case studies of such efforts in other nations may be able to do so.

As a seminar, the class meets once a week for two and a half hours. One of the defining characteristics of a seminar is that it involves extensive in-class discussion. So there is an expectation that each student will take responsibility for doing the assigned readings and for being prepared to discuss them in class. Another characteristic of a seminar is that it typically involves the preparation of a substantial term paper. For this class, students will prepare their term papers based on the case studies developed over the course of the semester. The term paper will be described in more detail later.
Books Available for Purchase:

Because a substantial amount of reading can be found in these books, they should be available in the Tufts bookstore. You should feel free to purchase these books from whatever source you wish, including Amazon.com. Readings from these materials should be considered required unless otherwise indicated. Copies of additional readings will be given out in class.


Additional readings will be made available as photocopies distributed in class or on-line through the course’s Blackboard web site. To access this site, go to http://crs.ase.tufts.edu, log in, and click on PS 195. Links to online readings are found in the “External Links” section, or in the html version of the course’s reading list.

Grading:

The final grade for the course will be based on the average of the grade on the take-home mid-term exam and the final term paper. There will be no other graded assignments. The grading of these papers will be based on assessment of three categories: 1) writing and organization; 2) factual accuracy and completeness; and 3) idea synthesis and creativity. Writing and organization includes all the mechanics of writing, spelling, word usage, and diction, and also includes the effectiveness of the logical presentation of the paper. In other words, is the argument in the paper presented in a logical way? Factual accuracy and completeness focuses on whether the statements made can be said to be correct, and whether there is directly relevant information that was omitted. Idea synthesis and creativity focuses on the extent to which the paper develops some fresh ideas or approaches the argument from a novel or unique perspective. Each of these categories can earn up to 33.3 points, and the sum of the three categories points will be used to determine the final grade (97.0 - 99.9 = A+, 93.0 - 96.9 = A, 90.0 - 92.9 = A-, etc.)
The final term paper will be due on the first day of final exams, Friday May 4. No extensions will be granted and no grades of Incomplete will be issued without the requisite signed contract.

The Research Challenge:

This course is both a seminar and a methodologically-focused research class. Therefore, a good portion of what we do in the class will be dedicated to conducting research on sustainable cities in the U.S. The primary issue of interest in this course will be the relationship between local governance and politics, on one hand, and the pursuit of sustainability on the other. In short, we would like to know whether there is any relationship between the ways cities are governed and whether (and to what extent) they decide to try to become more sustainable. Much of the time we spend in class will be dedicated to understanding what local sustainability is, what cities can and actually do to try to become more sustainable, and how cities are governed. The exact hypotheses we will focus on will evolve over the course of the semester.

The Syllabus:

The syllabus that follows presents the class-by-class topics for discussion and the associated readings. Required readings are in bold typeface. Items marked with an asterisk will handed out in class. For the dates that correspond to the class meeting numbers, consult the separate listing. The syllabus is available through the course web site.

Class Meeting 1: An Introduction to the Concepts of Sustainable Cities and Sustainable Communities; An Introduction to the Research Endeavor

Read:


Mazmanian and Kraft, eds., 2009. Toward Sustainable Communities: Transition and Transformations in Environmental Policy, chapters 1 and 2.


Class Meeting 2: Mainstream Views of the City Governance: Politics (and Economics) as Usual; The Environmental Kuznets Curve

Before we begin to develop a deeper understanding of the idea of sustainable communities and cities, we will take a look at what might be called “mainstream views” of city politics and economics; the relationship between economic growth and environmental quality; and the relationship of city politics to local economies. This is done so that we can contrast these mainstream views with the alternative conceptions of cities that tend to be associated with sustainability.

Read:


Class Meeting 3: The General Concepts of Sustainability, Sustainable Development, and Sustainable Communities

Today we will devote our time to discussing readings on the concept of sustainability and sustainable development. Most of these readings will be fairly general, consisting of broad conceptual works that set the stage for more concrete and better-defined concepts that will be of use to us in our effort to apply the concept to local areas, and in our task of operationalizing sustainability.

Read:


Herman E. Daly and John B. Cobb, Jr., 1994. For the Common Good: Redirecting the Economy Toward Community, the Environment, and a Sustainable Future. Beacon Press.


**Class Meeting 4: A Closer Look at the Idea of Sustainable Cities and Communities (Measurement/Indicators issues)**

Today we will extend our discussion of sustainability to the city/community level. We will begin to get a clearer sense of the concept of a sustainable community as a new paradigm or way of thinking and acting. Additionally, we will discuss the idea of using cities as the appropriate units of analysis for our research endeavor, and we will take a close look at some of the measurements of sustainability that cities have developed in their own efforts. We will examine whether these “indicators” of sustainability appear to be related to the underlying concepts, i.e. are they good, adequate, and sufficient measures of sustainability?

Read:


Class Meeting 5: Sustainable Cities, the Biophysical Environment, Ecosystem Health, and Pollution Prevention

Today we will focus on what some people would argue is the key element to sustainable cities: the environment and eco-system health. We will look at the wide array of environmental issues that sustainability addresses, and the relationship between what goes on in cities and the quality of the environment and related eco-systems. We will develop a number of different ways of looking at the city’s environment and eco-systems, including “ecological footprints,” environmental bubbles, and “closed loops,” to name a few.

Read:


Class Meeting 6: Sustainable Cities and Energy/Transportation

Today we will discuss the role of energy conservation, transportation planning, and related issues, such as “green building” programs. Energy and transportation play important roles in initiatives that seem to take sustainability seriously. Today’s topics will focus on how these issues manifest themselves in the operations of sustainable cities in the U.S.

Read:


**Class Meeting 7: Sustainable Cities and Economic Development – Land Use, Zoning, Smart growth, Regional Growth Management, and the Role of Comprehensive Planning**

Today we will examine the ways that sustainable communities do (or do not) engage in economic development activities. We will look at the conceptual tension between economic development and sustainability. We will address the question of whether any amount of economic growth is necessarily bad for the environment. Then we will look at various ways that cities have tried to engage in economic development or to pursue economic growth without complete disregard for the environment. So we will look at the general issue of “smart growth” approaches to development, and some of debates concerning the issue of urban sprawl.

Read:


About Smart Growth. Found at http://www.smartgrowth.org/information/aboutsg.html


Class Meeting 8: Eco-Villages, Eco-Industrial Parks, and Brownfield Redevelopment

Continuing the discussion about smart growth, today we will look at some specific forms of smart growth, focusing specifically on eco-villages, eco-industrial parks, and brownfield redevelopment projects.

Read:


Class Meeting 9: The Politics of Economic Development and Smart Growth

Read:


Class Meeting 10: Sustainable Cities and the Critical Importance of Environmental/Social Justice

Today we will look at the argument that a sustainable city is necessarily a more socially just city. We will examine the general issue of environmental justice and social justice in urban settings, and compare and contrast these with the concepts of sustainability and sustainable communities.

Read:


Equity’ Issues in Metropolitan Areas,” Evaluation Review, 18, 2, April, 123-140.


**Class Meeting 11: Local Governance, Civic Engagement, Urban Regime Types, and the Environment**

Read:


Class Meeting 12: Sustainability vs. Politics as Usual: Overcoming Political Impediments to Achieving Sustainability

Today we will revisit the issues of city politics and economics as usual, and we will examine the ways in which these conspire to act as impediments to achieving progress on sustainability at the local level. We will look specifically at prescriptions for overcoming these impediments, particularly at ways in which the sustainable communities process can be integrated with economic development types of activities.

Read:


**Class Meeting 13: Some Case Studies of Sustainable Cities – Seattle, Portland, Chattanooga, Boulder, San Francisco, Austin, and Jacksonville**

Today we will look at three specific examples and case studies of sustainable cities projects around the country, as described in the literature. We will take a critical look at what seem to be the underlying motivations for embarking on a sustainability effort, and we will try to understand some of the locality-specific pre-conditions that contribute to such an effort. We will also entertain the question of whether the sustainable cities process has been able to change aspects of local economics, business, politics, and the environment. We will focus on three cities that are considered by many to be among the best examples of what cities can do – Seattle, Portland, and Chattanooga serve as the case examples.

Read:


CHCRPA. 1997. Chattanooga Hamilton County Regional Planning Agency. *Futurescape Survey Results*. Chattanooga, Tenn.: CHCRPA.


Steven Reed Johnson, *The Ark of Sustainability: The Shape of Portland’s Sustainability Infrastructure at the Turn of the Century*. Unpublished manuscript.


City of Austin. 2001b. *Resources for Choosing Products and Services that meet Sustainability Criteria*. Austin, Texas: City of Austin. Found at: [http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/sustainable/purchasing.htm](http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/sustainable/purchasing.htm)

