

Public Spaces | Public Life for North Rainier Town Center

ScanIDesign Master Studio, Winter 2010 [Larch 504/Arch504]

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Biking with Gehl Architects in Copenhagen, Studio Trip of September 2009

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

To achieve sustainable, low-carbon, healthy neighborhoods, the City of Seattle has recently undertaken the first of its Neighborhood Plan updates, focusing on the areas adjacent to the Sound Transit's new light rail stations in SE Seattle. Our ScanIDesign Public Spaces Public Life interdisciplinary studio will take the next steps in planning and design for the proposed town center around the Mount Baker / McClellan Light Rail Station, with the goal of creating a safe, socially vibrant, ecologically healthy public realm. During the term, our Master Studio will benefit from involvement of the renowned Copenhagen firm Gehl Architects, who recently consulted with the City of Seattle to improve the pedestrian and environmental quality of the city's downtown. The intent of the studio is to explore how public life can be fostered through the interaction of people, space and buildings in the new North Rainier Town Center, described here by the City of Seattle in its initial planning for the transit hub:

The North Rainier Valley Neighborhood envisions "an interweaving of people of various backgrounds who live and work in a culturally and economically diverse area" in its neighborhood plan. The business district will be strong, stimulating, and economically stable, while retaining the diversity and ethnic heritage that makes the Rainier Valley unique. This vision for a town center will be filled with the development of the McClellan station area. The station area will be a lively commercial, employment, and residential district, building on its existing commercial vitality and employment density. The station area will be the heart of the neighborhood, a place for people to work, live, gather, shop, and enjoy community life. It will be surrounded by safe and inviting residential neighborhoods that are affordable to a broad range of people. The McClellan station area will be the northern gate-way to the Rainier Valley on light rail.

More recently, GGLO has coalesced the results of a series of neighborhood meetings and workshops into alternative plans and a set of goals and strategies, which include:

- *Create a destination town center, attractive to visitors and residents for a variety of shopping and recreational experiences.*
- *Make the town center a safe and enjoyable space to walk and take transit.*

- Explore methods to transform Rainier Avenue S between S Bayview Street and MLK Jr. Way S to a pedestrian oriented main street.
- Make Rainier Ave S. and MLK Jr. Way S corridors function as “complete streets.”
- Foster a vibrant, business district that serves North Rainier residents and is a destination shopping area with stores that serve the greater Valley.
- Support the continued ethnic and cultural diversity represented in the businesses and community.
- Within the town center prioritize the development of a range of more dense mixed income housing units.
- Promote the North Rainier Urban Village as a “Green Hub” providing green jobs and training, and green development.
- Support the neighborhood’s youth.
- Improve and activate the “ring of green” surrounding the urban village by providing strong connections to the greenbelts, boulevards and parks and augmenting them with a hierarchy of open spaces.
- Improve Public Safety



The initial portion of our studio will involve limited urban context analysis, building upon the work of the City, GGLO and the Green Futures Lab / Gehl Interns, and a simultaneous series of rigorous formal explorations. We will utilize and expand on Gehl's 12 Quality Criteria, consider applications of the Seattle Green Factor to commercial and multi-family development, and employ Gehl methodology as we revisit design of the North Rainier town center alternatives.

It is often the actual *urban landscape*--the space between buildings--that is forgotten in the drive for urban density, and this will be our design focus. We will also look at adaptive reuse of infrastructure, buildings and the intersection of architecture and urban landscape as a means to exploring 'best use' strategies for making cities better places to inhabit.

COURSE GOALS:

- to practice the design of ecologically sound and socially successful public space design
- to explore, implement and expand on Gehl Architects' urban design concepts and methods
- to explore applications of ecological and sustainable design to new urban development at the neighborhood center scale
- to consider strategies of reusing and retrofitting infrastructure and buildings as a sustainable design strategy;
- to develop graphic and verbal communication skills, and the ability to work in interdisciplinary teams;
- to develop skill at technological applications related to planning and design
- to practice working between scales, using both large and small scales simultaneously to each inform the other.

The project will give us the opportunity to approach the questions:

- How can we plan and design neighborhood centers that are "sustainable" "ecological" "cultural" and "socially just"?
- In service of these goals, how can we work together to advance and integrate urban landscapes, infrastructures and buildings?
- How do we best honor the past and present while planning for and positively influencing future conditions - to foster a great, humane, city that is ecologically healthy, carbon neutral, resilient and regenerative?
- How can we apply lessons and methods learned from exemplary projects and protocols to develop design that is responsive to unique Seattle contexts?

STUDIO PROCESS and EXPECTATIONS

We will meet Mondays and Wednesdays 1:30 to 5:30 and often on Fridays (students are expected to be in class and work Fridays on group or individual projects) for *group presentations, discussions, field trips, working time and desk critiques*. This term you will primarily work in groups and in pairs on inventory, analysis, design, and presentations. Each participant is expected to be in class during the scheduled class time. When Gehl Architects are scheduled to be in town, we expect you to be in studio at all times, and plan on slightly longer days.

You are highly encouraged to continue your sketchbook from Copenhagen (or start a new one) that documents your research and design explorations. Consider including your research and design process, notes from readings, class discussions and community meetings, solutions seen, heard, and imagined, and your reflections and conclusions about process and product.

READINGS AND RESOURCES

A list of resource books will be on Reserve in the AUP library and are available on-line. You are encouraged to share new resources with each other as you discover them throughout the term. The book we suggest for the course is: *Life Between Buildings (Jan Gehl)*, which is available online. We have ordered other books there that you may wish to purchase: *New City Spaces (Gehl and Gemzøe)*, *True Urbanism (Hinshaw)*, and *Sustainable Urbanism (Farr)*.

COURSE WEBSITE

<http://courses.washington.edu/gehlstud/index.shtml>

U-Drive:

To log in under windows, right-click the red "N" in the lower left corner of the screen and select "Novell Login". Click the Advanced button , and make sure the parameters are set to the following:

Username: larc504
password: MtBaker
Tree: UWCAUP
Context: COURSES.CAUP
Server: jabba.caup.washington.edu

To login on a mac, use the menu item /Go/Connect to Server/ from the finder. Enter your username and password, then select the volume USERS.JABBA. This volume will be mounted on your desktop. Open it to find the course folder.

STUDIO EVALUATION

Evaluation will be based on departmental and college standards, with a numerical grade at the end of the term for Landscape Architecture and Urban Planning students and evaluation forms for Architecture students. Evaluation will be based roughly on the following:

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| Context Analysis | 10% |
| Precedent Study | 10% |
| Mid-term | 20% |
| Final Design Package (including book pages) | 50% |
| Class Participation | 10% |

CDs with all of your files, including scans of your process work, are required at the end of the term.

Seattle Neighborhood Planning web resources (links available on studio website):

Link to current neighborhood plan update – North Rainier / Mt. Baker Station (Link to march and may 2009 community meetings at bottom of page)

http://www.seattle.gov/dpd/Planning/Neighborhood_Planning/NeighborhoodPlanUpdates/NorthRainier/default.asp

Link to 1998-2001 station area planning

http://www.seattle.gov/transportation/ppmp_sap_neigh.htm#mccellan

Link to current neighborhood plan update - overview

http://www.seattle.gov/dpd/Planning/Neighborhood_Planning/Overview/