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What do you
about
Lake Oswego?

Lynn Peterson
Chair, Clackamas County Board of Commissioners

Newberg

Lake Oswego

Planning on the Map: National Awards for Newberg & Lake Oswego

by Michael D. Harrell

Since its inception, the Nohad A. Toulan School of Urban Studies and Planning has produced nearly 700 graduates in the Master of Urban Studies and Planning program who have made their mark on the nation and the world. It should not be surprising, therefore, that four of them were involved, one way or another, in the award-winning projects described in this article. They are Sarah Selden and Laura Weigel, associate planners in Lake Oswego, Clackamas County Commission Chair Lynn Peterson, and Steve Olson, Associate Planner with the City of Newberg. — the Editor

In 2013, the American Planning Association (APA) recognized 18 cities that exemplified the “best planning efforts and individuals that created communities of lasting value.” Oregon is home to two of the honored recipients of the APA's National Planning Award – Newberg and Lake Oswego.

Newberg won the National Planning Excellence Award for Public Outreach. The city was recognized for the Design Star Program, an educational effort that connects local planners with elementary schools.

Lake Oswego won the National Planning Excellence Award for a Communications Initiative. The city was awarded for its efforts to bolster public involvement with “We Love Lake Oswego,” a short video that has been shown at more than 75 community meetings and events.

The 2013 award recipients were hon-

ored at a special luncheon held during APA's National Planning Conference in Chicago, IL.

Neighborhood Planner Sarah Selden, an alumna of Portland State University, attended the luncheon and accepted the award on behalf of Lake Oswego planners.

Jessica Nunley Pelz, Associate Planner for the City of Newberg, and Jan Wolf, GIS Analyst, accepted the award given to the Newberg's 6th Grade Design Star Program.

The APA is a nonprofit, professional institution that advocates and supports “urban and regional planning.” It is also the institution responsible for the certification of professional planners. Members can include practicing planners, students, elected and appointed officials, planning commissioners, as well as interested citizens.

“The communication award was directed toward programs in the U.S. that exhibited excellence in public outreach, which is, in many ways, the essential job of the City Planner,” Selden said.

“We were honored to win the award,” said Pelz. “But it was more exciting to show that a program like this could be done. It was a great way to introduce these concepts, and it could be done anywhere.”

Oregon planners met other civic leaders from around the country at the 2013 National Planning Conference. Among the recipients were representatives from New York City, NY, Philadelphia, PA, Riverside, CA, Cincinnati, OH, and the Ohkay Owingeh pueblo in New Mexico.

“But of course,” Wolf added. “It isn't the award itself that really matters.” The Design Star Program itself is still running strong and has just begun its 9th circuit around local middle schools.

Newberg's Design Star Program

In Newberg, the Design Star Program has connected local city planners with sixth grade students of the town since 2006. Each year Pelz and Wolf work collaboratively with the teachers to educate 6th graders about how cities are designed.

“The program is aimed at teaching students why things are organized a certain way in their city, and it allows them to think critically about both the positive and negative impacts of development.” Mapping, writing, presentation, and teamwork skills are all important aspects of the program that students learn and work on throughout the project in their classrooms.

The program started as part of the city's outreach efforts during National Community Planning Month. “Now it is an annual collaboration between Newberg city staff and middle school teachers

and has been integrated into their curriculum,” said Pelz.

Wolf starts the presentation by showing how Newberg had been built from the ground up.

“We start with the bare earth layer,” said Wolf. “How the ground looks on its own. Then we add the streets, then parks, buildings, etc., to show the complexity of how a city is built. Geographic information systems (GIS) technology helps to visualize that complexity.”

Next, Pelz explains to the students why the city is arranged the way it is.

“Why commercial buildings are near the highway, why the industrial zone is where it is, and so on. We discuss the differences between a city's ‘needs’ versus ‘wants,’ and then we discuss what makes Newberg a ‘great’ place to live now and what it might be missing that would make it an ‘awesome’ place to live.”

Pelz and Wolf choose two real, vacant areas in the city that they task the students with being developers. “They work in groups to come up with an idea and present their proposals to the class,” said Pelz.

The students propose everything from sports facilities to nature parks. The planners have seen proposals for a zoo, a biosphere, a multi-story restaurant, a lego store, laser tag . . . even a muffin ATM. “It's very creative. We learn what the kids want to see built in their city,” said Wolf. Students with exemplary ideas get to present their ideas to city staff and officials at city council meetings.

Pelz and Wolf expose the students to a lot of new information.

“It's very rewarding when students want more information on planning, when they want more details about how a building can be put into a public area. I really think we may be influencing some to get into planning, or GIS work,” said Wolf.

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Since 2006, the Design Star Program has visited schools every year. Currently, Pelz and Wolf frequent two public middle schools, Mountainview Middle School and Chehalem Valley Middle School, and a private school, CS Lewis Academy.

Beside the APA's recognition, The Design Star program has won other awards. It was recognized by the Oregon Chapter of the APA and another from the League of Oregon Cities.

"It's a good experience all around for everyone involved," said Pelz.

"The award is secondary. It gets everyone cooperating, getting something done, and letting people know how city government gets to work in the first place," said Wolf.

Lake Oswego

Lake Oswego was given an award for a short film promoting the Comprehensive Plan of Lake Oswego. Featuring local celebrities of the time, like County Commissioner Lynn Peterson, State Representative Chris Garrett, Don Forman of the Police Department and local pub owner, Mike Buck of Gubanc's, the film shows pep and pride for the present and future of Lake Oswego.

The video also introduces the idea of the Comprehensive Plan, a long-term policy document for the city, periodically updated by local planners.

"Initial outreach had difficulties engaging people to discuss city planning," said Neighborhood Planner Sarah Selden, who was present to receive the APA award. "Most people didn't know what our Comprehensive Plan was. So we thought of a new approach to public involvement."

The result was the three-minute film, "We Love Lake Oswego," directed by Kevin D'Haeze of Rock Island Media (previously Firefly Studios), a filmmaker

from Lake Oswego. D'Haeze offered the city a "great deal" to make the film, said Selden.

According to the APA, the video aided planners in public outreach, stimulating conversation between community members and city officials. Today it has been shown at more than 75 different community events.

Public meetings would often start with the video because it invites viewers "to imagine the future of Lake Oswego." It suggests several topics for discussion, such as how to ensure clean water and a safe environment, the best way to sustain a thriving business community, and how to provide adequate housing for all the city's residents.

The emotional impact of the video helped "break the ice" with community groups and stimulate discussions on long-term plans, according to Selden.

The APA recognized the video because it conveyed "a compelling story about why to plan for the future, provide a clear, concise concept of what the comprehensive plan update is about, and offered inspiration for the community to participate in the planning process." The video also "reflected on how the past has and will shape the future. It brought together all parts of Lake Oswego, and aimed to engage those typically not involved in the planning process."

The video was linked to the city's centennial, celebrating the people and work of the last 100 years that helped create the city.

"The message was that cities like Lake Oswego don't happen by accident," said Selden. "Thoughtful planning, creativity, and dedication to follow through all are needed to make sure we're on the right path for the future."

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City Planning in Oregon

In short, City Planners work as liaisons between civic leaders, businesses, and the community to offer suggestions for long-term plans of a city. Their ideas help shape the city – the layout of transportation, land-use, the policies that support employment uses and housing choices, preservation of historic buildings and neighborhoods. That is, the personal effects that change brings for communities.

When entering Lake Oswego, it is hard to miss its “special design” of downtown. The brown, pitched roofs, the limited building heights – all give Lake Oswego its patent “village character.”

Selden, who works for the Planning Department of Lake Oswego, said “downtown has transformed a lot over the last twenty years. Many of the buildings were built recently, in the Urban Renewal District. Planners were involved in such projects, helping to ensure that projects meet the community’s vision as outlined in plans and code.”

In the city of Lake Oswego, there are two citizen commissions that make recommendations and decisions on land use planning: the Development Review Commission, which reviews applications for new development, and the Planning Department, which works with long-range planning.

The Comprehensive Plan, which was the focus of their award-winning promotional film, is a guiding policy document for the next 20 years of Lake Oswego. It helps with writing and revising development codes, outlining changes in land uses, building form, and transportation, and public facilities.

“We provide options and suggestions. It's up to City Council to determine whether they agree or think there should be another direction for the city.”

Currently, Lake Oswego planners are in the midst of confirming with City Council to accept a grant from Metro to do a plan for the SW Industrial District, located near I-5 on the way to Tualatin. This would be the first major planning project to implement policy direction from the Comprehensive Plan.

“We'd look at analyzing how we can support redevelopment and increase the number of employees per acre,” Selden said. “Lake Oswego doesn't have much more available land. Today the Industrial District is underutilized. So we'll explore ways to make the best uses of land parcels to support more jobs for the next twenty years.”

In Newberg, Pelz has been a planner for the last seven and a half years. Her latest project, Bike Newberg, focuses on the various bike routes and associated signage, maps, and racks. Bike Newberg also hosts an annual May Commute Challenge.

Wolf has been a GIS analyst in the Engineering Department of Newberg since 2001.

“GIS permeates many different fields,” said Wolf. “We collaborate with the planning department. If someone wants to develop in a certain area, they must know the location of the nearest utility—and where their resources are in the ground.”

Another essential role of the planner is education. Both Lake Oswego and Newberg were recognized for the APA's National Planning Award because of their efforts to engage community members in the plans of their respective cities. Planners strive to hear what the community wants and needs, then encourage decision makers and businesses to consider the opinions of the people. **M**

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