

Urban Design Students Envision Ways to Reinvent Parma

(Kent, OH)—A Kent State University urban design studio class applied theoretical concepts and a healthy dose of imagination into a new vision for Parma, Ohio, an inner-ring suburb of 80,000 largely blue-collar residents.

The class, “Parma 2.0: Re-thinking the Suburb”, took a typical working class American suburb which has been buffeted by economic and demographic changes, and unleashed on it the graduate students’ visions for improvements based largely on finding new uses for existing infrastructures with a radical twist.

Patrick Hyland, an architect with Westlake Reed Leskosky in Cleveland, says he envisioned the studios an opportunity for future urban design professionals to stretch their own imaginations in facing issues related to urban problems that bleed into a suburban environment.

“This kind of studio is relevant for the student experience, because, in the larger context of the impact of regional population shrinkage, brain drain, globalization and immigration, future urban designers need to be equipped to appropriately recreate common spaces, architectures and infrastructures on a visionary scale to satisfy changing community needs,” says Hyland.

“Most urban design classes focus clearly on the traditionally urban,” Hyland says. “Most of these students grew up in the suburbs. Most Americans live and work in suburbs. Maybe we should spend more time re-considering these suburbs and expand the definition of ‘urban’.

“Parma itself really took off post- World War II with auto plants, heavy manufacturing and such,” Hyland continued. “Now, with foreclosures, plant closings, and shrinking populations, the city needs to transform itself into something else in order to compete and survive.”

Hyland set the stage with this perspective and, after the students paired off, he set them free to “do anything you want to do with the whole city.”

One student project that dealt with a current issue head-on was “Foreclosure Urbanism”. The project hints at reclamation, reuse and ultimately the reorganization of entire swathes of residential fabric impacted most heavily by foreclosures. At the time of the studio, public records showed 874 foreclosures city-wide. The student’s work suggests reclaiming some spots for uses ranging from urban gardens and tree farms to wi-fi houses and outdoor classrooms.

Other projects include “Parma Dam”, suggesting a man-made lake and spinoff development, and a “Linear University” to promote education uses along a set path within the city.

The projects were critiqued by a jury assembled by Hyland, which included faculty from Yale, the University of Virginia and Kent State’s architecture and urban design programs.

The student work was presented to Parma city leaders, who thought it appropriate to make the projects available for the whole community to consider.

“The Parma 2.0 Project by Kent State students gives all of northeast Ohio an exciting peek into the future of our great city,” says Parma Mayor Dean DePiero. “I have no doubt residents will be surprised, impressed and inspired. And I, too, am truly excited to see what my hometown may possibly look like in the years to come.”

Currently, the projects are on display at Parmatown Mall in a reclaimed storefront in the JCPenney wing.

An e-mail account has been established for feedback and “voting” on the new visions for Parma. The account is comment.parmastudio@gmail.com.

###

Media contacts:

Patrick Hyland, 440-785-2415

Kimberley Sirk, 330-672-8514 or kgallek@kent.edu