Building Resilient Communities Through University-Community Partnerships

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Key Questions:

How can we enhance long-term capacity to produce sustainable solutions, livable communities + resilient institutions?

How can we foster innovation in community engagement and cross-disciplinary collaboration in universities?
Resilient Communities Project

Connects U of MN, cities + community partners to advance sustainability and resilience through course-based projects

One-year partnership—RCP as matchmaker

Initial support from Institute on the Environment + Center for Urban and Regional Affairs (CURA)

Initiated by Sustainability Faculty Network
How Does It Work?

Formal request for proposals

Cities apply, define 15–30 projects, identify community stakeholders and resources

Community workshop to outline issues, assets, and needs

RCP identifies potential course matches

Scoping meetings with faculty, project lead, community partners

→ Formal scopes-of-work

Students complete projects

Final presentations + work products delivered to community
2013–2014 Partner:
City of North St. Paul
North St. Paul Projects

Live/work housing
Living streets and capital improvements
Green energy initiative
Neighborhood identities
Public art
Community identity and branding
Downtown revitalization strategies
Civic engagement and communication
Environmental education
Redevelopment-ready community
Master redevelopment plan
Silver Lake trail connection
Community gardens and local food
Staff development and retention
Development of underutilized parcels
Housing Conservation and Aging in place
Energy conservation initiative
Emerald Ash Borer Management Plan
Bulk Waste Pick-Up Program Evaluation
Documenting the RCP-North St. Paul Partnership
Fiber optic network development

U of MN Departments

Housing Studies
Landscape Architecture
Communication Studies
Sociology
Liberal Studies
Graphic Design
Gerontology
Journalism
Architecture
Urban and Regional Planning
Civil Engineering
Law School
Bioproducts and Biosystems Engineering
Public Policy
Environmental Education (UMD)
Org Leadership, Policy and Development
Environmental Science, Policy and Mgt
Forestry
Agronomy
Social Work
Recreation Resources Management
Environmental Education

**City Goal:** Capitalize on North St. Paul’s many unique natural features by creating opportunities for residents to learn about the local ecosystem and encouraging residents to reengage with their natural environment.
Environmental Education

M.S. Thesis in ESPM – use qualitative approaches to determine how residents understand, experience, and use parks and natural areas in the community

LS 5100: Re-Imagining the Arts for Public Parks – explore opportunities for the arts to reconnect residents with the community’s natural heritage

DES 3131: User Experience in Design – evaluate the user experience of Southwood Nature Reserve to inform an environmental education interpretation strategy for the park

EnEd 5325: Environmental Issues Investigation – design an education curriculum around Southwood Park for local schools

EnEd 4315: Operations & Management – create an operations and management plan for Southwood Park
What Is Different?

Multiple projects over a sustained period

Scalable to accommodate various-sized communities

Efficient access to full range of U of MN resources

Centralized management and coordination of projects
What is Different?

Community-identified and community-driven projects

Engages broad range of community partners – public, private, nonprofit

Builds long-term relationships between community and university

Driven by broader goals of sustainability + resilience
Thank you!

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