



U of I Students Share Ideas to Improve Peoria's Southside Neighborhood



Councilwoman Denise Moore, City of Peoria Innovation Team, and Peoria Southside community residents discuss ideas presented by UIUC School of Architecture Studio Workshop students. The Studio class focused on addressing real problems the City of Peoria is currently facing. Kathie Brown, Extension educator, has been working with community organizations and UIUC College of Fine and Applied Arts through the cross campus initiative known as Extension and Outreach Initiative.

Every minute of everyday, our health is affected by the physical design of our homes, schools, workplaces, and indoor/outdoor community spaces. During the spring semester, University of Illinois Extension facilitated University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign (UIUC) School of Architecture's engagement with Peoria's Southside Neighborhood as part of a Studio Workshop designed to involve community leaders and residents in an examination of the relationship between health, design, and the built environment.

Students presented design ideas for a vision of a safe, connected, vibrant Southside Neighborhood in Peoria. The planning and design process was aided by multiple visits to the community in which students spoke to key leaders, walked the neighborhood, and engaged in discussions with community residents regarding potential design solutions.

Community engagement is described as a reciprocal learning experience where both students and community members learn and grow from the shared experiences. Students described one of the most valuable opportunities presented through the course was “*working on a real problem.*” They also discussed the importance of soliciting community feedback on ideas to determine what is realistic for a community and finding ways to scale ideas for

implementation. Community members engaged in the conversations with students, discovered new strategies for community betterment by targeting critical elements of health and well-being.

Community leaders and faculty are working to identify ongoing research and funding opportunities which will allow the work which began in 2015 to continue. Student projects have found their way into city planning documents and grant proposals. Faculty and students have gained a deeper understanding of the complex issues contributing to urban decay and the challenges faced by communities to create policies and programs that can spur change.

UIUC College of Fine and Applied Arts project is designed to work with community partners to examine the relationship between health, design, and the built environment in the Peoria region. This project is part of the Designing Healthy Communities Initiative and is funded through the Office of the Provost and College of ACES Illinois Extension and Outreach Initiative.