

Roadmap to green

UO'S SUSTAINABILITY PROGRAM BYPASSES EUGENE by Ted Taylor

The city of Eugene has yet to participate in the UO's ultimate "town and gown" collaboration on sustainability, but Springfield has jumped on it with enthusiasm.

The UO's Sustainable City Year Program (SCYP) is getting positive attention from *The New York Times* and *Forbes* magazine. Numerous universities around the country, and as far away as China and New Zealand, are interested in replicating what the UO has created, and the program is attracting both students and faculty to UO.

In a nutshell, the SCYP contracts with one Oregon city each school year and hundreds of UO students, grad students and faculty descend upon that city to work with city staff on a dozen or more specific projects involving sustainability.

Springfield cobbled together the \$230,000 cost for the 2011-12 school year, using a mix of public and nonprofit funding sources. Salem did it the year before, and Gresham did the inaugural program in 2009-10.

The Jan. 31 deadline for applications passed with Eugene not applying for the second year in a row. Why would Eugene, with a national reputation for sustainability initiatives, not take advantage of an award-winning local program touted in *Forbes* as "addressing and catalyzing change across all issues that impinge on sustainability"?

"We've decided not to apply this year," says Babe O'Sullivan, sustainability liaison in the city manager's office, citing the city's long-established, broad-based working relationship with the UO, the high cost of the program (\$250,000 this year), the city's list of sustainability projects already completed or under way, and the extra burden on city staff. "It didn't seem to fit with the way we are doing our work, the time frames and the pace with which we are doing our work," she says. "We don't have a lot of stored-up projects that we've been waiting to do."

O'Sullivan says the city is talking to Chris Jones, program manager of the UO's Sustainable Cities Initiative (SCI), which oversees SCYP, about Eugene possibly participating in a scaled-down version of the program, this year or next.



CHRIS JONES

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ROBERT LIBERTY

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Jones says Eugene was well positioned to apply this year "because Eugene has a number of plans that are either recently passed or soon to be completed: the Eugene Pedestrian and Bicycle Master Plan, Envision Eugene, Climate and Energy Action Plan — plans that have been in the works for a couple of years now." Jones says the next crucial step for cities is trying to figure out how to implement these plans, "and that's where the students can fit in best. They are poised to do great things if they chose to."

Robert Liberty, executive director of SCI, says he's impressed with the multiple and diverse ways the UO and city of Eugene have collaborated over the years to their mutual benefit. "The city's been very supportive," he says.

But is the city doing enough and planning enough to be truly sustainable? "I applaud the positive moves toward sustainability planning in Eugene," says Kevin Matthews of Friends of Eugene (FoE). "When we drill down to the details, however, I'm not sure that we're really living up to our community's potential."

Matthews, who is also editor of *ArchitectureWeek*, says the Climate and Energy Action Plan "fails to address whether its actions, even if fully accomplished, would add up to meet our stated targets. In fact, calculations done for FoE suggest that the concrete actions listed in the plan are barely enough to get us halfway there, even at 2030."

"There are many other areas where our aspirations and our actions may not be matching up," says Matthews, "from a lack of substantive grappling with climate factors in Envision Eugene and other current planning projects to a failure of the city to enforce its own green building standards when signing long-term leases for new office space."

Matthews says the city has accomplished "a lot of largely aspirational and qualitative sustainability planning work so far. It is time now, if not earlier, to bear down and

start balancing the real numbers — on things like growth in vehicle miles traveled (VMT) over time — in order to actually achieve real community outcomes. If that's something the SCYP would help Eugene deal with, then at \$250,000 it would be a bargain."

Shawn Boles of the Sustainability Commission is also skeptical of the idea that the city is already doing plenty of sustainability work and cannot afford to do more. "This rationale sounded thin to me," he says, "and I asked for a list of city/UO projects. Have not heard back about this."

The decision process

The decision on whether to apply for SCYP was made by city staff, rather than through the Eugene Sustainability Commission (ESC) or the City Council. But councilors, commissioners and Mayor Kitty Piercy were aware of the opportunity, even if not included directly in the decision.

"The SCY proposal was not vetted through the Sustainability Commission this year or any of the last three years," says Jan Bohman, city community relations director. "The commission did not identify it as a priority in their annual work planning and it has not been discussed between the commission and City Council in work plan discussions." Bohman did say at least one member of the ESC encouraged the staff to apply, and city staff told commissioners about the decision at the ESC meeting Jan. 18. "Some commissioners expressed an interest in seeing reconsideration in the future when resources are available to support city participation," says Bohman.

Mayor Piercy defends the decision, saying "We love the SCYP at UO and have supported and encouraged it from the get-go. ... We have been partnering with them across many disciplines for years and all the more so in my tenure — with LCC as well. We are most fortunate to have