URPL 6205 – Plan Making
Course Syllabus – Spring 2026
Monday 2:00pm-4:45pm
CAP Building, Room 340

Master of Urban and Regional Planning
COLLEGE OF ARCHITECTURE AND PLANNING
UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO **DENVER**

Instructor: Peter Park peter@peterpark-planning.com

DESCRIPTION:
In this seminar we will explore plan making at the city scale. Specifically, we will examine various approaches to *comprehensive planning* in jurisdictions in the United States and how rational comprehensive planning evolved and continues to evolve in practice. We'll use a case study method to look at fast-growing cities (such as Denver, Los Angeles, Austin, Houston, and Oklahoma City) as well as legacy cities (such Milwaukee, Detroit, and Memphis) to better understand the relationship between aspirations in Comprehensive Plans and the realities of development and change. We will explore pressing issues in planning today such as: How do planners effectively provide technical expertise within a given governance (and political) structure? What roles do various communities and organizations have in the preparation of comprehensive plans? Where is innovation most needed in planning practice and how do comprehensive plans support it? What are the social, economic, technological, and environmental forces that shape the built environment and how can comprehensive plans most effectively influence positive outcomes? How can sustainability (economic, environmental, and social equity) and affordability be proactively addressed in comprehensive planning? How are plans implemented and by whom? What defines successful plans and how are plans evaluated and measured?

LEARNING OUTCOMES:
The Department of Urban and Regional Planning has incorporated the Planning Accreditation Board's (PAB) Learning Requirements as part of our learning outcomes goals. The PAB's Learning Requirements are organized into three broad categories: General Planning Knowledge, Planning Skills, and Values and Ethics. The curriculum for this course is designed to address the following PAB's Learning Requirements:

1) **General Planning Knowledge**
    a. Purpose and Meaning of Planning**:** appreciation of why planning is undertaken by communities, cities, regions, and nations, and the impact planning is expected to have.
    b. Planning Theory**:** appreciation of the behaviors and structures available to bring about sound planning outcomes.
    c. The Future**:** understanding of the relationships between past, present, and future in planning domains, as well as the potential for methods of design, analysis, and intervention to influence the future.
2) **Planning Skills**
    a. Research: tools for assembling and analyzing ideas and information from prior practice and scholarship, and from primary and secondary sources.
    b. Written, Oral and Graphic Communication: ability to prepare clear, accurate and compelling text, graphics and maps for use in documents and presentations.
    c. Plan Creation and Implementation: integrative tools useful for sound plan formulation, adoption, and implementation and enforcement.

3) **Values and Ethics**
    a. Governance and Participation: appreciation of the roles of officials, stakeholders, and community members in planned change.
    b. Social Justice: appreciation of equity concerns in planning.

COURSE ORGANIZATION

The seminar discussions are organized in four modules:

Module 1: Tracing the roots of Comprehensive Planning in the United States

In Module 1 we will review the professionalization of planning in the 20th century and the political, economic and social forces and design concepts that shaped and evolved rational comprehensive planning practice over the years.

Module 2: The Components of Comprehensive Plans (processes and products)

In Module 2 we will review the fundamental components of comprehensive plans; their legal foundations; the entities that prepare them; the necessary analytical foundations (economic, demographic, physical, environmental, infrastructure capacities, etc.); the topics they address (land use, transportation, capital infrastructure, urban design, open space, historic preservation, sustainability, resilience, public amenities, community health, arts and culture, etc.); and the various types of plans, planning, and implementation activities comprehensive plans influence. Module 2 will include student presentations of their "Case Study Background" that will follow a shared format to be prepared in a collaborative class effort.

Module 3: Planning Process and Vision

In Module 3 we will explore the aspirational and projective aspects of comprehensive plans; the visioning process and models of public engagement; scenario planning; and the importance of managing expectations through effective messaging. Module 3 will include student presentations of the "Vision Analysis" of their case studies that will follow a shared format to be prepared in a collaborative class effort.

Module 4: Implementation and Outcomes

In Module 4 we will explore the implementation tools and strategies (regulatory, investment/infrastructure, partnerships, and next-level planning) that bring planning visions to reality and the importance of clear linkages between planning policy and implementation activities; organizing, prioritizing, and phasing implementation; coordination across multiple departments and jurisdictions; political leadership; and regular update cycles. The primary focus will be on assessing the outcomes of comprehensive planning efforts, how effectively they guide desired results over time and reasons for success and failure in an attempt to describe a direction for successful comprehensive planning efforts in the future. Module 4 will include student presentations of the "Implementation Outcomes Analysis" of their case studies that will follow a shared format to be prepared in a collaborative class effort.

READINGS

The following are recommended readings. Others readings will be distributed during the semester.

- Jon A. Peterson (2009): The Birth of Organized City Planning in the United States, 1909–1910, Journal of the American Planning Association, 75:2, 123-133
- Jepson, Jr., E. and J. Weitz. (2016). *Fundamentals of Plan Making: Methods and Techniques*. New York: Routledge (Available free/online through Auraria Library: https://goo.gl/8ky7PW)
- Planning In America: Perceptions and Priorities. https://www.planning.org/policy/polls/economicrecovery/
- Fainstein, Susan S. (28 July 2011). *The Just City.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press

ASSIGNMENTS:

There are three assignments:

1) A beginning-of-semester summary of your understanding of comprehensive plans and the planner's role in plan making.
2) Comprehensive Plan Case Study (written and verbal presentations in three parts)
    a. Analysis and Presentation of the Case Study Background
    b. Analysis and Presentation of the Case Study Vision
    c. Analysis and Presentation of the Case Study Implementation and Outcomes
3) An end-of-semester reflection piece on your perspective of comprehensive plans and the planner's role in plan making.

Late assignments will not be accepted without prior approval of the instructor.

GRADES:

Grades will be based on six elements and weighted as follows:

Class participation	15%
Assignment 1	10%
Assignment 2 (in Module 2)	20%
Assignment 3 (in Module 3)	20%
Assignment 4 (in Module 4)	20%
Assignment 5	15%
	100%

GRADING SCALE:

Grade	Grade Description	
A A-	A grade range:	Exceptional scholarship and superior work products that significantly exceed stated requirements in scope and/or quality
B+ B B-	B grade range:	Commendable scholarship and accomplished work products that somewhat exceed stated requirements in scope and/or quality
C+ C C-	C grade range:	Satisfactory scholarship and work products that meet or almost meet stated requirements in scope and/or quality
D+ D D-	D grade range:	Inadequate scholarship and inferior work products that clearly fail to meet stated requirements in scope and/or quality
F	F grade:	Unacceptable scholarship and work product

LAPTOP COMPUTERS AND ELECTRONIC DEVICES:

Students are not permitted to use laptops to surf the web, write/read emails, do unrelated coursework, etc. at any time during class. Cell phone use is never allowed during class and all electronic communication devices should be turned off or muted during class time.

COMMUNICATION:
Electronic messages to students will be sent directly to your university email account.

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES:
Students with disabilities who want academic accommodations must register with Disability Resources and Services (DRS) at CU Denver. Once a student has registered with DRS, DRS will review the documentation and assess the student's request for academic accommodations in light of the documentation. DRS will then provide the student with a letter indicating which academic accommodations have been approved. Once a student provides me with a copy of DRS's letter, we will provide any accommodations that DRS has approved.

PLAGIARISM:
Students are expected to know, understand, and comply with the ethical standards of the university, including rules against plagiarism. Plagiarism is the use of another person's ideas or words without acknowledgement. The following are considered to be forms of plagiarism when the source is not noted:

- Copying word-for-word another person's ideas or words
- Creating a "mosaic" (interspersing your own words here and there within another's work)
- Paraphrasing (the rewriting of another's work, while still using their basic ideas or theories)
- Fabricating (inventing) sources
- Submitting another person's work as your own
- Neglecting quotation marks when including direct quotes

To avoid plagiarism, students must provide proper citation of all text and materials authored by others in all assignments, using the MLA or APA documentation styles. For assistance on plagiarism and on general writing help, please visit the CU Denver Writing Center: https://clas.ucdenver.edu/writing-center/

ATTENDANCE AND ACTIVE PARTICIPATION:
The course will be structured as a seminar. Each class will consist of a presentation, followed by class discussion. Students are expected to prepare for each class and be ready to discuss readings and/or other assignments. Regular attendance and active participation in discussions is mandatory and vital to the progress of the class. Participation is a key grade component. Absence from any class, unless excused for a religious holiday, documented personal emergency, or some other pre-authorized situation, is not acceptable. If a student misses any part of a class, it is their responsibility to obtain assignments and notes associated with the discussion.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week	Date	Activities
Module 1: Tracing the roots of Comprehensive Planning in the United States		
1	Jan 19	MLK Holiday (no class)
2	Jan 26	Introductions and Course Overview *Issue Assignment #1* **Assignment #1 Due 5:00pm Wednesday, January 28**
3	Feb 2	Lecture/Discussion *Case Study Initial Research Findings, Assign Case Study Template,* *Issue Assignment #2*
Module 2: The Components of Comprehensive Plans (processes and products)		
4	Feb 9	Lecture/Discussion *Confirm Case Studies, Assign Case Study Readers* **Pin up/Select Case Study Template**
5	Feb 16	Lecture/Discussion Case Study Check-ins
6	Feb 23	***Assignment #2*** **Case Study Background Presentations/Discussions**
7	Mar 2	***Assignment #2*** **Case Study Background Presentations/Discussions** *Issue Assignment #3*
Module 3: Visioning		
8	Mar 9	Lecture/Discussion
9	Mar 16	Lecture/Discussion
10	Mar 23	**Spring Break (no class)**
11	Mar 30	Lecture/Discussion Case Study Check-ins
12	Apr 6	***Assignment #3*** **Vision Presentations/Discussions**
13	Apr 13	***Assignment #3*** **Vision Presentations/Discussions** *Issue Assignment #4*
Module 4: Implementation Tools and Outcome		
14	Apr 20	Lecture/Discussion
15	Apr 27	Lecture/Discussion Case Study Check-ins
16	May 4	***Assignment #4*** **Implementation and Outcomes Presentations//Discussions** *Issue Assignment #5*
17	May 11	***Assignment #4*** **Implementation and Outcomes Presentations//Discussions** Final Reflections **Assignment #5 Due 5:00pm Wednesday, May 13**