



Indiana University of Pennsylvania
Planning Student Organization
Department of Geography & Regional Planning

Application for 2016
Outstanding PSO Award in
Community Outreach

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Indiana University of Pennsylvania (IUP) is proud to be one of only fifteen accredited undergraduate planning programs in the country. IUP is a state institution in Southwestern PA with a total attendance of 13,775 students in Fall 2015. Indiana is distinct from other college towns because of a small community with a large institution. Its downtown is vibrant with a strong sense of community and historical influence, while aspiring to grow and prosper.



The Regional Planning Program at IUP works to provide students with opportunities in the professional field to enhance the diverse regional community and to master fundamental planning strategies and techniques.

Students manage real world problems throughout coursework, internships, and post-graduate experiences. Ultimately, planners from our program work with communities to improve the quality of life for people and where they live by utilizing a comprehensive view, hear and speak for all citizens, and propose alternatives that guide community decision making.

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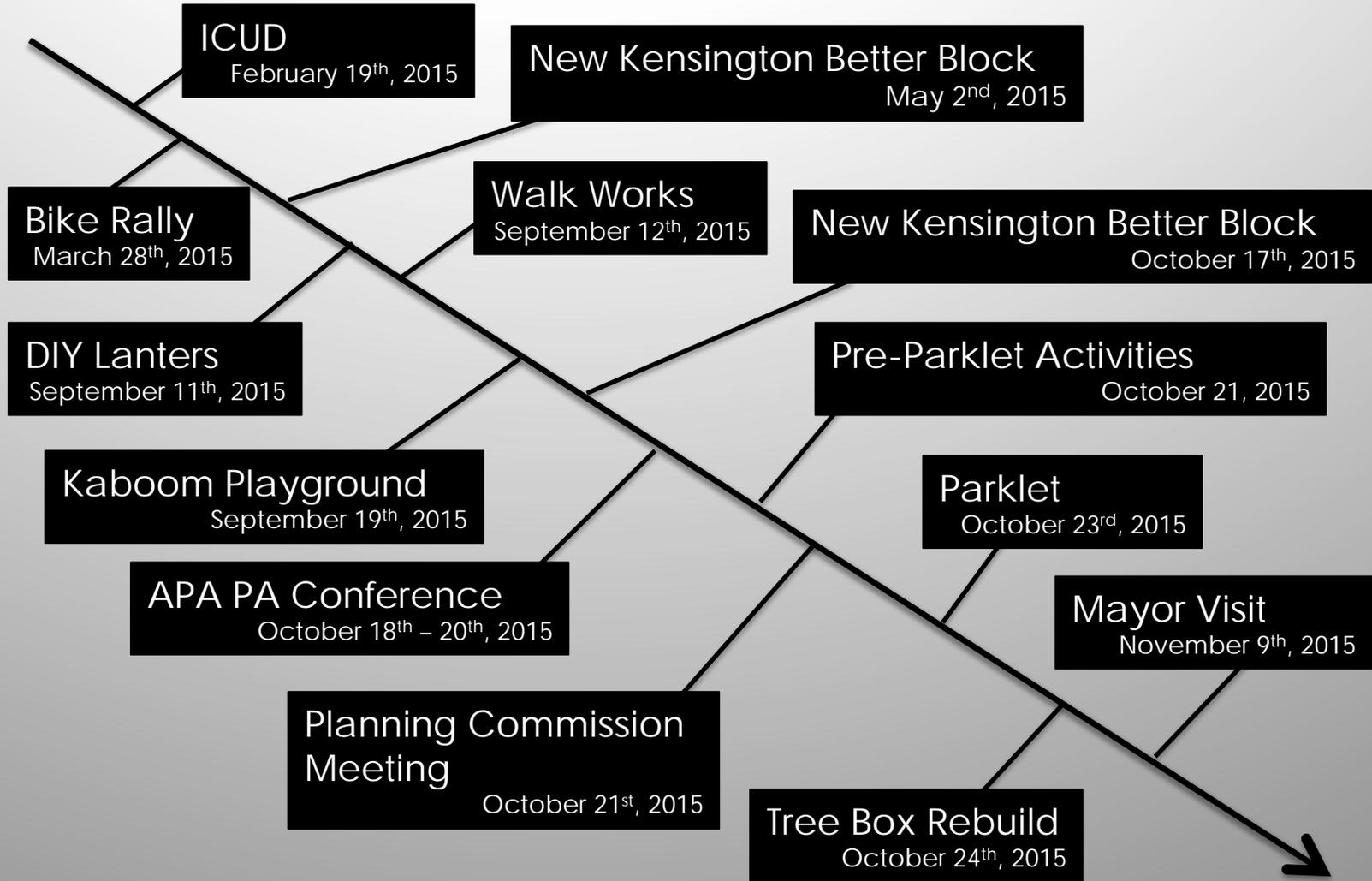
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COMMUNITY OUTREACH

The PSO Chapter of IUP has participated in many community outreach related activities in 2015. We have increased our presence by working on projects in Indiana County, Westmoreland County and Allegheny County while working with city government, neighborhood, and non-governmental agencies. The PSO has created their own projects in Indiana Borough to educate the community on planning, along with working with Borough members on small projects throughout the county. The increase in members and interest from outside organizations demonstrates that the continued hard work of the PSO has not gone unnoticed. The following timeline lists the events in chronological order.

TIMELINE



ICUD

The Indiana Community University District (ICUD) was a multi-municipality planning effort that brought together Indiana Borough, White Township, Indiana University of Pennsylvania (IUP) and Indiana County to develop a working plan for the areas around the periphery of IUP's campus. The final workshop was completed February 19, 2015 when JJRSmith Group concluded their meeting with all the stakeholders involved in the planning process.



PSO Member, Paige Bogats writes what changes she would like to see in the community.



PSO members participating in a workshop.



Members put dots on the problems presented that they feel should be addressed first.

The PSO played a large role with the community outreach process of ICUD. Student volunteers facilitated different charrettes, workshops and PET (Preserve, Enhance, Transform) map analysis. Student planners gained valuable experience making a case for "placemaking" with the community and assessing the importance of stakeholders in the planning process. With the completion of the final workshop and finalization of the ICUD planning report the next steps in the planning process is the implementation of the plan itself. PSO can continue working with the ICUD plan as professor and chief planner Jeff Raykes keeps the students involved in the future implementation process.

BIKE RALLY

Written by:
Kayla
Martinez



PSO members getting ready to distribute the decorated bikes before the Bike Rally.

Ready, set, go!



On March 28th the Planning Student Organization hosted a Bike Rally in Indiana, PA that was the end of a community outreach project that the PSO used to raise awareness about an extension of the Hoodlebug Trail. The proposed extension would provide connectivity from the trail on the southern end of IUP's campus to a nearby Sports complex on the Northern-east end of town. Before the rally, the PSO helped organize and volunteered at a workshop that was held at a local business where many members of the community attended and a panel of different community members spoke about the proposal.

Days before the event the PSO decorated old bikes to post on the proposed route. The Bike Rally itself turned out to be a major success. The weather was cold, but over 20 people showed up to bike the proposed route. Having members of the community bike down the route demonstrated that it causes no major conflicts with other modes of transportation. When the event was finished, we received very positive feedback from the community and also raised awareness about the proposed extension. Once the Bike Rally had passed many members of the community were left with questions. Partnered with "Smart Growth" the PSO hosted a informative meeting about the Bike Lane where anyone could come to gather information. As of today the Bike Lane is a project that is being worked on by the local Planning office.



The bikers are off!

Ralliers stop for refreshments sponsored by the PSO outside of a local bike shop.



NEW KENSINGTON BETTER BLOCK

Written by:
Ryan Bobich

Downtown New Kensington was once home to a thriving business sector. However not unlike many small towns in the United States, New Kensington has suffered due to deindustrialization. Much of downtown New Kensington now lays unoccupied. The goal of the Better Block event was to create awareness of the assets possessed by downtown New Ken and to show how minor improvements can bring life back to the area. The Better Block is a tool for communities to complete "living charrettes" or demonstration zones that implement complete streets, enable economic development in dormant areas, and enliven public spaces mainly through tactical urbanism implementations. Team Better Block reduces the planning process down to its essential elements to quickly identify the assets of a community and begin linking them while creating great places for residents, and visitors within weeks, not years. The Better Block approach tests ideas in real-time to see how a community interacts with an area and quantifies those successes to inform a stronger long-term plan and vision for a community.



PSO members
decorating street bikes.



PSO Members after working
hard on decorating the
street bikes.



Kids playing in the
sandbox at the October
Better Block in New Ken.



PSO members Melina Fuchs
and Evan Tobin working with
Smart Growth.



Kids activities at the October New Ken
Better Block.

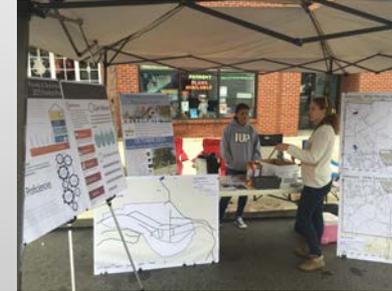
The first Better Block event in New Kensington was held on May 9th 2015. For this Better Block event the Planning Student Organization created Street Bikes. Street bikes are broken and unusable bikes that have been painted and decorated. Street bikes bring much needed direct attention to bike travelers while also adding artistic value to the streets and sidewalks. After the success of the first New Ken Better Block event another was planned for October 17th 2015. For this Better Block event the Planning Student Organization facilitated a children's area with the help of John Turack, the Executive Director/Community Development Assistant for the Smart Growth Partnership/ Penn State Extension. The children's area included a sandbox, cardboard model houses that the kids could build and color, and a model of a town that had different land types such as parks, industrial land, and farms. Kids were then able to choose where they would want to put their model home. This helped the children understand the importance of planning and supported Walter L. Moody's belief that "the ultimate solution of all major problems of American cities lies in the education of our children to their responsibility as the future owners of our municipalities and the arbiters of their governmental destinies."

FOLK FESTIVAL

On September 11, 2015 Indiana Borough hosted its annual Northern Appalachian Folk Festival, a music festival that showcases local artists, bakers, and craftsmen alike. PSO decided to employ tactical urbanism in celebration of the festival, spontaneously decorating Philadelphia Street with paper and balloon lanterns. Over 60 LED lanterns lined the main street of the festival – a spontaneous addition that helped set the DIY atmosphere of the festival. Through using tactical urbanism, PSO members were able to engage the public in temporary urban change, transforming the street into a venue of social exchange and artistic expression. The community of Indiana benefitted from the DIY lanterns, as they drew attention to local artists showcasing their work for the festival, as well as highlighted local businesses and restaurants. The visual beauty of the lanterns were the perfect way to enhance the smells of local food vendors and the sounds of Appalachian folk music.



PSO Members assembling the DIY Lanterns.



The second day of the Folk Festival, the PSO worked with the Indiana County Office of Planning and Development (ICOPD) in educating the community on the new Walk Works Program. Walk Works is a new Program that implements walking paths around towns to encourage community members to exercise. There are already three existing Walk Works Programs in Indiana County and the ICOPD is in the process of creating a projected walking route for Indiana Borough.

Setting the lanterns was many PSO member's first foray into tactical urbanism implementation, while more experienced members who have participated in progressive planning such as Better Block initiatives directed the group. Each lantern consisted of a balloon lit by an internal LED light and was attached to a paper bag filled with pebbles for weights – this allowed for quick and cheap arrangement of the lanterns, while remaining realistic and low-risk, yet pleasing to the eye, especially as the evening set in. The balloons swayed in the September breeze, which prompted street walkers to dance to the nearby main stage of the festival. Unfortunately, not all of the lanterns survived both days of the festival due to mischievous bystanders, though they definitely helped kick off the festival and were a great feature for the first night.

KABOOM PLAYGROUND

Written by:
Stephanie
Ward

The PSO was involved in a KABOOM playground build in the Indiana Borough, Pennsylvania. The build took place in the Fourth Ward. The playground was installed in order to provide recreational opportunities to children living in that ward, where there had been few to no opportunities for group play and interaction. PSO students arrived in the morning to begin working on the project, along with volunteers from other community organizations. There were various tasks that needed to be completed that our PSO members helped to fulfill. Members assisted with site preparation. These tasks included digging holes, assembling and installing equipment, leveling the site, spreading concrete and applying mulch. Members also distributed refreshments to workers, and documented the entire process through photography. Within several hours the volunteers had successfully installed the new playground.



PSO member, Stephanie Ward shovelling and levelling mulch.



After four hours of hard work from community and PSO members, the playground was finished and ready for kids to play!



PSO president, Meling Fuchs tightening the handles to ensure it is safe for kids to play on.

The request for volunteers for the event was announced at PSO meetings and in several classes within the Planning Department. Several members showed up the morning of the build in order to assist the other community groups create the playground. It would have been nice if more members would have been present but those who were at the event had a great experience. They were able to meet and work with representatives from various community groups, public/municipal officials and elected officials. This provided excellent networking opportunities, all the while helping the children of the community. The project was successful. The PSO came together with many community groups and volunteers to create the playground in an area lacking recreational opportunities. The playground will now provide a safe, state of the art area for children in the Fourth Ward of the Indiana Borough to play and interact with one another.

CITY GOVERNMENT INTERACTION

On October 21st, 2015, members of the Planning Student Organization attended Indiana's Planning Commission Meeting in the Borough Building. The meeting comprised of not only members of the County's Planning Commission, but also participants in the Borough Council. The commission went over a number of topics, including new zoning considerations and a redevelopment project for one section of the town. The renewal plan in specific was discussed heavily and members of the community went before the board to give suggestions and insight on how to make it more successful. With relation to the PSO, the experience was very helpful because it showed many members real-life application of skills learned in the classroom with regard to planning, zoning, and GIS usage. The demonstrated interest of the PSO in city government, proved to the Planning Commission our desire to be involved in the community. Following the meeting, the Indiana Borough Assistant Manager/Planning Director, Dana Turgeon, asked the PSO to assist in a project in downtown Indiana. Along with Mr. Turgeon, Otto Peterson, the Zoning Officer/Building & Electrical Inspector offered to come speak to the PSO along with Mayor George Hood to discuss their involvement in the community.



Mayor George Hood telling the PSO about his job and how he works with planning.



PSO members Ryan Anderson and Chris Volpe attending the Planning Commission Meeting.



Otto Peterson explaining the importance and usage of zoning in Indiana Borough.

Prior to the Planning Commission Meeting, the members of the board worked in conjunction with the Borough Council and the local planning department to create several designs for projects that were displayed. Several inconsistencies were found in the proposal for the redevelopment program that were found by participants. However, the Planning Commission informed the participants that they would resolve it in an upcoming workshop. When Mayor Hood and Otto Peterson visited the PSO, it was very insightful and informative to PSO members. We learned how the Mayor interacts with the Borough members, and it was very interesting for members to learn that there is no zoning in White Township, which surrounds Indiana Borough. We also learned that the Mayor has a lot of trust and a good relationships with the people who work for him, which is not always the case.

APA PA CONFERENCE

Written by:
Marysa
Myers

The Pennsylvania Chapter of the American Planning Association was held in Pittsburgh at the Westin Hotel and Conference center, on October 18th, 19th and 20th. The state chapter conference allows everyone involved in planning to come together and share knowledge. The conference lets everyone trade ideas; see how they were implemented and what their results may have been. There were nine PSO members who volunteered at the conference for the three days it was held. The students helped by setting up each room for presentations. This included setting up projectors, name cards, fixing the placement of chairs and anything else the speaker may have needed. Students were given specified rooms to maintain for the duration of the conference but were also given access to all benefits of the conference.



Once the students had ensured that the projectors would have no technical problems for the presenter, students were able to move rooms to sit in on the presentations that interested them personally. The student volunteers were also invited to dinners, reception events and keynote speaker events within the conference. The admission to all conference events gave the students a real look into what the professional planning stage is like. Students were not only able to enjoy presentations and guest speakers that they thought would benefit them, but also to network with professionals and gain experience and knowledge that can be used later on in their educational life and professional life.

PRE-PARKLET ACTIVITY

Written by:
Ryan
Anderson

Park(ing) day is a movement dedicated to showing public space in a different light. Most commonly with pop-up Parklets, which take a few on-street parking spaces and give it back to pedestrians. The PSO planned, designed, and implemented a one-day Parklet in our downtown. Local businesses donated some materials, and a cafe/art gallery was glad to offer 2 parallel parking spaces in front of their business, along with indoor space for our class' guest speaker. It was a chilly day on the shady side of the street, but a good place for hot chocolate, flowers, games of chess, and a quick yoga session.



As part of the design process, the PSO met with a local 5th grade class at Horace Mann elementary school. We explained to the class what a Parklet is and they were all intrigued from the start. Then the 5th graders divided into groups to draft ideas for the Parklet, while we used our facilitation skills to encourage their ideas. On the day of the event, their designs were posted up along the facade by the Parklet, and their class came by in the morning and contributed chalk-art. This was a great opportunity to get youngsters involved in community planning and the students learned what public space is and what they can do with it.

PARKLET

On October 23rd, the PSO implemented a Parklet in downtown Indiana in front of a local coffee shop. This idea was presented by the Indiana County Office of Planning and Development (ICOPD) as an activity for National Planning Month. The county lacked the bandwidth to implement the Parklet, and suggested the PSO take over the event. This began with a meeting at the beginning of the month with attendance from county, borough, community and PSO members. The idea of a Parklet is to demonstrate to the community exactly what public space is, and how it can be used. We collected data on legal Parklet requirements, inquired how to obtain two parking spots for a whole day, and purchased necessary materials along with receiving donations. The PSO signed up for shifts to monitor the Parklet and created fact sheets to distribute to curious people passing the Parklet. Melina Fuchs (PSO President), Brandon Kendera (vice president), Jeff Raykes (deputy director of the ICOPD), Dr. Watts (PSO advisor) and other community members showed up to the site at 7AM to design the Parklet. We used hay bails and wooden benches as buffers, purchased AstroTurf as flooring, had floor plants and mums donated for decorations, a table and chairs donated for extra seating, and large cones to make sure drivers saw that there were people there. There were events planned throughout the day such as yoga, live music and pumpkin painting and chalk art for local children.



PARKLET CONT.

Written by:
Melina Fuchs

At 11AM, the PSO was visited by two Indiana Borough cops, who questioned what was going on. We explained that a parking space is public space and we were demonstrating to the community how they can use their public space. When the PSO first went to the Police Station to inquire about renting parking spaces, we explained what our plan was and were told to just come back the day before and purchase two bags to put over the meters the day of the Parklet. Despite previously explaining to an officer what our plans were, the two officers claimed the Parklet was a safety hazard and required that the PSO move all the materials onto the sidewalk. We originally refused, continuing to explain to the officers that Parklets are legal, exist in major cities in the United States and Canada, and that we met every safety guideline. The officers called the Sergeant and he demanded that we move all our materials onto the sidewalk. Despite putting up a fight, we complied with the Sergeant and moved the materials onto the sidewalk.



Sergeant Kovalcik after speaking with PSO members.



Morning yoga moved to the sidewalk.



Students with their painted pumpkins at the park.



PSO Members Dan Welsh and Ryan Anderson playing music.



Local elementary students chalking the sidewalks and sitting in front of their Parklet drawings.



The PSO was originally defeated, but decided we could still get our point across and catch the communities attention even if we were on the sidewalk. The events continued as scheduled with yoga, a visit from local elementary students to see their Parklet drawings and decorate the sidewalk, live music, and pumpkin painting. The pumpkin painting location was changed to a local park as requested by the teacher because she did not want to explain the issue with the police to the kids, which could have possibly strewed their opinions of the local police. Although the event did not go as planned, the PSO still got their point across and educated the community about public space. The PSO plans to give the Parklet another try in the spring, but will attend a Public Safety meeting prior to the event to explain to them that a Parklet is legal and demonstrate that we fulfilled all Parklet safety guidelines. The PSO experienced first hand the existing political problems that exist in planning and it was a valuable experience.

TREE BOX REBUILD

After receiving complaints from residents of Indiana Borough about the uneven and unsafe tree boxes lining Philadelphia Street in downtown Indiana, the borough was given the task from Public Safety of raising 64 tree boxes of the 500 block of Philadelphia Street. Lacking the man power to complete this, they reached out to the PSO asking for volunteers to help. On October 24th, PSO members and friends showed up ready to help. The job required removing the permeable rock tiles, placing a tarp on top of the existing mulch, laying sand, levelling the sand, then re-laying the rock tiles. The first day, the PSO and Borough staff successfully raised eight tree boxes. The following Saturday, the PSO and Borough members worked hard to complete one side of the block.



PSO member, Ryan Bobich, carefully removes the rock tiles without breaking them.



PSO president, Melina Fuchs, holds the tarp while others cut it to fit in the box.



PSO members Ryan Bobich and Chris Volpe, replacing tiles that had been cracked while being removed.



PSO member, Ryan Bobich, spreading the sand evenly so it can be levelled.



PSO vice president, Brandon Kendera, moving to the next box to level the sand.



The finished tree box is even with the sidewalk and is now safe for pedestrians.

The PSO learned that planning can be manual and that even tedious tasks such as raising tree boxes is all included in planning. The Borough members were extremely grateful in our participation, and asked us if we would be willing to help finish the other side of the block in the spring. This activity instilled great pride in the PSO as we personally improved the safety on the sidewalk of downtown Indiana and that we helped improve its aesthetics as well. The PSO looks forward to working with Borough members again in the spring and has established a positive relationship with the Borough and are pleased that the members are confident in relying on our help. There were only about five PSO members that showed up at the Tree Box Rebuild, which is why the opposite side of the block has not been finished. In the spring, we hope to obtain more volunteers so that the tree boxes can all be levelled in one day.

LETTERS OF SUPPORT

Dr. Whit Watts: PSO Advisor, *IUP Department of Geography and Regional Planning*

Jeff Raykes: Deputy Director, *Indiana County Office of Planning and Development*

Dr. John Benhart: Department Chair, *IUP Department of Geography and Regional Planning*

George Hood: Mayor, *Indiana Borough*

Dana Turgeon: Assistant Manager/Director of Planning and Zoning, *Indiana Borough*

John Turack: Executive Director/Community Development Assistant for the Smart Growth Partnership/ *Penn State Extension*

Josh Krug: Chief Planner, *Indiana County Office of Planning and Development*

Barbara Hauge: Chair, *LINC (Livable Indiana Neighborhood Connections)*

On behalf of the IUP Chapter of PSO, Melina Fuchs and Brandon Kendera
Thank you for your consideration in this opportunity
to be recognized for our Community Outreach.



Check us out on Facebook: [APA Planning Student Organization at IUP](#)