

Dear Rich Appelbaum, Ph.D.,

Please find enclosed the Documentation Report for my Applied component of HOD-703: Systems, Social, and Community Studies. In the contract, I proposed to use my non-profit – Village Design Institute – to present a Design Course applying the principles gathered during the Overview and Depth phases of the study. This Design Course did in fact transpire. The original plan was to host an Urban Village Project in my native Bellingham, conducting a comprehensive design process at the scale of the Happy Valley neighborhood (see overleaf); however, I ended up moving from Bellingham before the Project could get underway.

Synchronistically, around that time a new Project was being initiated in Albuquerque. Ecovillage Design Southwest (EDS) asked to use my non-profit as their supporting organization; and to this I readily agreed. EDS had plans to host an “Ecovillage Design Education” (EDE), the international education sponsored by the Global Ecovillage Network and endorsed by UNITAR as an official contribution to the UN’s Decade of Education for Sustainable Development, 2005-2014. Earlier, as the Applied phase of my HOD-708 study, I coordinated the writing of this EDE curriculum; so, naturally, the EDS team was seeking my participation in the planning and delivery of their EDE – especially since this was to be the first full EDE in North America. The Ecovillage Design Education curriculum can be found at www.gaiaeducation.org.

As the culmination of a full year of conference-call organizing, the first Dimension of the EDE – Worldview – was delivered in September 2007 as an extension program to the University of New Mexico. The Social Dimension followed in November 2007, the Economic Dimension in February 2008, and the Ecological Dimension will be presented in May of this year. By any standard, the first full EDE in North America, right there in Albuquerque, can be considered a resounding success – in some respects setting a global precedent.

I used the Social Dimension to introduce the concept of the “Urban Village,” as propounded and elaborated upon in my HOD-703 paper *The Urban Village: Synergy of Ecology and Urbanism*. The Urban Village was to be understood as a comprehensive retrofit solution for the urban pattern during the coming anticipated scenario of energy descent. As one defining feature, the Urban Village eclipsed the Ecovillage in socio-economies of scale, such that, from a systems perspective, the greater Urban Village could be considered as comprising ten to twelve neighborhood-scale – and thus more intimate – Ecovillages. As a design and decision-making guideline, I also devised and articulated a list of “12 Principles of Social Design.”

These ideas were applied in a Design Studio format. Participants of the EDE were organized into four design teams. The first task was to understand influences at the scale of the bioregion; thus, on a map of New Mexico, participants illustrated various regional factors that effect or converge upon conditions in Albuquerque.

Next, on a base map at metropolitan-scale, design teams were asked to sub-organize greater Albuquerque (theoretically 500,000 persons) into ten to twelve ‘districts’ of approximately 50,000 persons each – each district with a well-defined boundary and a well-

defined center. As could be expected, there were remarkable similarities in design team delineations, as well as unique peculiarities. This is one benefit of the group design process: in that each team had a chance afterward to discuss their rationalizations, and so contribute to a collective pool of expanding knowledge. No one team was exactly 'right' or 'correct;' yet by sharing their rationalizations, accompanied by feedback from the whole group, a clearer understanding of fundamental issues was gained by all.

Then, following up on another occasion, design teams were re-assembled and asked to select one of their original districts. This district of 50,000 was to be sub-organized into ten to twelve Urban Villages of 5000 persons each – 5000 being the magic number put forward in the guiding paper. Each Urban Village was to be demarcated by a well-defined boundary and a well-defined center, and each was to perform a specialized function within the larger whole of which it is a part.

I must admit, I was very impressed with the outcome of this exercise. Participants' knowledge of their local place, embellished with new ideas coming through the EDE, enabled them to imagine and configure details beyond the stated range of the exercise. For example, one team created a circulation pattern through their district linking the centers of all the Urban Villages into a network. This team also "daylighted" a currently buried watercourse, and used that as one seam in their Urban Village network. Another team, working on another district, was able to specify in some detail the unique function that each Urban Village would serve within its network. Another team devised advanced features to ecologically integrate their villages into a sloping landscape.

All told, facilitating this Urban Village Design Studio was a very valuable experience for me – and an appropriate demonstration of learning for my HOD-703 study. Through my non-profit, I had previously hosted a couple of Ecovillage Design Courses – where the mapping occurred on scales of 20 acres in more rural settings – yet this was my first opportunity to try mapping at the scale of the metropolis. Undoubtedly, it was the research and writing during the Overview and Depth phases of my HOD-703 study that prepared me for this next step.

This HOD-703 study also came with unexpected benefits: During the writing of my paper, I was introduced to a developer who had recently been lit up with a passion to build what he calls "sustainable communities." When I told him what I'd been working on, he responded approvingly, "Can I hire you?" I'm now working on two "Urban Village" projects in the City of Bothell, a suburb of Seattle.

Many thanks for your sponsorship of this study;
There's a whole continent waiting to be retrofitted!

E. Christopher Mare
President – Village Design Institute