Dwelling, Health and the Built Environment: Envisioning Possible Futures for Ellis Heights – Fairgrounds Valley

Architectural Design ARCH 572: Behavior and Environment  
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Overview: This studio will explore redevelopment of a Midwestern industrial city in the post-industrial age. Using a neighborhood in the City of Rockford, IL, as the vehicle for investigation, students in this studio will engage with The Rockford Housing Authority and residents of the Ellis Heights – Fairgrounds Valley neighborhood to re-envision the neighborhood as a physically, socially and economically healthy community developed around green infrastructure and healthy homes concepts. The primary questions this studio will explore are:

1) What is the meaning of this place for residents and how might it be leveraged to redevelop this neighborhood?
2) How might the environment of the neighborhood contribute to the physical, mental, social and economic health of a community?
3) What role can housing, commercial, and non-traditional educational environments play in a higher quality of life for neighborhood residents?

Neighborhood Vision Map: Ellis Heights – Fairgrounds Valley Neighborhood: Rockford, Illinois

Format: This studio will employ a collaborative participatory design process in working with our community partner and residents of the Ellis Heights – Fairgrounds Valley Neighborhood.

Schedule/phases: The studio will be divided into 4 components, each incorporating opportunities for feedback from RHA Staff, Partners and neighborhood residents in order to produce design products that will be helpful to future redevelopment efforts.

1) Research and initial engagement with Rockford Housing Authority Staff and Partners (students in teams of 3 or 4)
2) Detailed neighborhood redevelopment scenarios and incorporation of LEED ND principles/standards (students in teams of 3 or 4)
3) Sub-neighborhood strategies for housing and educational/training facilities (students work in pairs)
4) Housing, commercial or educational/training facilities proposals with focus on LEED criteria and healthy homes standards (students work individually but collaborate regarding overall strategy)

Fieldtrips: Fieldtrips to the neighborhood and to work with Housing Authority staff, project partners, and residents are an integral part of this studio experience in which all students will be expected to participate as fully as possible. A preliminary schedule of the fieldtrip dates are as follows, but are subject to change as needed to facilitate collaboration with our partners in Rockford, IL:

January 25 (Friday) – Day-long Site Visit and Charrette with RHA staff and partners
February 23 (Saturday) – Day-long Progress Review with RHA staff, partners and residents for feedback and recycle
April 5 (Saturday) – Day-long Review with RHA staff, partners and residents for feedback and recycle

Products: The interim and final products of this studio will be used to facilitate interaction with project partners. Interim products will include digital presentation tools, physical boards and both digital and physical models. The final products will include digital boards, a physical model of the neighborhood within which individual design proposal will be placed, and a final comprehensive studio booklet of all proposals. This will be produced using a template developed by all studio members in consultation with RHA staff.

1 This studio will join with on-going HUD-funded, Choice Neighborhood planning processes in Ellis Heights-Fairground Valley. The basics of the Choice Neighborhood Planning process to date can be found at www.rockfordhacn.org