



**LAR 545-001 Semester Paper**  
**Analysis of A Land Use Issue**

Due date: ***See class schedule.***

Interim due dates will be given for parts of the assignment. The details of these interim due dates will be communicated throughout the course.

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**Format:** This assignment should be in written form, 10 or 12 point type, Single-spaced or 1 ½ spaced lines (not double spaced). Illustrations are encouraged to make your ideas clearer to the reader. This is an opportunity to show how you can communicate both in written and graphic form - a great portfolio-builder!

The final document should be in .pdf format, and should have a title, the name and number of the course, the title of your project, the date, and your name on the title page. Submittal procedures will be discussed in class.

**Length:** The length of this paper is not specifically required, but it will be difficult to do a creditable job of completing the assignment in less than 12 pages of text, plus illustrations. Please use all the pages you need, but the narrative is important. A project that is all illustration and little narrative is unlikely to convey all the information necessary to complete the assignment appropriately.

**Instructions:** This project has several stages:

1. **Attend a public meeting** where planning issues are considered. Most communities in the Triangle area have a Planning Commission or Planning Board. All of them have an elected Town Council or City Council. Many others have an Appearance Commission, or a Board of Zoning Adjustment, or a Historic Commission that has jurisdiction over construction relating to historic properties or districts. In some communities land use issues are considered by the City Council or Town Council. Re-zoning cases and changes to the land use regulations are all required to be approved by the elected governing body by state law after a public hearing is held. A public hearing is a great place to start your research! In most cases further review is necessary after a public hearing, so you will be able to observe the case from its beginning. You may select a hearing that is unrelated to a regulatory action, such as a public event to gather comments about a small area plan, or a corridor plan. **There will be a submittal required at this stage - see class schedule for due date. See rubric on the web site for more information on what is required.**
2. **Select a case at your public meeting to track and analyze - relate to what you are learning.** Try to pick a controversial case! They are more fun and generally test the appropriateness of the public process better than an open-and-shut case. It might be a re-zoning case, a change in the development regulations, an update to the Comprehensive Plan, a development plan in a historic district, a variance to the land use regulations, a small area plan or corridor plan or a similar issue. Hopefully the case you select will require further review, so you can track its progress through more than one meeting. TAKE GOOD NOTES! If you have questions bring them to class and we'll talk about them. Select a case in the context of the history we are learning in class - I want you to relate the evolution of planning in the last century-and-a-half to this contemporary case. **There will be a submittal required at this stage - see class schedule for due date. See rubric on the web site for more information on what is required.**
3. **Data gathering and analysis.** Collect as much data as you can about your case:

- a. Who are the proponents / applicants? How did this case come about? What is the nature of this case and what do the proponents hope to accomplish?
- b. What is the process this plan must follow in order to be approved? You will have to do some research on this with the governmental agency.
- c. What is the makeup of the deliberating body? Is it an elected board, an appointed commission, or something else? What is its mission and role in the approval process? Who is on the board or commission and why were they appointed (do they have specific knowledge or skills)?
- d. Is a public hearing required, and if so, why? What are the parameters of this hearing? Who can ask questions? What can they say and not say? What that they hear can be considered by the decision-makers in deciding the case?
- e. Who are the staff professionals who are representing the community / presenting the case and its implications to the deliberative body? What is their role in the process of approval?
- f. Are there opponents? Who are they and what is their stake in the issue?
- g. What is the regulatory or planning document that the proposal is being measured against? Is it a zoning code, subdivision regulations, a unified development ordinance, an area plan or the community's Comprehensive Plan? Or is it more than one document? How did the community endorse that document as representing its values?
- h. What type of decision is this? A final decision? An advisory decision? There are other types of public decisions (quasi-judicial, administrative) – you will find out about these in class.
- i. What specific issues appear to be the most important (what are people talking about most)?

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4. **Analyze, describe the role of professionals, apply your own ideas, make a conclusion and back it up.** This is where your paper comes together. This portion of your work should cover these areas:
  - a. Why is this process or program even here? How has it evolved to this point – what happened in the history of city planning that brought something like this to the attention of the community in this form? What is the trade-off between public interest and private property rights? What's the nature of the decision to be made? Is it a physical design issue or a social issue (or both)?
  - b. Describe the roles of design and planning professionals in this process. What design professionals or planning professionals are involved, from the development of the guiding public documents, to the administration of the process from the public side, to the preparation of the site-specific design? What is their role? How do they perform this role? What are the skillsets that seem effective in their role? Apply your own ideas to this case. Will this process result in a better city? What would you do differently? How much do you feel input from the public at large is considered here and how important is that? Do you think the process was effective in testing "the will of the people"? Who has control of the outcome in this case? What do you think of this? What do you think should happen, or if the case is decided do you think it was decided correctly? What aspects of "planning" – thinking about the long-term outcome for the city – are reflected in this case? How do you think, based on what you've learned here, planning in the future can be improved by the involvement of professionals like you?

**There will NOT be a submittal required at this stage - this is where you will be writing your final submittal. Note the overall due date at the top of this document.**

5. **Prepare a class presentation** of your project that you can complete in 5 minutes or less. That is not going to be easy, but, like writing, the challenge is to decide what is important and what is not, and then how to get the important points across in an effective way. You may employ whatever media you wish and include handouts if you'd like.

**Here's how you get a good grade on this assignment:**

- **Don't wait to go to your first meeting.** You need to get a jump on this early! Meetings on land use issues in most jurisdictions happen only once, or at most twice, a month. Waiting until late February or March to get started on this will spell disaster – so start on this right away. Meetings are generally posted publicly on local government web sites.
- **Tell a story!** These cases are always about more than just the technical issues surrounding the case. There is a proponent who wants to make positive change. There are elected and appointed officials who have to consider what's right for the city, what their personal ethics tell them, and what keeps them in their jobs. There are professionals representing the proponents. There are professionals who work for the community to support the decision-makers. And there's you and how you feel about all this. Tell these stories. Don't just relate a lot of facts. After all, planning is about people.
- **Write clearly and concisely** with no misspellings or grammatical mistakes. Please spell check and read it over, then edit before you submit. If English is not your native language, ask a native English speaker to read it over first and suggest edits, or take advantage of the resources offered by the Graduate Writing Center. I want this to be a work you can put in your portfolio as an example of your writing skills.
- **State the essence of the issue in the context of planning history and the theorists who helped in the evolution of the profession.** Relate what you are learning by researching this case to your design education and to what you are learning in class. That's the reason you have so much time to complete this. Why is all this of interest to landscape architects and other design professionals?
- **Use illustrations to maximum effect**, not just for eyewash. Use them to help you tell the story. Planners are very good with words and numbers. Designers are good with graphics. If you put them both together you will have the best of both worlds.
- **Choose a case that has some ambiguity to it** – a case with some opposition is always good. When people feel strongly it is probably a good case to consider. It will also engage you in your own opinion, which I value and want to hear about.
- **Use sources outside of just the meeting you attend and your online research.** Talk to planners, proponents, opponents in person to hear what their take on the issue is. Discuss this with other faculty and students. Broaden your research to compare and contrast similar issues that may have come up in other communities and what happened there. Is there a national trend here? Find out and write about it.
- **I want to hear YOUR opinion** about the proper outcome and reasons why you think this way. Every great paper starts with a premise – an idea that you have that is either proven or disproven by what you learn as you do your research. A dispassionate paper that just reiterates facts, even if thoroughly done is at best a B-, so make sure to take it seriously and give me your thinking, supported by the facts.