URP 526: Scenario Planning

Fall 2021
Instructor: Robert Goodspeed (rgoodspe@umich.edu)
Schedule: Tues/Thurs 10:00-11:30 AM

The future of cities will be shaped by decisions being made today, as well as uncertain trends like climate change, new technologies, economic shifts, and changing demographics. Scenario planning is a powerful method used by cities and regions to steer towards desirable futures and prepare for what lies ahead. Instead of basing plans only a most likely or must desired future, practitioners using scenario planning construct multiple possible futures. Doing so requires combining art with science as scenarios are a synthesis of creativity and rigorous analysis. The goal of scenario planning is to make better plans and decisions by challenging stakeholder assumptions and encouraging learning.

This course introduces students to this exciting professional technique, as well as provide hands-on experience using qualitative and GIS-based planning support systems (PSS) used to implement scenario planning. This course contains four modules: (1) an overview of scenario planning theory and concepts, (2) a discussion of the three main approaches to use these ideas in urban planning, (3) an examination of some of the modeling tools used for scenario planning, and (4) an opportunity to use leading PSS tools to construct and analyze scenarios. The course will involve readings, discussion, and a series of individual and group assignments which culminate in detailed student-generated scenarios for sites in Ann Arbor.

Learning Goals

By the end of the course, students will:
- Develop knowledge and skills to be *reflective practitioners* (Schön 1983) who draw on scenario techniques appropriately to foster urban progress through effective planning practice.
- Have knowledge derived from hands-on experience of a variety of qualitative and quantitative techniques used by scenario planners to analyze trends, construct scenario narratives, and model scenarios using GIS tools.

Course Assignments

The course involves discussion posts of assigned readings, and a series of short individual and group assignments which culminate in a presentation of scenarios for Ann Arbor's future.