who we are and what we do

THE URBAN LAB, Faculty of Environmental Design, University of Calgary is a research centre dealing with urban design, community planning, and urban development issues. The Urban Lab works with community associations, town and city councils, neighbourhood committees and other civic groups. Our work is funded through research grants and project commissions.

We strive to understand the places in which we live, and to find ways to develop urban form that is ecologically and economically sustainable, and that is appropriate in our contemporary cultural context. The search for a regional expression of civic and architectural design is a major underpinning of our work. Our approach, Townscape Analysis, always begins with a detailed analysis of the context of the project, where we try to understand the historical, environmental, cultural and political influences and processes.

All work is directed by faculty members with professional experience and credentials, and completed by teams of faculty and graduate research assistants.

The Urban Lab is linked to the Urban Design Program at the Faculty of Environmental Design, and we attempt to integrate our research projects and findings into our teaching.

If you have a project that you would like to discuss, or for further information about the Urban Lab or the Urban Design Program, please contact Dr. Bev Sandalack at 403-263-2841.

Welcome to the third edition of our update on activities, projects and employment opportunities at the Urban Lab. This newsletter will include information on some of our projects, features on urban design issues in Calgary and notices of upcoming events at our downtown Calgary location.

events

sense of place

As a means of helping to mark the occasion of the Centennial of the Province of Alberta, a celebration of Sense of Place was held from September 23 to November 10.

Events related to sense of place were held at the Nickle Arts Museum and included an exhibition exploring the prairie, foothills, mountain, aboriginal and urban landscapes of southern Alberta, a collection of artifacts relating to these landscapes, and a continuously running series of videos exploring place and placelessness.

Day long excursions into these cultural landscapes were held on weekends throughout the fall, and were led by experts on these special places, and attended by students and members of the public.

In addition, several lectures and panels allowed additional discussion of issues of place, and two books were published.

Part of the Sense of Place exhibit explored the prairie, foothills, mountain, aboriginal and urban landscapes in southern Alberta. Exhibit design and installation by Ainsley Davidson and James Sloane.
21st century city + urban design strategies symposium

The EVDS Urban Lab and the Calgary Civic Trust collaborated on a three day symposium to consider some contemporary issues in urban design and specifically the Calgary context. The conference brought together local practitioners, academics, developers, administrators, politicians and students along with invited keynote speakers and panelists from around Canada and internationally.

Keynote addresses by Doug Paterson, George Baird, Ted Relph, Mark Kingwell and Essy Baniassad were thought provoking and challenging, and were responded to by local leaders in the planning and design disciplines, including Jamal Ramjohn (AACIP President), Len Novak (landscape architect and past president of the CSLA), and Brent Toderian (Manager of City Centre Planning). This gave a counterpoint to each of the keynote addresses, and further set the stage for panel discussions.

One of the strengths of the symposium was the involvement of locals as well as experts from elsewhere. There is a rich culture of urban design practice and discussion in Calgary, and too often the local experience is passed over in favour of outside gurus.

urban design educators session

The final day of the symposium consisted of a session on urban design education. Over a dozen educators from across the country met to present ideas and approaches to urban design education and to consider collaborations.

This was a landmark event – likely the first gathering of urban design educators in Canada. It gave participants an opportunity to discuss their programs and courses, and helped to acquaint the participants with the Urban Design Program at the University of Calgary - one of only two formal university programs in this emerging discipline.

A publication consisting of submissions by the participants is currently under preparation.

An exhibition of submissions by many of the participants is on display in the EVDS Urban Lab downtown centre.
sense of place: a catalogue of essays
ed Ann Davis & Beverly A. Sandalack
2005 The Nickle Arts Museum.
In 2005, a series of events called Sense of Place was developed to help commemorate Alberta's Centennial. This included an exhibition at the Nickle, several excursions into the cultural landscapes of Alberta, a series of videos exploring different aspects of 'place', several speakers and panels, and two publications.

A large multidisciplinary committee directed by Dr. Ann Davis, Acting Director of Information Resources and former Director of the Nickle Arts Museum, met for over five years to discuss ideas of place and placelessness and to plan the events. A steering composed of Ann Davis, Bev Sandalack, Len Novak and Bob Sandford worked with the Urban Lab on several activities. Ainsley Davidson and James Sloane designed the exhibition, Francisco Alaniz Uribe designed the publications, and several students were involved with other aspects of the project.

Sense of Place: a catalogue of essays is the first in a series of four related publications, intended as ways of learning, teaching and gaining inspiration, and of presenting opportunities to reflect and to critically evaluate the ideas of place and placelessness. Essays by ten authors explore sense of place from various perspectives.

excursions into the cultural landscapes of alberta
ed Beverly A. Sandalack & Ann Davis
2005 The Nickle Arts Museum.
Perhaps the most distinctive part of the Sense of Place events were several Excursions into the Cultural Landscapes of Alberta. During the fall, groups were led on investigations of the foothill, mountain, prairie and aboriginal landscapes by Len Novak, Bob Sandford, Bev Sandalack and Ron Goodfellow. Companion essays and maps were developed into a richly illustrated publication that also includes five routes exploring the Calgary urban landscape and the multicultural experience of place. The course Cultural Landscapes was offered this term in EVDS to take advantage of the Sense of Place activities. Nine students prepared projects that explored an aspect of the cultural landscape of Alberta.

During the 21st Century City Symposium, five groups of EVDS students presented versions of the Calgary excursions, as part of a Block Course that allowed them to take part in the symposium and to help those from elsewhere to learn about Calgary. These presentations will be compiled into a public web page over the next semester.
Red Deer County Open Space Plan

Working in collaboration with Dillon Consulting, the Urban Lab conducted an inventory of all county owned open spaces, and developed some guiding principles for an open space plan. This provided an important database and classification of the open spaces into a working typology according to function and accessibility. This was used to help create a vision for a comprehensive open space plan for Red Deer County, and as the first step in developing more detailed plans for strategic areas.

This project employed six students from three EVDS programs - Urban Design, Planning and Environmental Science - and provided an excellent opportunity to learn more about regional planning, landscape issues, and public realm needs in a rural county.

Red Deer County contains much impressive natural landscape, with population concentrated near the Calgary-Edmonton corridor. A cohesive system of open spaces and trails is one objective of the plan.

Springbrook/Gasoline Alley Area Structure Plan

The Urban Lab and Red Deer County are collaborating on innovative approaches to the planning and development of high quality, sustainable townscapes and landscapes. The design process is based upon a comprehensive analysis of the region’s landscape, which helps us to set out principles and guidelines for development in the area.

This project is also developing environmental and urban design plans and guidelines for the settlements of Springbrook and Gasoline Alley, as the areas that are most likely to experience growth. Principles developed for these areas can then guide other forms of residential development and land use policies.

Plans for Springbrook and Gasoline Alley recently received first reading at Red Deer County Council. County Planning Director Harry Harker encouraged innovation and exploration of more sustainable practices of land planning, neighbourhood design and street standards, and the development of more compact and connected villages and clusters of developments, as an antidote to more conventional patterns of sprawl.

Harry Harker and Bev Sandalack were recent guests on CBC Radio’s Wild Rose Country where they discussed the project.

Pine Lake Area Structure Plan

Pine Lake is an important recreation amenity in Central Alberta, and has recently been undergoing significant development pressure. The Urban Lab conducted an extensive environmental analysis that is being used to inform land use decisions and guide future development. The plans are in the final stages of preparation, and emphasize water quality, environmental sustainability, locally-based economic activities such as eco-agricultural endeavours that could also focus the tourism potential of the area. Proposals for location of a village centre are also being considered.
projects

varsity courts

Varsity Courts, also known as the University of Calgary's married students' residences, finds itself beside a new entry for the university which was developed with the new Children's Hospital in the West Campus. A site and landscape plan is attempting to address issues of safety, noise and appearance for Varsity Courts, and also to create a legible and high quality entry for the university.

Entry to Varsity Courts must also address the broader issues of campus access and legibility.

news and notables

The Urban Lab is pleased to have had the opportunity to collaborate during 2005 on projects with several EVDS Alumni and Adjunct Professors, including the following:

**Springbrook-Gasoline Alley ASP**

Harry Harker, Director of Planning with Red Deer County, is an Adjunct Professor.

**Pine Lake ASP**

Jacqueline Arling and Jamal Ramjohn, Planners with Dillon Consulting, are EVDS grads.

**Red Deer Open Space Plan**

Harry Harker, Adjunct Professor, is Director of Planning, Red Deer County. The Urban Lab has been working with RDC over the past few years, and Harry has contributed to several EVDS courses as a lecturer and studio crit.

**Sense of Place Publications and Events, and Excursions into the Cultural Landscapes of Alberta**

Len Novak is Adjunct Professor

**21st Century City + Urban Design Strategies Symposium**

Panelists included:

- Bill Chomik, Adjunct
- Jim Dewald, Adjunct
- David Down, Adjunct
- Carlos De Leo, Adjunct
- Yves Gosselin, Alumnus
- Jamal Ramjohn, Alumnus
- Jeremy Sturgess, Adjunct
- Fred Valentine, Adjunct

Conradation to the following former Urban Lab staff:

Andrei Nicolai, former Urban Lab research associate and EVDS Adjunct Professor, recently completed his PhD at Oxford Brookes University, and is now working and teaching in the United Arab Emirates.

Ryan Perry, Urban Lab research assistant 2004-2005 successfully defended his EVDS Master’s Degree Project (MDP) dealing with the evolution of the urban forest in Calgary neighbourhoods, including recommendations and strategies, and is currently working as a Planner in Coquitlam.

Kate Lambert, Urban Lab research assistant 2004-2005 successfully defended her MDP which evaluated livability of Garrison Woods and Somerset according to several variables, and has returned to Victoria BC.

Jinwei Zhang, Urban Lab research assistant 2000-2003, recently left BKDI Architects and moved to San Diego and is working as an architect.

Julio Marce Santa, Urban Lab research assistant 2001-2003 and the first EVDS graduate in Urban Design, is working as an architect and urban designer in Mexico City.