Program and Staff Updates

The Community GIS (CGIS) program is hosting “Visualizing Neighborhoods: A Hackathon for Good” on May 25. The day-long event will bring together neighborhood leaders, technologists, data visualizers, designers, artists, scientists, civil servants, and anyone else interested to explore how data can be used for research, analyzing, mapping, outreach, engagement, and communication in our neighborhoods. The goals are to start conversations, build community, experiment, and prototype projects for neighborhoods. The event is currently full, but a waitlist has been created. For more information or to be added to the waitlist, visit www.cura.umn.edu/visualizingneighborhoods. CGIS has hired two new research assistants for spring semester. Tony Damiano is a graduate student in the Urban and Regional Planning program at the Hubert H. Humphrey School of Public Affairs, and Nick Shauer is an undergraduate in the Department of Geography majoring in geographic information systems. CGIS Director Jeff Matson and Cecilia Martinez from the Center for Earth, Energy and Democracy presented the Twin Cities Environmental Justice Atlas at a meeting of the City of Minneapolis’s Citizens Environmental Advocacy Committee on March 6. In January, Matson was selected to serve on the steering committee for a newly formed American Community Survey (ACS) Data Users Group organized by the Population Reference Bureau in Washington, D.C. The purpose of the users group is to improve understanding of the value and utility of ACS data, as well as to facilitate ongoing discussion and exchange about ACS data issues through an external website, webinars, workshops, conference presentations, and several ACS data users conferences.

The Hennepin-University Partnership (HUP) is working with two Hennepin County departments—the Human Services and Public Health Department and the Hennepin County Library—to relay the latest research findings to Hennepin County practitioners about infant brain development and how external influences impact brain development. An event is being planned for May that will include practitioners from several County departments and speakers from the University of Minnesota’s Institute on Child Development. The University’s Center for Early Education and Development is participating in the design of the event. In addition, HUP is working with the County’s Human Resources Department to provide stronger support to departments who are considering hiring students. Human resources staff contact Mai Xiong will help County staff shape a job description, decide what type of student would best meet their needs, determine whether funding is required, and recruit students from the University.

The Resilient Communities Project (RCP) hosted an end-of-year celebration on May 10 at the McNamara Alumni Center on the University’s East Bank campus to showcase student work and recognize the many accomplishments resulting from its year-long partnership with the City of Minnetonka. The partnership has matched 14 city-identified sustainability projects with 22 courses and hundreds of students at the University of Minnesota. Last month, RCP selected North St. Paul as its partner community for the 2013–2014 academic year (see announcement on page 19). In April, RCP Director Carissa Schively Slotterback and Program Manager Mike Greco attended the Sustainable City Year Conference in Portland and Eugene, OR, sponsored by the University of Oregon’s Sustainable City Year Program on which RCP is modeled. In addition to RCP, the conference included several other “pioneer” programs that are now underway at the University of Iowa, Pennsylvania State University, and the Associated Colleges of the Twin Cities. Each program highlighted its work during its pilot year, and shared insights and best practices with representatives from 20 other colleges and universities who attended to learn how to launch their own programs. Learn more about the conference at z.umn.edu/scycconference.

The CURA Housing Forum sponsored three programs this spring. In January, Jeff Washburne, executive director of the City of Lakes Community Land Trust, and Bill W. Ziegler, president and CEO of the Little Earth of United Tribes Little Earth Management, described the Little Earth Homeownership Initiative, which has a vision to create homeownership opportunities for American Indians living in the Twin Cities metropolitan area. In February, Tom Streitz, director of housing development and policy for the City of Minneapolis, talked about the record and impact of the Minneapolis Affordable Housing Trust Fund Program, which provides gap financing for affordable and mixed-income rental housing, housing production, and preservation projects. In April, the executive directors of Urban Homeworks (Chad Schwitters) and Project for Pride in Living (Steve Cramer) described their organizations’ new joint venture, Northside Home, an innovative initiative working to address the vacant single-family housing stock in North Minneapolis. To view summaries and materials from these and other past CURA Housing Forums, to learn about upcoming forums, or to sign up to receive announcements of future forums, visit www.cura.umn.edu/housing-forum.

CURA Director Ed Goetz has written a new book, New Deal Ruins: Race, Economic Justice, and Public Housing Policy, published by Cornell University Press. The book examines recent changes in public-housing policy in the United States and offers an evidence-based argument for renewed investment in public housing to accompany housing-choice initiatives as a model for innovative and equitable housing policy.

CURA Associate Director Will Craig will serve on a panel of the Transportation Research Board examining integrating airport GIS data into county GIS. The panel will investigate how airports share airport data with public-agency GIS, and will provide information on what types of data sets are currently being used, and could potentially be used in the future, for maximum benefit and security of all agencies. Craig currently cochairs the Address Work Group for the National States Geographic Information Council. The work group’s primary goal is for every state to have wall-to-wall addresses, complete with x-y coordinates so that localities can better respond to 911 calls and other issues. Craig is also a member of the program planning committee.
for the 29th Annual Conference on Policy Analysis to be held in October 2013. CURA is once again cosponsoring this event and will be providing partial scholarships for attendees from Minnesota-based nonprofit organizations.

Neeraj Mehta, director of community-based research at CURA, was invited to be a member of the Project for Public Spaces’ new Placemaking Leadership Council, and attended their inaugural meeting in Detroit in April. The goal of the council is to build a culture of mutual support among the doers and deep thinkers at the forefront of the placemaking movement, creating a community of practice around this important work. After almost four decades of working in this field, Project for Public Spaces is reaching out to peers new and old to form the council to consolidate and strengthen placemaking as an international movement. Mehta also participated in a conversation about the importance of creating and protecting “third places” (social spaces outside the home and workplace) in low-income communities. An article summarizing this conversation was published in a recent issue of Shelterforce and can be found at www.shelterforce.org/article/3057/where_community_is_at_work_making_itself/.

Resilient Communities Project Program Manager Mike Greco was recently appointed to the Vermillion River Watershed’s Wetland Engagement Team, a steering committee that will guide civic engagement and outreach activities for the Vermillion River Watershed Restoration and Protection Plan. The Vermillion River is a DNR-designated trout stream, and the only world-class trout stream in the United States within a major metropolitan area. Greco was also reappointed to a third term on the Dakota County Planning Commission, representing the cities of Farmington and Hastings, as well as the rural townships in southern Dakota County.

Community Programs Assistant Jeff Corn will present a session on “Merging Community and Academic Knowledge: Neighborhoods and Community-Based Research” at the National Neighborhoods USA Conference, which is being held May 22–25 in Minneapolis. The session will discuss community-based research (CBR), showcase the work of three CBR partnerships with community organizations, and provide best practices for how to approach CBR in communities.

Esther Wattenberg, policy and program coordinator in family and child welfare at CURA, hosted a reflective seminar titled “Codes of Silence, Confidentiality, and Family Privacy: Implications for the Child Welfare System,” in December at the Humphrey School. The seminar underscored the importance of understanding the ways in which “codes of silence” play out in gang life, church organizations, university athletic departments, and family life. The seminar was offered under the auspices of the University’s Center for Advanced Studies in Child Welfare, School of Social Work, College of Education and Human Development, and CURA. The agenda, presentations, handouts, and further material from the event are posted on the Center for Advanced Studies website at z.umn.edu/codesofsilence. The next reflective seminar, provisionally titled “Toward a Shared Vision: Exploring School-Linked Services,” will be held early this summer.

Resilient Communities Project Selects North St. Paul as 2013–2014 Community Partner

The Resilient Communities Project (RCP) is pleased to announce that it has selected the City of North St. Paul as its partner community for the 2013–2014 academic year. The partnership will bring the expertise of hundreds of graduate students and the University of Minnesota to sustainability-related projects identified by North St. Paul.

RCP organizes year-long partnerships between the University of Minnesota and Minnesota communities. Each academic year, RCP chooses a city partner through a competitive request-for-proposal process, helps identify potential projects based on community-identified sustainability issues and needs, and then matches the city’s project needs with University of Minnesota courses. The partnership provides the community with access to students from a wide range of programs and disciplines—from architecture, planning, and engineering to business, environmental sciences, and the humanities. Through work with RCP, the community is able to enhance its own capacity to advance sustainability. Students who participate in RCP projects benefit from real-world opportunities to apply their knowledge and training and bring energy, enthusiasm, and innovative approaches to address local issues.

RCP selected North St. Paul’s winning proposal from among seven submitted. The proposal identified 18 projects for which the City would like assistance, including developing live/work housing, revitalizing the city’s downtown, investigating green energy alternatives, creating “living streets,” planning community gardens, identifying economic-development strategies, designing civic-engagement initiatives, crafting an environmental-education program, and creating a public-art plan. Staff from RCP and North St. Paul will begin working this spring to define the scope of the projects and match them with courses offered at the University in fall 2013 and spring 2014. RCP Program Manager Mike Greco will administer the partnership on behalf of the University, and North St. Paul Community Development Director Nate Ehalt will coordinate the City’s participation in the program.

RCP is an initiative of the Sustainability Faculty Network at the University of Minnesota, with funding and administrative support provided by CURA and the Institute on the Environment. To learn more about North St. Paul’s selection, visit rcp.umn.edu/2013/03/18/nsp-2013-partner/.