

Citizens' Pollock's Branch Interactive Planning Model



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May 2016

Abstract

How can we translate individuals' daily place-based experiences into larger strategic planning efforts? How can we assemble these plans to be tapestries of resident insights, rather than top-down technical studies? The paradigm of expertise has shifted from the technician to the resident; the resident is increasingly acknowledged as the true expert of their place. However, traditional planning processes provide little opportunity to recognize these qualitative insights as usable data. Resident input gathered from traditional community engagement efforts is often unrecognizable in final plan. Currently, there exists no direct avenue for incorporating individual stories into actionable strategic plans.

Engaging Charlottesville Residents

The Citizens' Pollock's Branch Interactive Planning Model paves this avenue. As multiple planning discussions* engage the area surrounding the Pollock's Branch Watershed in Charlottesville, Virginia, the need for a strong foundation of resident voice becomes increasingly apparent. These discussions range from highly technical planning studies to cultural mapping processes, yet have failed to weave a comprehensive narrative for the area or recognize existing conditions. The Citizens' Pollock's Branch model enables users to engage resident voice at an unprecedented level, placing the City at the forefront of the collaborative planning field.

The model's capabilities are twofold. Primarily, the model enables its facilitators to record resident insights and user interaction, gathering practical data to inform strategic planning processes. Second, the model's clear representation of existing built conditions advocates for consideration of the area's cultural landscape, cultivating a deep discussion of the goals and values embedded in Charlottesville's strategic plans. The model's tactile nature empowers a wide range of voices to participate in this discussion, ultimately producing plans that are representative of the trajectory of the collaborative planning field as well as the true needs of residents.

**Current initiatives include the City of Charlottesville's Strategic Investment Area, the University of Virginia's Pollock's Branch Cultural Landscaping project, and the Piedmont Housing Alliance's Friendship Court Redevelopment project.*

Using the model

As the model is intended to facilitate existing discussions, use is highly flexible. Multiple configurations exist:

Open-ended prompting

No transparency sheet is required for using the model in this capacity. Participants may use erasable whiteboard markers to draw on the model's top layer of plexiglass. Examples for prompts for this use include "where are your favorite spaces in Charlottesville?" "Which space means the most to you?" "Which spaces evoke positive memories? Negative memories?" "What are your favorite amenities of this space? What amenities is this space lacking?"

Diagram-guided prompting

This method provides the opportunity to guide incorporate additional context diagrams into facilitated discussions. Additional transparency layers may be either hand-drawn, or printed with diagrams formatted to scale and sent to the University of Virginia School of Architecture. Participant feedback may range from responses to plan proposals or additional context layers for the model (i.e., layered with a map of existing park space, participants may be prompted about which spaces they use the most, which amenities they desire, etc.).

Inquiries

If you are conducting a project for which the Citizens' Pollock's Branch Model could serve as an asset, please do not hesitate to reach out! The model is available to the public, loanable through the School of Architecture at the University of Virginia.

Phase 1 of the model depicts the Friendship Court Apartments, a Section 8 housing development within the Pollock's Branch Watershed. As the apartments face redevelopment, Phase 1 of the model was created to facilitate data gathering and discussions between the Piedmont Housing Alliance-commissioned design team and residents to inform the team's planning process, but is intended as a resource for any organization seeking to facilitate workshops regarding this area.

For inquiries regarding use of the model or creation of transparency layers, please contact faculty steward:

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