

INNOVATION VALLEY (ivalley.org)

An Olympics for urban foresight

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VALLEY PATRIOT COLUMNIST

Imagine an Olympics of urban foresight and sustainability. How would Merrimack Valley cities do? Gold? Silver? Bronze? Honorable Mention?

We may soon find out.

There is such an Olympics of sorts; it's called the SustainLane City Ranking (<http://www.sustainlane.com>). Unique to this are categories such as "City Innovation" and "Green Buildings". The 2008 winner for City Innovation was Portland, which earned a "Leader" status. Pulling up the rear, Fort Worth was considered "Endangered". The City Innovation category looked at factors including, environmentally preferable purchasing programs, green building incentives, and car sharing programs. In all, there are 16 categories.

This study is targeted to the 50 largest U.S. cities, so Merrimack Valley cities won't qualify, but the methodology is compelling, and it should be applied locally. Of course the objective is not merely to celebrate or chastise the winners and losers, but to learn from what works so we can be better prepared. As they state, "The rankings explain how people's quality of life and city economic and management preparedness are likely to fare in the face of an uncertain future."

What will the world look like in 2050?

To help our cities face the uncertain future, one of the world's leading architectural and urban planning design firms, London-based Arup, has taken bold action in pushing the envelope in how we consider city development.

Their approach is revolutionary and has implications for the Merrimack Valley. They have created a Global Foresight and Innovation team that's job is to help clients answer the question:

What will the world look like in 2050? If you haven't seriously considered that, you probably shouldn't be in public office or building infrastructure.

But, no fear, the Arup Foresight group will help bring you up to snuff. Their group tracks a wide range of trends potentially impacting their clients. The

trend categories include: energy, climate change, water, waste, urbanization and demographics. Each trend category is cross-examined through five domains: social, technical, economic, environment, and political, as part of a futures-planning framework known as STEEP. They even have a "futurist" on staff.

As an example of their flare for the future, Dr. Chris Luebke, Director for Global Foresight and Innovation stated in a recent interview,

"The future of cities is as strong as it has always been. It is our manifest



destiny in a way. But I also hope that one day we will have building facades that don't have to hold carbon monoxide outside of the building. Imagine a city in which you don't have to hold out the air, and you don't have to hold out the noise... It makes the city an amazingly different place."

The flagship project of the Foresight group is a comprehensive research and communications initiative called Drivers of Change. This initiative conducts workshops and hosts a website (www.driversofchange.com) where you can learn about what's cutting edge and view or participate in a wide range of videos and blogs, such as "The Future of Connected and Sustainable Cities" and "The Energy Road Map". But what I

think is coolest is a set of cards, like playing cards, called Drivers of Change 2006. These cleverly cover all the tracked trends analyzed via the categories mentioned above. There are 6 decks - one each for energy, climate, water, etc. Each deck has about 25 cards. On the front of each is a compelling question. On the back, are informative and insightful statistics and charts.

For example, the card under Demographics-Social, asks: How many

centenarians will you know? On the back is information about the aging population with projections to 2050. The card for Demographics-Climate Change asks: If cancer doesn't kill you, will warmer weather? On the back are projections for climate change related deaths and illness, particularly for those 65 and older.

There are approximately 150 such cards, each a doozy. So, instead of playing pinochle, you can play Future Shock.

You may ask, why is Arup doing this?

Possible answers:

A. Because they care? B. Because they're bored? C. Because they want your business.

At the end of the day, week, month or fiscal year, the bottom line is always business, and Arup knows that their city clients face a crisis of epic proportions. It will take innovative thinking of equal measure to keep them thriving.

One of Arup's most recent projects was the Beijing Olympics. They consulted on both the National Stadium and the Aquatics Center, and for the latter helped provide numerous energy saving features, such as solar heated water. So, they know a thing or two about innovation and Olympic spirit.

Maybe we can learn from the efforts of Arup and SustainLane and have an urban design Olympics of our own. In fact, maybe we can host.

Join the discuss at Innovation Valley, www.ivalley.org

John Michitson and I have created the Innovation Valley website (www.ivalley.org) to help nurture and spread innovative ideas for the region. If you are interested in the topics discussed here, please join us online.



Seth Itzkan is president of Planet-TECH Associates, a consulting agency identifying innovations in economic development. Recently, Mr. Itzkan helped The Boston

Foundation to conceptualize and implement its Hub of Innovations tool. You can email him at seth.itzkan@gmail.com



John Michitson was a Haverhill city councilor for 10 years; the last 2 as president. He is a manager and electrical engineer at the MITRE

Corporation in Bedford, Mass. John and his wife, Heidi, are enjoying the childhood of their 7-year-old daughter and 9 year-old son. email: john@michitson.com

The Innovation Valley initiative seeks to help stimulate economic growth and quality-of-life enhancements in the Merrimack Valley. Every month we will report on innovative businesses, practices, and ideas that are helping to make Merrimack Valley the place to be. Look for our article in print media and online at www.ivalley.org.

Learn how to go green at Northern Essex Community College

A professional designer will teach how to "Go Green with Residential Sustainable Design", a noncredit course offered at Northern Essex Community College through the Corporate and Community Education Center in North Andover this fall.

Participants will learn what can be done to an existing or new home to "go green" and safeguard health and the environment. The course will explore the basics of sustainable residential building material selection and applications, indoor

air quality, long-term building quality, rating systems, solar energy concepts and applications, plus energy use management issues and options.

This course is appropriate for homeowners as well as interior decorators/designers, and property managers and other real estate professionals.

Taught by Judith Holt, president of Holt Design, a green building and solar applications consulting firm, this course is being offered for the first time this fall.

This course will meet Mondays from 6:30 to 8 p.m. Oct. 6 through Nov. 17, with no class on Oct. 13, at the NECC Corporate and Community Education Center, 1600 Osgood St., North Andover. The cost is \$153.

For more information please contact Diane Zold-Gross, assistant dean,

Workforce Development and Community Education at 978-659-1221.

NECC's Corporate & Community Education Center, located at 1600 Osgood St., North Andover (on route 125) in the former Lucent training facility, offers noncredit personal enrichment courses, as well as professional certificates and compute training for individuals and companies that are looking for cutting edge skills. For more information call 978 659-1200 or visit us online at www.necc.mass.edu/noncredit

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