



**Staff Report**

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**Date:** 5/13/2024  
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**TO:** Mayor and City Council  
**FROM:** Keith Stahley, City Manager

**SUBJECT:**

The City of Salem is partnering with the University of Oregon’s Sustainable City Year Program for the 2023 - 2024 academic year to advance City Council and community priorities.

Ward(s): All Wards

Councilor(s): All Councilors

Neighborhood(s): All Neighborhoods

Result Area(s): Result Areas - Good Governance; Natural Environment Stewardship; Safe Community; Safe, Reliable and Efficient Infrastructure; Strong and Diverse Economy; Welcoming and Livable Community.

**SUMMARY:**

The City of Salem is partnering with the University of Oregon’s Sustainable City Year Program for the 2023 - 2024 academic year to advance City Council and community priorities to include implementation of Climate Action Plan strategies, principles of equity, communications and civic engagement, active transportation and mobility, and furthering 2022 Community Safety and Livability Bond priorities.

**ISSUE:**

Receive an update on the City of Salem’s partnership with the University of Oregon’s Sustainable City Year Program for the 2023 - 2024 academic year.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

Information.

**FACTS AND FINDINGS:**

The Sustainable City Year Program (SCYP) is a year-long partnership, based out of the University of Oregon (UO), to help communities solve the problems of today and lay the groundwork for a

sustainable, livable future. The SCYP also help students prepare for the workforce through applied learning. For more, see: <https://sci.uoregon.edu/>

For the 2023-2024 academic year, staff work directly with the UO SCYP to match high priority project ideas with available courses in the academic year. The goal is to move further and faster than we would do without professor and student engagement. While we don't anticipate the student work will lead directly to construction of a building, for example, we do find that the work propels visioning to a state where we can take the next step.

Students started engaging with our community during Summer quarter in 2023. City staff engage with students at the beginning of each quarter, for a mid-course review, and participate in the final review for each course. Often, staff engage community members and partners to inform the student work. Final reviews for fall courses took place in early December 2023, and for Winter quarter courses in March 2024.

Spring quarter courses began in April and will conclude in June 2024. Students in two Spring quarter courses will be at Center 50+ to present their final products at a community open house on June 4, 2024 from 3:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.: (1) Topics in Bicycle Transportation and (2) an Equitable Urban Parks course. The community open house continues from 4:30 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. that evening, with a mix of participating students and professors sharing information about their learnings in all UO SCYP Salem courses (Attachment 1).

Below, find a listing of the courses completed to-date and those anticipated for Spring quarter. Student-prepared final reports, when complete, are available from [the scholars bank at UO SCYP <https://scholarsbank.uoregon.edu/xmlui/handle/1794/28914>](https://scholarsbank.uoregon.edu/xmlui/handle/1794/28914).

## **DESIGN, PLANNING & ENGINEERING**

**Equity-centered Parks & Recreation Case Studies (Winter).** Using GIS analysis and case study research, students made recommendations on how to prioritize parks and recreation funding across the city based on equity considerations.

**Timber Tectonics in the Digital Age (Fall).** Architecture, Wood Science, and Engineering students designed and constructed a temporary structure for the Salem Parks Department using "kit-of-parts" construction methods. Centered on the adaptable nature of reciprocal frame construction, students focused on the sustainable reuse of panel materials such as plywood and Mass Plywood Panels. The kit-of parts method meant the structure could be quickly deployed to add immediate benefit to a neighborhood as well as disassembled, moved, and reassembled.

**Boardwalks for Beavers: Improving Accessibility at Minto-Brown Island Park (Winter and Spring).** To allow for greater use of Minto-Brown Island Park's floodplain areas while allowing for beaver recovery, Portland State University Engineering students explored the feasibility of developing a quarter-mile long elevated bypass. This boardwalk proposal included design alternatives that could be used to estimate construction costs and potentially secure funding for final design and construction. Student deliverables also included a site plan, project alternative cross sections, and a matrix differentiating alternatives based on key criteria such as capital cost, maintenance cost, environmental impacts, and user experience.

**Safe and Connected Salem: Bicycle Transportation Options (Spring).** Students examined a variety of challenges, perspectives, and possible solutions related to bicycle transportation in Salem, such as multi-use paths and other ways to make streets more bicycle-friendly; safe routes to school opportunities; local and regional bicycle tourism opportunities; and bicycling-centered marketing campaigns. Student recommendations supported bicycle transportation opportunities that were safe, connected, and comfortable for all users.

**Equity-Centered Park Assets Condition Assessment (Spring).** Students supported the city's park planning efforts by developing and testing methods for assessing the condition, performance, and user experience of Salem's parks. Students considered park service, quality, and classification, and explored how these factors relate to equity. Students also developed and implemented data collection methods to evaluate park conditions and performance.

**Walkability & Corridor Assessments (Fall and Winter).** Using GIS mapping, students identified sidewalk and pedestrian gaps or redundancies, as well as ways to reduce these gaps. Students also surveyed and assessed certain corridors, which included an equity and demographic analysis, a network connectivity and land use analysis, and made recommendations to improve pedestrian and bicycle safety; sidewalk accessibility; and create more equitable and walkable neighborhoods.

**The Role of Artificial Intelligence for Cities (Summer and Fall).** Students completed an analysis of key Artificial Intelligence applications, case studies, and challenges. Resources presented to the city included model city policies, draft informational public meeting format, AI software and applications, implementation actions, glossary, and research references.

## **PUBLIC POLICY**

**City Operations Fee Evaluation (Winter).** The City of Salem wanted to examine how to assess and collect its operations fee equitably and efficiently. Students considered balance among user groups (commercial, industrial, institutional, public, residential) and within residential types (single family, multi-family). Initial findings suggest that the City consider charging commercial businesses based on Car Trips per Day or Business Traits and residential properties based on Home Size or Trip Generation since these approaches best fulfill the criteria of equity, administrative efficiency, and productivity.

**Electric Vehicle Charging (Winter).** Students made recommendations on how Salem might incentivize electric vehicles; how to equitably locate EV charging stations based on GIS analysis, and how EVs are addressed in selected large city climate action plans, and how that might be helpful information for Salem.

**City Facilities Solar (Spring).** The course evaluated the feasibility of installing solar panels within Geer Park. Students offered insights and recommendations with a focus on policy considerations, neighborhood inclusion and trust building, cost analysis, and a comparative study with similar projects across the United States.

**Age Friendly Communities (Spring).** Students conducted case studies to help Center 50+, the City's largest senior center, advance their aging-related services and activities with a specific focus on current priorities-transportation, housing, and interagency collaboration.

## **CIVIC ENGAGEMENT & NONPROFIT MANAGEMENT**

**Volunteerism & Civic Engagement - The Next Wave (Fall).** Salem relies on diverse volunteers, from the mayor and city council to volunteer boards and commissions. Journalism students helped the city identify what the "next wave" of volunteers will look like and recommended engagement strategies for targeted publics that included the Hispanic community, young families, GenZ, and youth volunteers.

**Climate Action Public Relations Campaigns (Fall, Winter, and Spring).** Across three terms, Public Relations capstone students focused on unique public engagement campaigns to educate and create behavior change among Salem residents to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Student work included research, creating a plan, and a distinct outreach campaign on the following topics:

- **Reduce Idling.** Students developed a community education campaign focused on "The Lowest Hanging Cherry - Stop Idling." Students developed positive messaging to stop idling starting with city employees who can lead by example; educating youth, who can help influence their parents/guardians; and spreading awareness on the health risks associated with vehicle idling.
- **Heat Pumps.** Students developed a two-part campaign strategy: 1) storytelling focused on early adopters of heat pumps within the Salem community and using peer-to-peer communication to help educate others on the benefits and 2) overcoming common barriers to heat pump adoption, such as cost, with action-oriented language and relationships with potential partners. To support these strategies, students developed deliverables such as a new website, tabling materials, postcards, event invitation flyers, yard signs, stickers, news segments, and social media content.
- **Active Transportation.** Students created a framework centered around behavior change to encouraging active transportation. The class leveraged work from the Safe and Connected Salem Bicycle Transportation projects to positively encourage the Salem community to utilize alternative forms of transportation, including walking, biking, and transit.

**The Digital Divide and the Future of Civic Engagement (Fall and Winter).** The class collaborated with Salem city staff, schools, community-based organizations, and local media to co-design and implement a survey of Spanish speaking youth. Based on the premise that a well-informed public is essential for a functioning democracy, the project aspires to continue being a conduit for community-driven solutions and broad participation.

**Parks Foundation Strategic Planning (Winter and Spring).** The Salem Parks Foundation sought help with board development to include greater representation of diverse groups that more fully reflect the Salem community. Project deliverables focused on a board assessment and diversity plan, best practice review, and strategic planning with a timeline for implementation.

## **BACKGROUND:**

This year's SCYP partnership includes a funding match, through a grant the program secured from the federal Department of Education. Through an intergovernmental agreement, up to 20 courses at the University of Oregon will work on high priority projects for City Council and our community. The City of Salem last worked with SCYP in the 2010-2011 academic year. In all, we had 27 courses with more than 500 students thinking about our community that year. SCYP hosts the [final reports <https://scholarsbank.uoregon.edu/xmlui/handle/1794/11432>](https://scholarsbank.uoregon.edu/xmlui/handle/1794/11432) and [media <https://www.dropbox.com/s/p7z464p2wgdu4nl/Salem\\_Press\\_Book.pdf?dl=0>](https://www.dropbox.com/s/p7z464p2wgdu4nl/Salem_Press_Book.pdf?dl=0) from that year on their website.

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## Attachments:

1. Community invitation to Join UO Sustainable City Year Program end of year celebration.