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The following article originally appeared as: Alexander, D. (2007). First annual film fest a rousing success. *Planning West*, 49(1), 20.

Planning West is published by the Planning Institute of British Columbia. The PIBC website can be found at: <https://www.pibc.bc.ca/>

First Annual Film Fest

A Rousing Success

by Don Alexander

On November 17, the PIBC Vancouver Island-North Chapter and Malaspina's Department of Geography co-sponsored Nanaimo's 1st Annual Urban Issues Film Festival. Around 70 people participated in the on campus event, watching six films, that chronicled a range of issues from peak oil to innovative urban planning in Curitiba, Brazil.

The event, which attracted planners, students and faculty, and community members, was a kick-off for a full-day workshop on the Official Community Plan review for the City of Nanaimo. The passionate discussion which occurred at the film fest carried over to the next day with many people attending both events. Pizza, popcorn, and beverages were provided by the PIBC North Island Chapter. Plans exist to make the event an annual tradition.

that are more solution-oriented. We started with "The End of Suburbia," a nearly feature-length film that deals with the impact of peak oil on the viability of current patterns of sprawl and suburban development. This was followed by a very vibrant discussion moderated by one of the organizers.

After the discussion, we took a social break for pizza and beverages, followed by "Subdivide and Conquer," a tongue-in-cheek examination of the emergence of residential and commercial sprawl on a massive scale in the American West. After a brief discussion period, we segued into "Sustainable Urban Living," a film about the land use and social planning innovations of Curitiba, Brazil. This was followed by a discussion and break, and we finished up with three short films: an American film on "Smart Growth" (featuring several prominent new urbanists), "Recycling City Space" (on the adaptive re-use of old warehouse and industrial spaces), and "Placemakers" (a series of vignettes on how people have taken direct action to revive their neighbourhoods by tapping into hidden sources of revitalization and community spirit. With discussion time, we were able to wrap up the event by 9 o'clock.

Some of the films came from the campus library, and others from one of the organizers' personal library. Other possible sources could include public libraries, planning departments, and materials available inexpensively on-line. The idea of an Urban Film Festival is definitely something that could be successfully replicated in other cities, especially those that have an even larger potential audience. The keys are joint sponsorship, good publicity, and a facility that is comfortable for showing videos and DVDs and also has space for snacks and socializing. For more information, contact Don Alexander at 250-753-3245 ext. 2261. 



Promo picture from *The End of Suburbia*

The inauguration of the film fest began with a chance comment between colleagues that the upcoming OCP workshop seemed oriented to the usual talking heads, when many planning issues lend themselves more to a visual treatment – such as can be conveyed through films and videos. The idea for a film festival of planning and urban-related issues was born and we were up and running! And given the turnout, and the enthusiastic response to our request that people pre-register for the free, but limited, spaces in the theatre, clearly the festival was meeting an unmet need.

The main challenge was to come up with a program of longer and shorter films that wouldn't exceed people's stamina and which would gradually shift from a focus on problems to those