Using Vignettes to Study: One Candidate's Experience

Using "Old" Vignettes to Study for the "New" Exam

Introduction

The following is an example of proactive and creative use of existing review materials. It was created by a candidate while studying for 2013's Section 3, using the logic that:

since the *content* of the exam has not changed much,
but the *format* has,
looking to prior vignettes gives insight into current issues and potential questions

While this was done for Section C / Section 3 (design), the process is valuable for Section E/ Section 4 as well.

The candidate compiled this list by:

- analyzing important directions and information in the problem statements
- sketching out alternatives and making notes on the vignettes instead of working the entire problem, beginning to end
- analyzing available solutions

Thus the candidate identified specific issues likely to be encountered in Section 3 design questions—and some reasonable guidelines and parameters. From specific examples in the vignettes, it is not difficult to identify larger HSW concerns, such as optimum and conflicting relationships (program element to program element, function or element to slope or other site feature) and key circulation do's and don'ts.

From here, move into the next phase of preparation, which is understanding how these issues may be tested, perhaps by making up your own questions. In addition to multiple choice, there may be more interactive questions that ask you to choose the best option from a series of images, or tell you to drag and drop a site element into a site plan. (See CLARB website and CLARB's Sample Questions for examples.) Vignettes illustrate how the concerns were tested in the old exam format. How might the elements in the following list be tested in the new format?

A number of vignettes for Sections C and E are still available on the ASLA website. These include the vignette Problem Statement, its base map, and examples of passing solutions. Vignettes can be worked to a final solution (or several alternative solutions) for honing grading or site planning skills, or, as this candidate did, they can be analyzed as to exam content.

This list is a good start, but it is not comprehensive as to what has been or will be tested. Can you add anything to this list? If so, send your ideas to lareprep@asla.org

Issues to Watch in Section 3

While preparing for Section 3, I reviewed many old vignettes. Through my review, I quickly created the following list of items to be aware of while taking the Site Design exam. This was simply for my use and is not conclusive or technical by any means.

1. Locate high density uses near existing roads for ease of access.
2. Slopes under 5% make construction easier.
3. Provide buffer between commercial and residential.
4. Provide buffer between residential and intensive recreation (e.g. sports complex with lights).
5. Align new entrance or road with existing intersection. If not possible, ensure that it's a safe distance from existing intersections.
6. If stream crossing is essential, do it in area of least impact (e.g. narrow woodlands or floodplain, NOT through wetlands).
7. Always keep pedestrian and vehicular circulation separate and safe.
8. Locate trails near natural areas if possible (open space, just outside floodplain, etc.).
9. Locate high density uses on slopes of 5% or less (commercial, single-family attached, multi-family).
10. Locate medium density uses on slopes of 5-10% (single-family detached). Can be closer to natural areas.
11. Try to locate similar uses near each other (existing and proposed). Relate on and off-site uses.
12. Whenever possible, protect existing vegetation, especially trees. (If vegetation has to be removed or impacted, there had better be an important HSW issue that it solves. Vignettes occasionally forced candidates to make a choice—protect trees or protect human safety. Or chose which trees to save and which may be sacrificed.)
13. Commercial uses should take advantage of street frontage.
14. One lane drop offs impede traffic flow. Allow for two lanes when possible.
15. Through traffic should not be routed through parking areas or drop-off areas. Do NOT make cars back into primary vehicular circulation.
16. NO dead end parking.
17. Accessible parking should always be close to building and accessible by an immediate walkway.
18. Remember sight distance triangle!
19. For book drop off and drive-through windows, make sure the driver's side of the car is facing the drop box/drive up window.

Test taking rule of thumb: Always rule out the wrong answers first!!