

Quality of Life Indicators and the SOAR Ordinances

Ventura County in 2001 has 820,000 people and sits on the edge of the Los Angeles metropolitan area, where new space for urban development is almost gone. Ventura County voters passed a number of separate Save Open Space and Agricultural Resources (SOAR) ordinances between 1995 and 2000. These measures by themselves do not limit growth: they give the electorate the choice through the ballot box to limit or approve the expansion of most cities and the urban development of the unincorporated areas surrounding the cities for the next 20-30 years. Voters, in partnerships with officer holders and policymakers, can now shape the future growth of Ventura County. Therefore, this study aims to inform and educate the public, as well as policy makers and office holders, about development issues which shape the quality of life in Oxnard and the County.

What we, the CSUN Project Faculty and Students, and The Sustainability Council of Ventura County, present here are a set of baseline indicators of the quality of life in Oxnard just as SOAR ordinances begin taking effect. We concentrate on density issues, health, and civic engagement in Oxnard near the beginning of the twenty-year timeline of SOAR.

We have designed this set of quality of life indicators to gauge whether or not Oxnard, the county's largest and most diverse city, improves or degrades its economic, social, and environmental well being over the next twenty years. We define an improvement as a move toward sustainability, degradation as a move away from sustainability.

The sustainability of a system, such as a city, can be defined as its ability to meet the needs of present generations in areas of social, economic and environmental well-being without compromising the ability of future generations to meet theirs. These are broad measures and together over time we believe they will show, as a set, just how development decisions enhance or reduce Oxnard's quality of life.

The sustainability indicators designed for this study have three main features. First, each indicator can be used by itself to measure trends in urban development issues, civic engagement, and community and environmental health. Second, any one indicator has a number of

connections with bundles of other indicators. For example, the “Redevelopment: Mixed-Use” indicator is directly connected to the many indicators of density and ease of traffic flow. Third, as a set kept over time, these indicators capture key aspects of a community we believe necessary for personal, community, and environmental health—its sustainability—and will reveal the overall quality of life in the City of Oxnard and the surrounding region.

This Set of Indicators can also serve as a model for measuring the future quality of life of other cities. How and where cities grow to meet growing populations will depend on an informed and engaged electorate. Our study aims to educate our community about factors that can lead to a sustainable, healthy future and to stimulate interest in everyone to engage in the process of choosing one.