

Dear Sustainability Indicators Faculty and Student Project Members and Council Members:

The Indicators coordinating meeting on September 29, 2000 at Professor Dagodag's house gave most of its time to civic engagement itself. Carl, Barbara, Tim, John, and I have another meeting planned on October 20 to see if we can coordinate the indicators from the three areas.

I. The discussion first focused around the debate the working group of the Council itself had over the scope of our civic engagement indicators. Is a local neighborhood enough to survey for its sense of engagement? How does focusing on a local neighborhood bring the issues that SOAR influences into view, such as affordable housing, economic disparities, and class and ethnic stratification that characterize much of Ventura County? (These are issues that obviously relate to the social equity leg of sustainability itself and will need to serve in some way as baseline indicators of SOAR's effects.) What links can be drawn between a local neighborhood and environmental preservation and health on the one hand and economic well-being on the other? Since SOAR is likely to influence affordable housing most dramatically, some way to measure its impact on neighborhoods themselves and the overall county will be necessary.

It became clear that the Project's original double focus on the city of Oxnard and the County as a whole might do this.

Professor Dagodag urged all three sub-groups to follow agreed upon parameters as we develop the statistical based indicators. We therefore agreed that the objective data source for such statistics would be, as he suggested, environmental impact reports (EIRs), which offer a wide range of data that are readily available, geographically bounded, periodically renewed, and therefore can serve other groups throughout the state as sources of data as they develop sustainability indicators based on our experience. This is the ultimate intent of CUEREC in funding our project.

However, civic engagement indicators may have to use other sources of data beside EIRs. And, any civic engagement polling the Council itself might do would not be easily replicated by other agencies or groups such as ours. This does not exclude polling as a source of information the Council may wish to develop as an adjunct or supplement to statistically based civic engagement indicators.

II. Participants of the meeting devised a list of quantifiable entities that could be seen as measures of civic engagement about the SOAR issue, both in Oxnard and county-wide.

The first measures of the civic engagement around SOAR involved people's specific participation in SOAR discussions. We could tabulate and chart the following in past, present, and future instances:

The number of inquiries to public agencies seeking information about SOAR.

The number of hits on SOAR related Web sites.

The numbers of voters responding to SOAR plebiscites.

The number of participants in public meetings focused on SOAR.

The number of SOAR related cases advocated by public interest attorneys.

The number of responses to a draft EIR .

The number of participants at public hearings regarding a draft EIR.

As for the general participation of people in issues not necessarily related to SOAR, we could measure the following:

The number of members of neighborhood watchdog groups.

The number of members in environmental interest groups.

The number of members in neighborhood councils.

Etc.

All this would be charted against the total number of voters or residences in a neighborhood or council district or other bounded area.

The point would be to compare the specific civic engagement around SOAR (in Oxnard) with the specific civic engagement of people in a similar area (such as Ventura) and county-wide

The logistics of gathering this data need to be worked out--who, and how, and how much is need to develop a useful indicator. (This is on the agenda of the next Coordinating meeting, October 20.)

III. We also began to list what forums of access are available to people for civic engagement around an issue like SOAR at both the regional and local levels. These include the following :

Regional

1. Special interest groups
2. Open forums
3. Regional boards of public agencies (water/air /harbor/waste)
4. Public agency sponsored forums on regional issues (ongoing vs. infrequent c.g. Measure A group)
5. Regional organizations (The Sustainability Council)

Local

1. Local chapters of national organizations (PTAs, NGOs)
2. Community-based organizations (CBOs, such as Ormond beach, Neighborhood Watch)
3. Emergent groups

We also noted the” audiences” and public venues for civic engagement, which include the following:

1. The Internet
2. phone trees
3. community cable-TV
4. School based forums
5. radio station KCLU
6. Newsletters/publications of local organizations
7. Print media

Finally we discussed the need for a county wide sustainability Council like ours, but one with broad social-economic and ethnic representation that would function as an ongoing advisory group to county government on quality of life matters.

IV. “Next Step” Agenda for October 20

1. Civic Engagement Indicators data gathering process
2. Report from Health Indicator group (John)
3. Report from Density group (Tim)
4. Report on Dissemination Activities (Carl)
5. Role of student participants

