

Dear Council Members, Project Faculty, and Students:

The August 23rd conference revealed real strengths and weaknesses in our project design thus far. It occurs to me that at this point, we may want to reconfigure the work so as to make it more manageable and more responsive to our goals.

The Urban Studies group presented three sustainability indicators they would like to work on, and while there was some debate about how they might be handled, I feel these are good choices. They included the areas of density, sustainability itself, and civic engagement. What occurs to me is the need to keep the scope of each of the indicators manageable and to make the key linkages to all three areas that the Council believes represents the focus of any sustainable indicator worth its name. I also think that "sustainability itself" as an indicator may be too unwieldy since they all should point to sustainability as a consequence.

I therefore recommend the following re-organization of our work.

I believe the Urban Studies students under Professor Dagodag should focus on density itself and all its ramifications as it impacts the quality of life: how density issues affect housing (see today's Star front page), ecological footprints, hours journeying to work, affordability, and particularly how density issues affect an area we haven't discussed and that is industry --industries beyond the agricultural industry. This will enable the fall semester students to play to their strengths in the area of planning and will encourage them to create linkages between planning issues related to the environment, and economic and social justice issues. A detailed and statistically based indicator(s) might enable us therefore to show the advantages of increasing densities through particular kinds of development that we might call livable neighborhoods or sustainable communities.

I believe that John Schillinger's Environmental Health students, who are a part of this project but have yet to surface, should focus on the general area of health and the quality of life and its linkages to environment, business, and social justice issues. They can examine standard issues such as water quality and run off, air quality and transportation, and explore the density issue from a different vantage point. (Many of the indicators will cross reference issues.) Perhaps more important and innovative would be linkages of density issues to mental-health, teen pregnancy, work hours loss due to stress, etc... A detailed and statistically based indicator in this area would broaden the public's concept of health as it relates to SOAR.

The final sustainability indicator should focus as suggested on civic engagement. But I am wondering if this should not be the task of the Council itself to design. We certainly could use the help of students from both groups, but I believe this is our topic and that we have unique ways of addressing it. This would be the least statistically based indicator insofar as hard data goes, but not all indicators have to be of the same nature. This indicator would include such things as voter participation, attendance at civic organizations, volunteer time, attendance at public events such as street fairs, use of parks, libraries, public places, and the general use of the community as a resource for personal enrichment and community connection. Here is where polling might be useful, and the design of that poll should necessarily try to establish linkages between social issues and the environment and the economy. Civic engagement really gives voice to the indicators themselves, one can argue, because it expresses the collective sense of well being about our communities.

These are some thoughts I have about our second half of work on the project. What we are expected to deliver are indicators, not final, or complete, or even perfectly substantiated. Our project,

remember, is experimental in nature; we need to show what we can produce in a short time with relatively little funding. It is my hope that this division of labor outlined above will produce 6 to 9 indicators that, if nothing else, show baselines of Ventura County's quality of life that either we or other groups in the future can use to make convincing conclusions about the impacts of SOAR on the sustainability of our way of life now.