Impacts of Urban Growth Limits on Environment and the Quality of Life

Proposal Abstract

This proposal is a request to fund a working partnership between faculty in the Departments of Geography,
Health Sciences, Urban Studies and Planning, and the Sustainability Council of Ventura County to assess how urban growth control strategies (e.g. urban growth boundaries, redevelopment, higher densities, and infill) affect environment and quality of life. Ventura County has a population of some 820,000 and is on the edge of the Los Angeles metropolitan area; it is therefore subject to substantial urbanization pressures. The proposed scope of work includes conducting interviews to determine attitudes towards urban land use and quality of life; designing sustainability indicators and monitoring techniques to measure the impacts of
urban growth control strategies on such factors as urban community design, housing, transportation, land values, employment, public health, quality of life, recreation and civic engagement; and educating community residents, through workshops and forums on livable communities, sustainability, and the quality of life.

Research Problem

Ventura County voters recently passed measures that would control urban incursions into agricultural land
and preserve open space. Agriculture, a major industry that brings
$3 billion per year to Ventura County, requires land to farm and urbanization increasingly threatens it. The S.O.A.R. - Save Open Space and Agricultural Resources initiative limits the expansion of cities and urban development of remaining unincorporated areas for the next 20 years through direct vote of the people. Ventura County has a population of some 820,000 and is on the edge of the Los Angeles metropolitan area;
it is therefore subject to substantial urbanization pressures. Strategies that can work in this County can apply anywhere. The strategies adopted encompass seven cities and the County unincorporated area, so the
conditions are complex and representative of most urbanizing areas.

Since urbanization is the chief threat to farmland, simply locking up farmland without a complementary reconfiguration of urban development is a half measure. Limiting urban expansion in the face of growth pressures will necessarily produce higher development densities. Such standard infill patterns have been an
anathema to suburban cities and residents. If this standard strategy is to be modified and accepted by the residents, then livable community models must be adopted. Ventura County and its cities have already begun to reassess their development patterns with an eye towards more livable cities with higher development densities.

Focusing on the City of Oxnard and other cities which sit adjacent to agricultural land, the proposed study will assess how urban growth control strategies affect environment and quality of life. The following questions organize the proposed research:

1) Do urban growth control strategies produce sustainable systems?

2) What sustainability indicators can be developed to measure the efficacy of urban growth control

strategies?

If the model control strategies work, they will ensure a healthy urban environment that does not rely on the consumption of valuable farm land to accommodate future growth. City dwellers will learn that their ability to adapt to new urban forms that accommodate higher densities, while still preserving a vital quality of life, allows for the continued farming of large tracks of land that would otherwise be lost to urbanization if traditional growth patterns prevailed.

The work of the Sustainability Council of Ventura County has been collaborative and community-focused. The Council's work requires avoiding favoring either business, social, or environmental interests, even as it promote sustainability, which includes all three. The Council has hosted community meetings to discuss ethical issues of sustainability, such as the moral underpinnings of resource management, co-hosted a conference on "Livable Communities," and provided continued support and advice in planning and publicizing regional efforts of the Ventura Council of Governments (VCOG) to develop a "Livable Communities" program. The Council is also developing, in collaboration with California State University-Channel Islands officials, a plan that incorporates principles of sustainability into the thematic focus, physical design, and curriculum of the new campus. In the research area, the Council has developed, conducted, and made public a survey of 200 organizations and individuals involved with agricultural land issues that discovered broad consensus about seven of eight suggested strategies that were offered as an integrated, sustainable approach to saving agriculture and agricultural land in Ventura County.

The opportunity for the University to collaborate with the Council in order to study and improve urban development and agricultural preservation strategies and thereby creating more sustainable and livable communities seems a good match to the CUEREC mission. We envision the working partnership to continue to develop into additional sustainable development initiatives in the future.

Objectives

1) Conduct interviews to determine the impact of urban growth control strategies on attitudes towards urban development, environmental degradation, quality of life, changes in social behavior, so as to obtain a variety of suggestions for use in designing sustainability indicators that measure the impacts of urban growth limits on quality of life.

2) Design a set of ecological, economic and social equity sustainability indicators, construct a sustainability index, and develop monitoring techniques to measure the impacts of the urban growth control strategies on such areas as community design, agriculture, housing, public health, quality of life, land values, employment, transportation, and civic engagement. Sustainability Indicators are integrative measures of economic, social and ecological well-being that are designed to gauge a community's systemic balance and resilience over

time. Each indicator must be periodically monitored for changes in direction and intensity. Taken together,
they indicate community assets, liabilities, and regional capacity to meet present and future needs in ways that do not sacrifice quality of life.

3) Educate community residents, decision-makers, and others involved in agricultural land conversion through workshops and forums, about livable community strategies, how to assess the problems of urban land use and development, and what can be done to improve the quality of life.

Project Strategy

Dr. Dagodag and Dr. Schillinger will collect information on sustainability indicators and monitoring techniques with the help of their students. They will work with Dr. Maida and his students to create a dissemination program. CSUN will convene the partners to begin the process of developing the key informant interview instrument and the sustainability indicators. CSUN will develop the parameters of the research with the Sustainability Council. The Council will coordinate the interviews to determine how the urban growth control strategies are perceived by city planners, policymakers and residents. The interview will be administered by both CSUN students and Council members. The Council will work with CSUN to analyze the community-based interviews. Council members, CSUN faculty, and students will convene to develop the indicators. Dr. Dagodag and Dr. Schillinger will design procedures for ongoing community monitoring. A workshop will be organized by the Council to present the information to the community, with input from CSUN faculty and students. Faculty and students will gain more useful insights into these issues as the partnership activities progress. This element of student training is increasingly valuable and difficult to obtain except by collaborative community field work such as that proposed here.

Timetable

June 1999 - Collect Information on Sustainability Indicators and Monitoring Procedures
July 1999 - Design the Interview Instrument
August 1999 -Develop the Sample
September-October 1999 - Administer the Interview
November -December 1999 - Analyze Interview Data
January 2000 - Design the Sustainability Indicators
February - April 2000 - Develop and Test Monitoring Procedures
May 2000 - Disseminate Findings through a Community Workshop
June 2000 - Publish final report, present at AAAS meeting, and submit journal article

Outcomes of Project

We are developing a research tool that will be most useful in assessing future changes in livability factors in
Ventura County that we hope will inspire similar efforts throughout California. In communities up and down the state, especially those at the agricultural-urban interface, conflicts over urban growth control policies remain unresolvable. The ultimate goal is to provide insight to policy leaders and the community-at-
large about the negative impact on the quality of life due to failure to implement livable communities models
in the context of urban growth control. This insight takes the form of a monitoring system that employs

sustainability indicators. The ultimate success of the project, which is to change the existing ways development proceeds into living communities model, will be contingent on community support and funding of a ongoing indicator monitoring system. The outreach activities logically will expand in the future to include other livable community initiatives such as community design, agriculture, housing, quality
of life, land values, employment, transportation, recreation, civic engagement, health care and other human
services delivery. The project will also demonstrate how an integrated approach to dealing with communities
like those in Ventura County that are subject to substantial urbanization pressures can best be achieved through a university-community partnership.

It is anticipated that Ventura County communities and their decision-makers will be better informed about livable community strategies, how to assess the problems of urban land use and development, and what can
be done to improve the quality of life. Publicity from the project will have enhanced the visibility and effectiveness of the Sustainability Council of Ventura County. The baseline assessment of sustainability indicators will also establish a sound basis for a broader effort to measure changes in quality of life throughout Ventura County. The publications resulting will be of value to other communities around the nation in search of similar solutions.

In addition to the local and statewide dissemination of assessment indicators, we plan to convene a regional
dialogue on agricultural land preservation and urban development models in conjunction with the annual meeting of the Pacific Division of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. The Pacific Division, and its affiliated societies, including the Pacific Coast Entomological Society, Western Society of
Soil Science, and the regional chapters of the American Society for Horticultural Science, Botanical Society
of America, Ecological Society of America, sponsor symposia that bring together scientists from the western United States and Canada. The Pacific Division also has sections of interest, including biological sciences, earth sciences, ecology and environmental sciences, social, economic and political science, that sponsor programs at the annual meeting. A number of factors make the AAAS Pacific Division meetings ideal for regional dialogue on urban- agricultural land use policies: 1) the Pacific Division is a neutral organization that does not represent the interests of any governmental or corporate organization, and 2) a multi-disciplinary mix of researchers and educators from California and the West will be present.

BUDGET

Faculty Salaries		In-Kind
Tim Dagodag	$ 2200	$2500
Benefits (14%)	308	
Carl Maida	2200	2500
Benefits (14%)	308	
John Schillinger	2200	2500
Benefits (14%)	308	
Student Salaries	1400	
Benefits (7%)	78	

Sustainability Council Staff		7500	
Interview Fees	1500		
Training Stipends	3000		
Workshop Costs	2250		
Educational Materials Preparation	1250		
Translation Fees	1350		
Printing	1000		
Local Mileage	900		
Subtotal	20252		
Indirect Costs (10%)	2025		
Total	$ 22277	$15000	
Grand Total			$37277