Course Overview

Too often, sustainability is used as a catch-all buzzword for "goodness." But how can we recognize a sustainable city when we see one? If sustainability is a concept matters – one that makes a material and experiential difference in the lives of communities we serve - we need clear metrics we can use to adapt and plan.

The Sun Valley EcoDistrict initiative will serve as a focus for our class, as we investigate which set(s) of metrics are best to assess ongoing progress, and how we can use metrics/sustainability assessments to support better adaptive planning and collective impact. Our research will inform the ongoing evolution of EcoDistrict metrics, and we'll consider the relevance of diverse rating systems studied in class to this case.

Course Objectives

• Develop understanding of a range of metrics and frameworks to advance sustainable development, environmental justice and healthy, livable cities, resilience planning, and regenerative development.
• Develop competency in making these methods matter at a district scale, e.g., the Sun Valley EcoDistrict
• Consider the connection to making sustainability count at the local and global scales
• Explore methods of communicating metrics so they may be employed by community leaders.

“If you don't know where you're going, you'll end up someplace else.” – Yogi Berra

“Gross National Product counts air pollution and cigarette advertising, and ambulances to clear our highways of carnage. ... It counts the destruction of the redwood and the loss of our natural wonder in chaotic sprawl. ... It measures neither our wit nor our courage, neither our wisdom nor our learning, neither our compassion nor our devotion to our country, it measures everything in short, except that which makes life worthwhile. .... If this is true here at home, so it is true elsewhere in world.”

– Bobby Kennedy, March 18, 1968