

“Creating the Sustainable Communities Indicators Catalog”

Presenter: Eugenie L. Birch, University of Pennsylvania

Eugenie L. Birch is the Lawrence C. Nussdorf Professor of Urban Research in the Department of City and Regional Planning at the University of Pennsylvania and the founding codirector of the Penn Institute for Urban Research (PennIUR). She has published widely on urban issues. Her most recent books are *Rebuilding Urban Places after Disaster: Lessons from Katrina* (2006), *Growing Greener Cities* (2008), *The Urban and Regional Planning Reader* (2009), *Global Urbanization* (2011), *Neighborhoods and Life Chances* (2011), and *Women’s Health and the World’s Cities* (2011). Her articles have appeared in the *Journal of the American Planning Association*, *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, *Journal of Urban History*, *Journal of Planning History*, and *Planning Magazine*. Her current research centers on two areas: knowledge dissemination related to urban planning and energy/sustainability and urban revitalization with a special focus on anchor institutions. Birch has held many leadership positions in her field and in the civic arena. She served as president of the Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning, president of the Society of American City and Regional Planning History, coeditor of the *Journal of the American Planning Association*, and chair of the Planning Accreditation Board. She has been a member of the New York City Planning Commission, and served as a member of the jury to select the designers of the World Trade Center site. She is currently cochair of UN-HABITAT’s World Urban Campaign and chair of the board of directors of the Municipal Art Society of New York. She earned her master’s degree and PhD in urban planning from Columbia University and resides in New York City.

Coauthors: Stuart Andreason, University of Pennsylvania; Amy Lynch, University of Pennsylvania; Simon Mosbah, University of Pennsylvania

Summary and Findings: The Partnership for Sustainable Communities (PSC), founded in 2009, works to coordinate federal housing, transportation, water, and other infrastructure investments to make neighborhoods more prosperous, allow people to live closer to jobs, save households time and money, and reduce pollution. A central objective of the effort is to help communities balance various goals and determine the most effective and efficient use of their resources in accomplishing them. Performance measurement is a prerequisite for this process. Numerous projects and initiatives have attempted to provide metrics to measure sustainable practices and outcomes, but to date they have not been synthesized in a coherent, accessible way. The objective of the PSC-PennIUR collaboration is to create a Sustainable Communities Indicator Catalog (SCIC) and an accompanying guidebook. Together, they will detail a wide range of performance metrics that can be used to evaluate progress toward sustainable community objectives. The SCIC will be designed to be available as an online web tool located on SustainableCommunities.gov. The SCIC project builds upon several well-documented efforts by DOT, HUD, and EPA to catalog, evaluate, and field-test indicators associated with livability and sustainable community planning. Instead of developing new indicators, the PennIUR team is collecting, organizing, and augmenting existing measures for integration into a highly interactive web tool.

Implications for Policy and Practice: In crafting a flexible set of indicators to be employed by different urban areas and in different contexts, the catalog will enable communities to benchmark and measure progress easily. By presenting a wide range of indicators along with instructions for their use, the catalog may also suggest new approaches to sustainable development.