

# Newsletter

Fall  
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APA

Environ.



## **Recent Webinar: Environment, Natural Resources, and Energy Professional Pathways Webinar**

On May 16<sup>th</sup>, the Division held a Professional Pathways Webinar with a panel of professionals from diverse career levels and backgrounds in Environmental Planning. The speakers discussed a wide range of topics including career development, establishing a professional network, and job opportunities in ENRE-related fields. It was a very informative discussion and the panelists received several great questions from attendees.

If you missed this webinar, you can still view it online (and get 1.25 CM credits!). Go to [www.planning.org](http://www.planning.org) and search for #9149134 or Professional Pathways Webinar in the search bar.

## **Interview with Nicholas Ryu, 2018 ENRE Student Fellow**

### **Los Angeles' Alter-Eco: Identifying and Assessing the Viability of Ecodistrict Sites in Los Angeles Counties**

Each year the Division awards a fellowship to a planning student for a project consistent with the Division's mission – this year was no exception! Read on to hear from this year's recipient on his project and learnings.

#### **(Q) First off, what is an Ecodistrict?**

One of my first goals of the project was to establish a definition of an Ecodistrict! Here's what I came up with:

*Ecodistricts are focused on sustainability at the neighborhood scale – promoting and prioritizing positive outcomes in equity, resilience, and climate protection. They are usually implemented through projects related to buildings, infrastructure, and community collaborative actions.*

#### **(Q) Tell us about your Fellowship project and how you got started.**

For me, I first became interested in the concept of Ecodistricts in 2013 when I was working in D.C. I've always been very interested in climate mitigation and adaptation, and learning about Ecodistricts showed me that reducing environmental impacts can be a driver for economic development in cities. This is what led to my interest in urban planning and to learn about how different rating systems such as the [Ecodistrict rating system](#) can spur sustainable development in cities. (Continues on Page 2)

## **Announcements**

### **Want to have a project featured in the next newsletter?**

We are always looking for new content. If you have been working on an ENRE related project for work, research or just for fun, we would be happy to publish your work in the next newsletter. Email us to learn more about this opportunity.

### **Students: do you want to be featured in our student spotlight?**

On page 5 of this newsletter you can see the new student spotlight. In this issue we feature Kelsey Wilson from UC Berkeley. If you want to be featured in the next newsletter, just email us your responses to the 8 sections listed, along with a picture of yourself.

### **It's official!! ENRE is now on LinkedIn and Facebook**

Join the Division's Facebook page to share and learn about projects, news, or ideas about environmental planning, natural resources, or energy.

Join the Division's LinkedIn to share job postings, professional news, and conference & webinar information.

### **We want to hear from you! Take the membership survey today!**



As always, reach out to us at:  
[apaenre@gmail.com](mailto:apaenre@gmail.com)

# Los Angeles' Alter-Eco: Identifying and Assessing the Viability of Ecodistrict Sites in Los Angeles Counties

Interview with Nicholas Ryu, 2018 ENRE Student Fellow

## **(Q) What were your goals for the project?**

My project consisted of five goals:

1. To provide an understanding and definition of Ecodistricts
2. To identify patterns across different Ecodistricts via case study review – i.e. to review and compare demographics, neighborhood size, goals, etc. for various Ecodistricts
3. To compare and contrast the Ecodistrict rating model against other community rating systems such as ([LEED for Neighborhood Development](#), [2030 Districts](#), [Enterprise Green Communities](#), [STARS Communities](#), and the [Living Community Challenge](#))
4. To identify potential Ecodistrict sites in the Los Angeles area – I ultimately identified four:
  - ◆Santa Monica
  - ◆Watts
  - ◆Culver City
  - ◆Long Beach
5. To determine possible collaborative governance, policy and financial recommendations around establishing Ecodistricts.

## **(Q) What types of research did you conduct?**

Almost all of my research was done through secondary sources – case studies, government websites, and background on different cities and on the rating models themselves.

## **(Q) Tell us about your final project results and learnings.**

I had many learnings related to each of the five project goals:

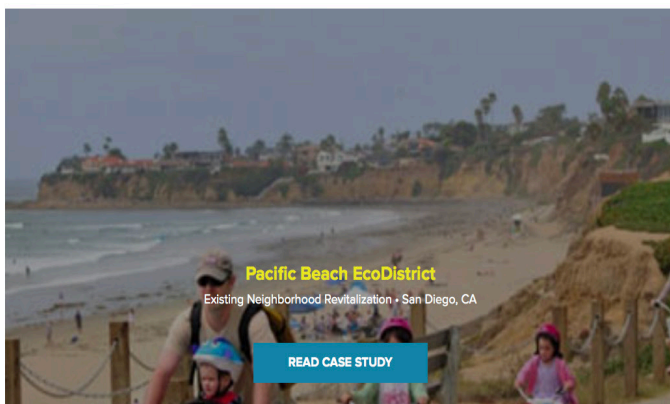
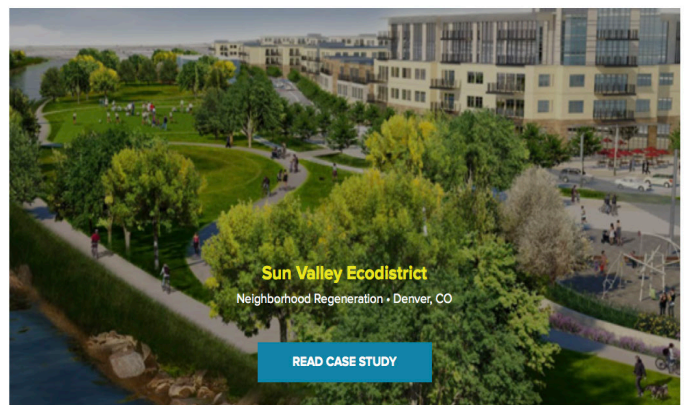
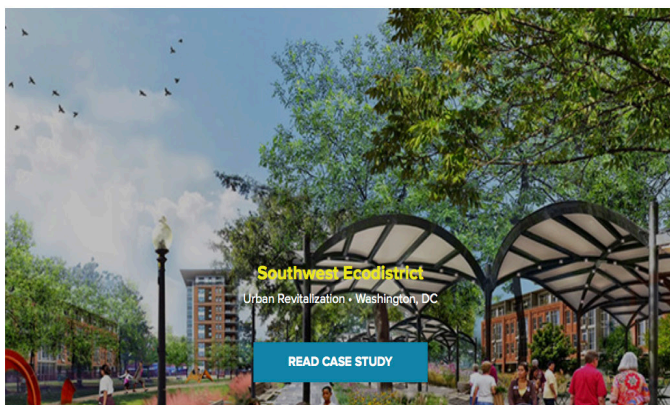
When looking for patterns among Ecodistricts, I looked at thirteen case studies. Most Ecodistricts are located within largely populated cities. Almost all are based in currently existing neighborhoods, while one was a former brownfield site. Ecodistricts include multiple types of organizations with many stakeholders. Eight of the thirteen reported low median incomes for their area – below \$40k household median income (with the national average being closer to \$60k). A quarter of these Ecodistricts are located in neighborhoods with a poverty rate of 40% or higher.

I also found patterns around the barriers to creating successful Ecodistricts. These include issues related to project management, the need for strong community involvement, and

financial support. Funding sources for Ecodistricts vary – The Ecodistrict model is very flexible in this way, focused on customizing goals for existing financial mechanisms and community infrastructure.

When compared to other community rating systems, the Ecodistrict model appears to be the most flexible and focuses on the neighborhood-scale. Other systems focus on the system’s specific rating model and goals like the Triple-Bottom-Line, or targeting a specific organization and their goals. Ecodistricts will work with any stakeholders and organization types, particularly focusing on *creating goals with community partners*. Other rating systems have previously-established goals and criteria (such as LEED-ND). In terms of overall success, Ecodistricts are still relatively new, so there have not been as many fully-developed projects as compared to more-established rating systems like LEED and STAR. Listed below are all the community rating systems I reviewed.

- ◆LEED- Neighborhood Development: focused mostly on green building categories. A total of 456 projects have been completed under this category.
- ◆STARS Community Rating System: focused on working with local government. There are 106 communities with either a 3 to 5 star rating, or with their certification result pending.
- ◆2030 Districts: focused on working with the private sector and includes 18 established districts.
- ◆Enterprise Green Communities: focuses on green and affordable housing. Over 38,000 housing units have been created by 550 housing organizations through these grants.
- ◆Living Community Challenge: focused on a “symbiotic relationship between people and the natural environment” with 14 participating communities ranging from universities to cities throughout the country.





I then identified four cities that would be good candidates for Ecodistricts, based on their current contexts. I looked for cities that already have existing climate or sustainability action plans and initiatives. The following are the four I selected:

- ◆ [Santa Monica](#) has the 1st Net Zero energy green building code in the world.
- ◆ [Watts](#) has a \$34M grant as part of Climate Communities Program.
- ◆ [Culver City](#) is currently focused on green buildings, community choice energy programs, and transit-oriented development.
- ◆ [Long Beach](#) has a robust sustainability program related to urban gardens, low impact development, and green infrastructure.

I then identified four key issues that these cities were facing to determine the need and potential benefit of an Ecodistrict. The following were the focus areas I found to be most common among the four cities:

- ◆ Pollution and air quality
- ◆ Transit Oriented Development
- ◆ Urban Agriculture
- ◆ Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy

Finally, I tried to make some recommendations around establishing an Ecodistrict based on three contextual criteria:

**1) Collaborative Governance** – I recommended that Ecodistricts work with local community members and organizations along with municipal leadership. Having a citizen engagement model to allow for residents to serve in a leadership role of the Ecodistrict would help further this idea of collaborative governance.

**2) Policy** – Los Angeles and California already have a lot of policies and initiatives that create an environment for Ecodistricts to thrive. For example, SB-375, [the Sustainable Communities and Climate Protection Act](#), helps cities reduce greenhouse gas emissions through land use and transportation planning. Existing policies have created funding and leadership that can be leveraged to implement the Ecodistrict model.

**3) Finance** – There are many ways to finance an Ecodistrict. Some include private donors, foundations and philanthropy, state and local bonds, local/municipal/federal grants, and value-capture mechanisms such as property assessment (such as PACE), rental revenues, or TIF Districts.

**(Q) What advice would you give to planners or municipal leaders interested in learning more or pursuing Ecodistricts?**

One of the things that is of most importance for Ecodistricts to succeed is proper stakeholder engagement. The initiative can not be led by just one organization or government agency. Like any good planning process or initiative, it is key to integrate and understand different issues and perspectives within a neighborhood and work alongside community members. On a related note, it is important to create goals that directly address community issues on the ground. Since the model allows for customized goal development, it is crucial to have clarity on the issues happening within the community to create goals that truly address the issues.

Lastly, I would recommend using the Ecodistrict model in neighborhoods that are not only seeking to become more environmentally sustainable, but are also looking to create economic and social benefits for community residents. Having a community organization create programs that link multiple benefits would really benefit from the Ecodistrict model.

# STUDENT SPOTLIGHT



**Name:** Kelsey Wilson

**School:** UC Berkeley

**Current Internship:** Instructor at InCity Institute at UC Berkeley (City Planning Summer Session).

**Future Career Goals:** International land use consultant with a focus on water and ecological restoration projects. Exploring environmental issues through a multifaceted lens from culture to policy.

**What do you hope to achieve through your career:** I hope to heal the earth through encouraging more harmonious relationships between people and the earth by utilizing strategic land use practices and policy.

**What do you hope to see the planning profession achieve in the future:** Incorporating ecological systems into urban areas in ways that benefit people and the environment. As well as continuing to push innovation in the way we design and experience cities.

**Who would you want as a dinner guest:** Robin Wall Kimmerer and John Todd

**Where would you want to travel next:** Pape'ete