Sustainability is an ill-defined term that is applied to a complex ensemble of things and situations. Houses built in floodplains, lightbulbs that become hazardous waste, and roads that fragment natural habitat might be touted as sustainable. However, they also test the meaning of sustain as the capacity to support, maintain, or care for a place or thing. The 1987 Brundtland Report linked sustainability to development in a way that placed development in the context of social, ecological, and economic justice, and included the necessity of caring for spatially and temporally distant people and places into how we make decisions today. The broader context of justice and caring can be seen in what have been called the three pillars of sustainability: ecological sustainability, social sustainability, and economic sustainability. It is this focus of sustainability as a practice of inclusivity and empathy that we will engage.

Sustainable design is embedded in long-term thinking, or what composer Brian Eno has called “the big here and the long now.” Landscape architects already work with extended scales of time and space. The trees we envision on our plans will take generations to mature, and the re inhabitation of foxes or butterflies in a place take place over time. Our designs really only make sense when viewed within much larger spatial contexts, such the patterns and presence of the city and its infrastructure, of soil and water, or of migrations and ranges of species. The mapping of these diverse fields and patterns is fundamental to making decisions that are ultimately sustainable.

This studio will propose design solutions for the park of the big here and the long now, or, in short, the sustainable park. We will examine how a park in the 21st century might contribute to ecological, social, and economic sustainability and well-being, a challenge which will require that we wrestle with how to answer questions such as: Who should be a neighbor to toxic or unhealthy places? What would an environmentally just park include (or exclude) and what are the implications for design? As landscape architects, what are our responsibilities to the non-human inhabitants of a place? How do we design now for future drought or floods? Or for production of basic needs such as food or energy? What is the place of beauty in this conversation? And, what, exactly, are we aiming to sustain?
Our site is Golden Gardens Park, 222 acres of open space on the north edge of the Bethel neighborhood, along the northwest edge of Eugene’s Urban Growth Boundary (UGB). The park has a checkered past: once prairie and wetland, then productive farmland, a gravel mine for road construction in the 1960s, and in recent years, the site of several drownings in the ponds created by the mines. The City acquired it in 1974 to use as future parkland. The neighborhood is one of the most ethnically diverse in Eugene. It has a higher than average percentage of children and disabled residents, as well as reports of childhood asthma. The City is proposing an expansion of the UGB that will encompass Golden Gardens Park and add 642 acres of industrial-zoned land, as well as 54 acres for a new elementary school, to the existing urban footprint of Eugene. This is expected to add needed jobs, schools, and parkland to the City.