

UNDERSTANDING OUR COMMUNITY

A COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT PROJECT



Protecting open space lands to benefit people and nature and sustain our communities





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Since its inception in 1993, the Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority (the Authority) has worked collaboratively with passionate and engaged citizens to preserve beautiful, open space lands and the productive farmlands and ranchlands that make our region unique and special. Now twenty-three years later, Santa Clara County is one of the fastest growing and most diverse areas in the San Francisco Bay Region.

More than 1.4 million people live within the Authority's jurisdiction — with rich diversity in cultures, ages, experiences, and backgrounds. The region is also one of disparity when it comes to distribution of wealth, environmental burdens, and access to open space. The Authority works diligently to both engage all segments of the larger community and provide an equitable balance of services to all those living here. These goals, in fact, gave impetus for embarking on *Understanding Our Community*.



Marc Landgraf

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External Affairs Manager, Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority

PURPOSE

The *Understanding Our Community* project is an assessment of demographic data and other community attributes that helps the Authority navigate its cutting edge community engagement program. The Authority's aim is to reach and engage diverse community members in ways that help overcome barriers to accessing nature and its many health, recreation and other benefits. A second important goal is to attract leadership in the conservation field that represents the diversity of the Santa Clara Valley region.

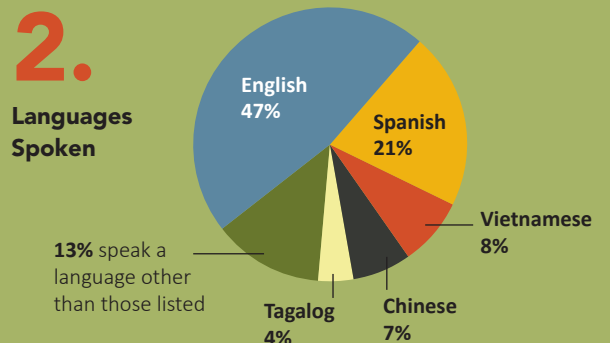
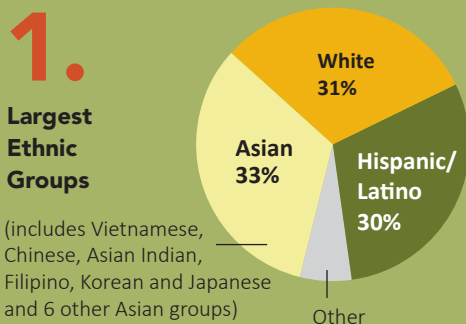
In 2014, Measure Q, a parcel tax for open space protection, was passed in the Authority's jurisdiction. Measure Q includes provision for an Urban Open Space program that will help ascertain and address the needs of urban communities with limited access to open space land and natural areas. *Understanding Our Community* has been a guiding force as the Authority designs and develops this program with the input of diverse voices and perspectives to

help ensure that it is relevant and equitable to communities across the jurisdiction.

APPROACH AND FINDINGS

Understanding Our Community researchers employed an iterative process with continuous reflection, feedback, and analysis. Inputs included data from the U.S. Census, the

A SAMPLE OF DEMOGRAPHIC DATA OF THE AUTHORITY'S JURISDICTION





California Environmental Protections Agency’s CalEnviroScreen, Santa Clara County Registrar of Voters, the Authority’s outreach data, and stakeholder interviews.

Using ArcGIS Online, the research team created individual maps to view distribution of data such as demographics, environmental burdens, under-reached communities, barriers to engagement, and voter support. Then by overlaying selected maps, they gained deeper insights. For example, by layering language and linguistic isolation data, they pinpointed neighborhoods where the Authority could translate materials to improve outreach. Another example is the identification of communities with significant barriers to access that could benefit from supplemental transportation to events.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Deep Engagement Communities

Meaningful community engagement requires intentionality and a focus on the particular interests and preferences of unique communities. *Understanding Our Community* identifies six communities where deeper levels of engagement would bring greater understanding of the barriers to access of nature. Selection was based on multiple indicators:

Selection of Deep Engagement Communities	
Considerations	Sample Indicators
Potential of improved access for residents	High density population means greater potential for impact
Social barriers and environmental burdens	Low-income households and high CalEnviroScreen scores demonstrate lack of resources and disproportionate levels of environmental burdens such as pollution
Other barriers to engagement	Linguistic isolation, high population of very young or elderly, vehicle access – all which make access to open space outside the neighborhood difficult
Opportunities for strategic partnerships	Potential for partnerships demonstrated through stakeholder interviews, again increasing potential impact

The report recommended these activities and practices to better serve the community over the long term: build relationships with local elected officials, forge strategic partnerships with community organizations, hold community meetings with pre-planned opportunities for continuing engagement, offer gateway experiences such as special tours or hikes to generate excitement about nature preserves and programs.

Urban Open Space Program

The Authority’s Urban Open Space program has potential for significant and lasting impact in the region, and therefore it is critical to invest in projects that will serve the greatest need. *Understanding Our Community* recommends creating an urban open space needs score that would increase the Authority’s understanding of those it serves and help identify particular needs within communities identified with the greatest barriers to access. A screening tool would be designed that combines a blend of the CalEnviro Screen Score, protected lands data, local socio-economic indicators, and other criteria that demonstrate a need for urban open space investment.



CONCLUSION

Using the intelligence gained from *Understanding Our Community*, the Authority will work to fulfill its mission in the most equitable way possible. We will learn from and collaborate with community members to build partnerships, invest resources, and deliver projects that serve all of our constituents. In so doing, the Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority hopes to serve as a model to conservation organizations across the country.

3.

Linguistic Isolation

31% of residents live in some of the state’s most linguistically isolated households (where those who are 14 years of age or older have at least some difficulty speaking English).

4.

Income Level

11% of residents live in low income households, i.e. below half the county median income.

5.

CalEnviroScreen (CES)

8% of residents live in a community that falls within the California Environmental Protection Agency’s definition of Disadvantaged Communities.

Understanding Our Community Project Team

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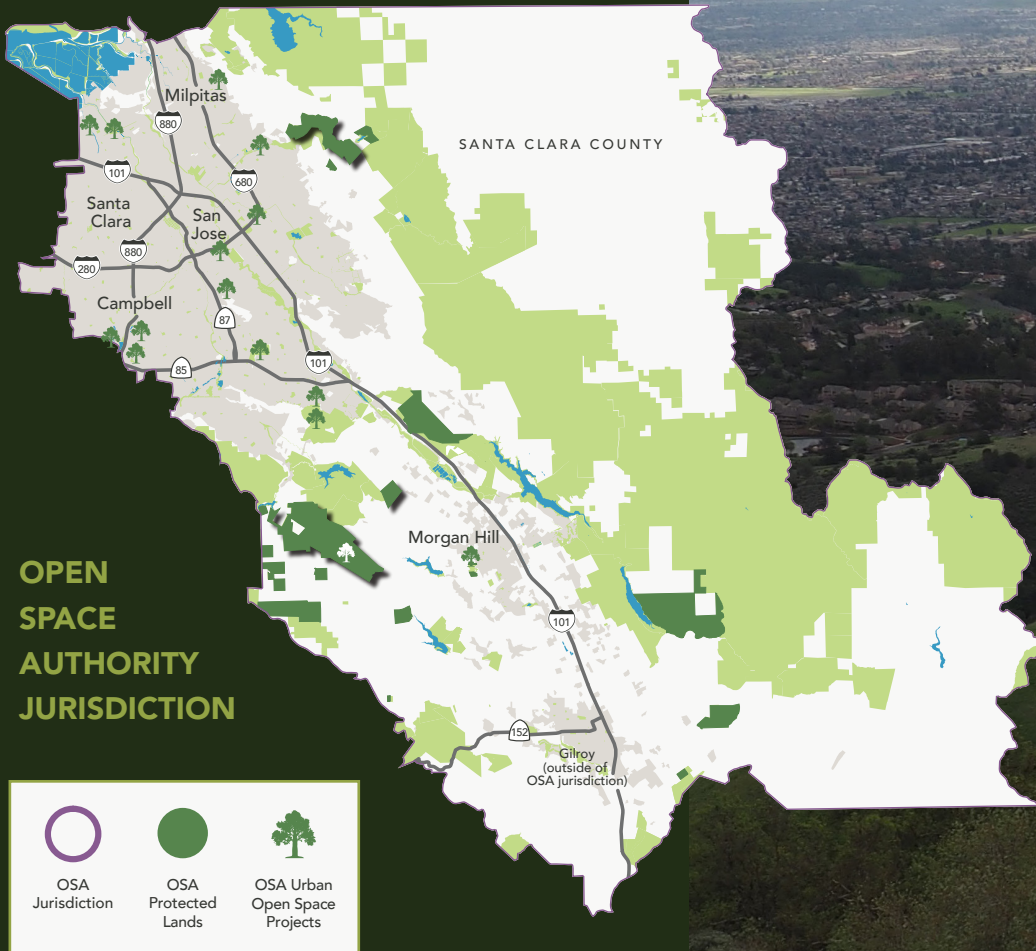
Janice Lau Perez, GIS Planning Technician,
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Understanding Our Community report can be
downloaded at:
www.openspaceauthority.org/urban

PHOTOS

main cover image: Ron Horii; cover insets, left to right: Ron Erskine, Patty Eaton, Liv Ames, Liv Ames;
inside top: Liv Ames, William Matthias, Liv Ames, L. Haymaker, Stephen Joseph, Teri Rogoway, Liv Ames;
inset left: Mountain Mike; inset right: cc T. Miller Holmgren



OPEN SPACE AUTHORITY JURISDICTION

openspaceauthority.org
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Our Mission

The Open Space Authority conserves the natural environment, supports agriculture and connects people to nature by protecting open spaces, natural areas and working farms and ranches for future generations.

The Open Space Authority proudly serves the cities of San Jose, Campbell, Santa Clara, Milpitas, and Morgan Hill and unincorporated areas of Santa Clara County