

SAN PABLO PARKS ASSESSMENT REPORT



*A community-based
participatory research
and evaluation project*

A collaborative project of:
West County Regional Group
First 5 Contra Costa Children and Families Commission
Healthy & Active Before 5

Prepared April 2015

CONTRIBUTORS

West County Regional Group Members

Tomasa Espinoza (Chair), Petronila Fernandes (Co-chair), Mariela Cuellar (Secretary), Soledad Garcia (Treasurer), Laura Aguilar-López, Rosa Alaniz, Lucy Alfaro-Canjura, María Almonte-Flores, Sandra Banales, Blanca Calderón, Flor Castro, Lily Celso, Yajaira Celso, Leticia Chávez, Melinda Davis, William Davis, Samuel González, Alma Grajeda, Aja Green, Ana Iglesias, Lionel Johnson, María Juárez, Camille Lazar, Verónica Liera, Juana Ángeles López, María López Martínez, Leydi Maldonado, Maura Maldonado, Víctor Manning, Rosa Mata, Sandra Mercado-Mendoza, Villahermosa Moreno, Idania Oregón, Jesús Pérez, Claudia Rangel, Nicole Rubio, Jenny Ruiz, Hofferd Sequeira, Andre Smith, Sonia Smith, Adriana Vázquez, Karel Villalobos, and Laura Villanueva

First 5 Contra Costa, Community Engagement Program

Rhea Elina Laughlin, MPH | Community Engagement Program Officer

Gabi Rivas | West County Community Liaison

Carolina López-Flores | Community Engagement Program Assistant

Healthy & Active Before 5

Emily Warming, MPH, MSW | Director

Tonya Love | Program Associate

Stephanie Arcayena | Graduate Intern

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The collaborative partners extend their sincere gratitude to the following individuals and organizations that provided support for this project:

Abigail Kroch, Ph.D., MPH | Director of Epidemiology | Contra Costa Health Services

Ange Burnett, MS | Inclusion Project Coordinator | Contra Costa Child Care Council

Commander David Krastof | Police Department | City of San Pablo

Commander Gene Alameda | Police Department | City of San Pablo

Denece Dodson | Evaluation Specialist | First 5 Contra Costa

Greg Dwyer | Community Services Manager | City of San Pablo

John Bothwell | Maintenance and Operations Supervisor | City of San Pablo

John Medlock | Public Works Administrative Officer | City of San Pablo

Lisa Nguyen, DTR | Program Assistant | Healthy & Active Before 5

Maria Leticia Oregón | Interpreter and Community Partner

Matt Rodriguez | City Manager | City of San Pablo

San Pablo Childhood Obesity Prevention Task Force Members

Walter Aab | Public Affairs Assistant II | First 5 Contra Costa

FUNDERS

The San Pablo Parks Assessment Report was made possible thanks to generous funding from:

First 5 Contra Costa Children and Families Commission

Kaiser Permanente Northern California Community Benefit Programs

Abstract

In October 2014, a collaborative team of resident advocates and early childhood health organizations assessed 5 San Pablo city parks to determine their suitability for young children and families to play and engage in physical activity. The partners included: the West County Regional Group—a parent advocacy group comprised of residents of San Pablo and West Contra Costa County; staff from First 5 Contra Costa Children and Families Commission; and staff from Healthy & Active Before 5 (HAB45)—a collaborative of Contra Costa agencies committed to promoting early childhood health and preventing chronic disease. During follow-up workshops, project partners and community stakeholders: analyzed the park assessment data; selected priority parks and areas in need of improvement; and developed recommendations for improvements and optimal park use. An analysis of the data showed a need for increased park acreage per capita and improvements across all existing San Pablo parks. Across all parks assessed, four thematic priority areas emerged from the data analysis: safety, play equipment, bathrooms, and garbage. The partners recommend immediate improvements are made to Davis Park and El Portal Field because these parks: rated poorly; are located in neighborhoods where poverty rates are high; have a high concentration of children under age five; and are located in areas with high rates of violent crime. Both parks also have more acreage compared to other city parks, creating opportunities for innovative development and improvements. Lastly, the partners encourage adoption of city land-use policies and ordinances, revenue-generating strategies, and park development plans to increase the amount of open, green space available to San Pablo children and families.

1. INTRODUCTION

Public parks are crucial community assets that promote physical activity, social cohesion, and healthy neighborhoods. Parks promote environmental health and can enhance the economic value of neighborhoods. For low-income families, access to quality, safe public parks is particularly important to facilitate social, emotional, and physical development of young children and overall community health. These opportunities for safe outdoor play are essential for promoting early childhood health and preventing chronic disease.^{1,2}

To promote increased park use among young children, a collaborative team of West Contra Costa County residents and early childhood health organizations embarked on a community-led project in fall 2014, to assess the quality of public parks in the City of San Pablo, identifying the best parks and those in need of improvement. The collaborative partners included: the West County Regional Group (WCRG); First 5 Contra Costa Children and Families Commission; and Healthy & Active Before 5 (HAB45).

These partners convened with a shared goal of promoting outdoor play among young children and equitable environmental conditions that foster healthy, safe, and family-friendly communities.

The partners grounded their approach in the principles of community-based participatory research (CBPR). As defined by Minkler and Wallerstein, CBPR is a “collaborative approach to research, [that] equitably involves all partners in the research process and recognizes the unique strengths that each brings. CBPR begins with a research topic of importance to the community with the aim of combining knowledge and action for social change to improve community health and eliminate health disparities.”³

About the Partners

West County Regional Group (WCRG): An organized group of West Contra Costa parent and community advocates whose mission is to create a healthy, safe, and family friendly community by supporting leadership development, and advocacy on behalf of young children and their families.

First 5 Contra Costa Children and Families Commission: First 5 Contra Costa invests Proposition 10 tobacco tax revenues in local health and education programs for expectant parents and children, birth to age five. First 5-funded programs help young children grow up healthy, ready to learn, and supported in safe, nurturing families and communities. First 5 Contra Costa sponsors the WCRG.

Healthy & Active Before 5: A collaborative in Contra Costa County with a mission to prevent obesity in children ages 0-5, by building partnerships and environments for healthy eating and active play. The collaborative is led by a steering committee that includes representatives from: Contra Costa Child Care Council; Contra Costa County Office of Education; Local Planning Council for Child Care and Development; Contra Costa County Employment & Human Services; Community Services Bureau; Contra Costa Health Services; Contra Costa WIC; Contra Costa Health Plan; First 5 Contra Costa; John Muir Health; Kaiser Permanente; and La Clínica de La Raza. The HAB45 advisory board is comprised of diverse interdisciplinary representation, including over 80 community organizations, public agencies, churches, funders, hospitals, and other stakeholders.

The following report is a summary of the park assessment findings and final recommendations. It seeks to promote immediate public and private investment in key San Pablo parks, in order to foster overall community health for children and families. Finally, the report highlights a community-based methodology that serves to strengthen partnerships, build leadership capacity, and empower residents through shared project ownership and participation.

2. BACKGROUND

Recently named an “All America City,” San Pablo is a vibrant, multicultural, and ethnically diverse city with over 29,000 residents. Currently, the City of San Pablo faces a daunting public health crisis: over half of the city’s children are overweight or obese.⁴ In response to this alarming rate—one of the highest in the state—city leadership and local government created the Childhood Obesity Prevention Task Force (COPTF) in 2012 to promote healthy environments and citywide health programs focused on children, youth, and families. In the COPTF’s *Community Action Plan*, a blueprint for addressing the city’s childhood obesity crisis, “improving park spaces” was identified by the Task Force as a top policy priority for promoting physical activity and childhood health.

The City of San Pablo currently has 22 park acres serving its residents and surrounding communities. The average park-per-capita ratio is 0.7 acres per 1,000 residents—a ratio considerably less than the goal of 3.0 acres/1,000 residents established in the Municipal Code.⁵ As outlined in the *Community Action Plan*, access to high quality parks and recreational spaces can result in increased health of San Pablo’s youngest residents. Understanding the current state of existing parks in San Pablo is critical to informing funding, policy, and programming interventions for park improvements. It was with this intention and shared goal of promoting increased park use that the three project partners embarked on a citywide assessment of San Pablo parks.

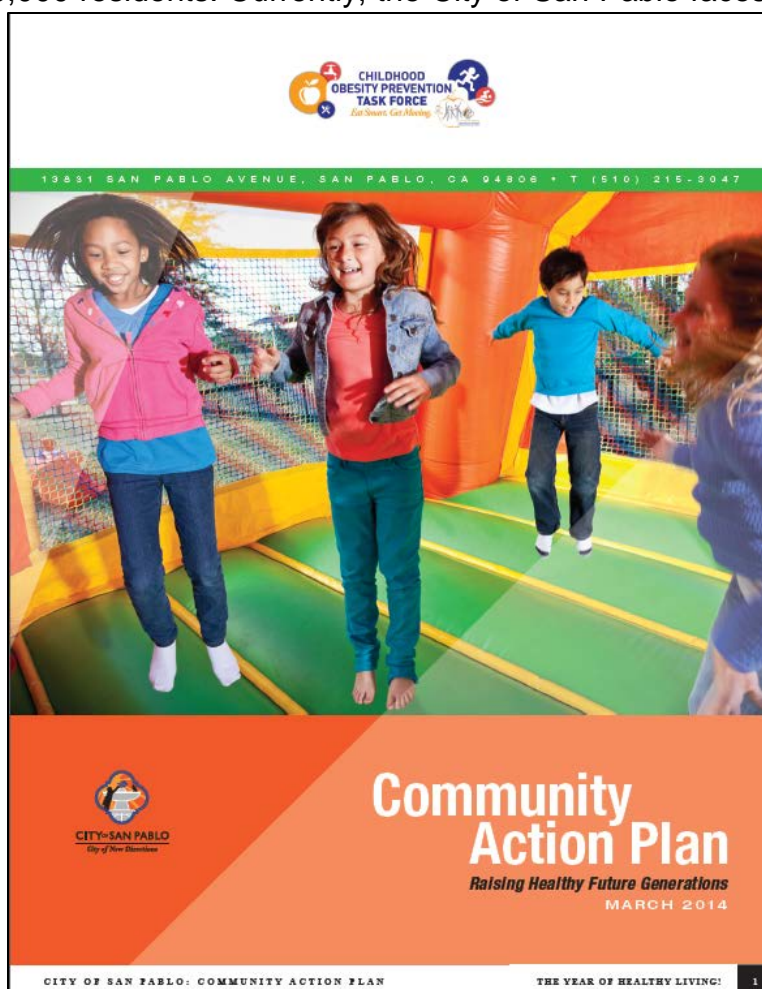


Image 1: Cover of the San Pablo COPTF Community Action Plan

3. METHODOLOGY

Prior to assessing the parks, the collaborative partners developed a park survey tool that incorporated community input, questions from an independent park survey,⁶ and information gathered through key-informant interviews with local evaluation and Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) experts (Appendix Image 1). The survey, available in both Spanish and English, covered nine assessment areas: family amenities, maintenance, safety, play equipment, innovative play atmosphere for young children, all-abilities accessibility, transportation access, young child experience, and overall parent rating (Table 1). The survey contained 80 questions with a combination of Likert scale ratings and open-ended questions to capture surveyors' observations.

Table 1: Survey Tool, Areas Assessed	
Category	Description
Family Amenities	Restrooms, seating, shade, water fountains, toys, asphalt games, sports fields, barbeque pits, picnic area
Maintenance	Landscaping, trees, litter, cleanliness, trash cans, maintenance of play equipment, signs, and surfaces
Safety	Lighting, perception of neighborhood, graffiti, noise and air pollution, visibility, protection from street traffic
Play Equipment	Age appropriate play equipment, separate structures for young and older children, seating, sand box, surfacing, perception of equipment safety
Innovative / Creative Play Atmosphere	Unique and accessible play equipment for young children, nature, water, themed elements, art, gardens, free-standing activity panels
All Abilities Accessibility	Ramps, wide paths, smooth surfaces, wheelchair-accessible swing, braille panels and signs, picnic areas connected by paved paths
Transportation Access	Bus stops, sufficient parking, bike racks, pedestrian access to park
Young Child Experience	Parent impression of young children's experience of the park
Parent Overall Rating	Parent overall rating of the park

Partners consulted the City of San Pablo website and staff to identify all city-owned parks and then performed a preliminary review of the parks to confirm their locations (Image 2). Of the ten parks listed on the city's website, the partners determined that 5 qualified as bona fide, city-owned parks. Among the 5 parks excluded from the assessment, three are facility rentals (Davis Park Senior Center, Maple Hall, and Church Lane Senior Center), one is the City Hall building, and one—Joe Gomes Field—is a soccer field owned by, and located on the grounds of, Contra Costa College.

On October 13th, 2014, project staff, WCRG Members, unaffiliated residents, and stakeholders from local government, schools, universities, churches, health clinics, and non-profit organizations conducted an assessment of 5 San Pablo parks. In total, project staff collected 180 surveys (Table 2).

Upon completing the assessments, project staff compiled the survey data into an Excel spreadsheet and facilitated two community workshops in early 2015 with WCRG Members, city staff, and assessment participants. During the workshops, staff and participants analyzed the survey data to identify themes across all parks, prioritize parks in need of improvement, and draft preliminary recommendations. Partners

also consulted poverty and population data from the U.S Census Bureau⁷ to identify two priority parks for improvements. Lastly, in March 2015, the partners, city staff, and local law enforcement met several times and conducted a site-visit at one priority park to inform the final recommendations.

Table 2: Parks Surveyed	
Park Name	Surveys Collected
Davis Park	50
Brentz Lane	45
Wanlass	45
Kennedy Plaza	20
El Portal Field	20
Total	180

3. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Data analysis and discussions with surveyors indicate a need for some improvements across all existing San Pablo parks and increased park acreage per capita. The following assessment results primarily reflect the perspectives and needs of parents of young children who rely on parks to support their children's optimal development. For the purposes of the findings, the Parent Overall rating was used as an indicator of overall park quality. The Parent Overall rating was based on a scale from 1 to 5, with 5 as the highest score possible.

PARK RATINGS

While the survey data shows that no park received an overall rating above 4, Wanlass Park, with a Parent Overall score of 3.4, was the highest-rated park in the city. Four of the five parks assessed received a rating below average and two parks received a score below 2, indicating major improvements are needed. Brentz Lane Park and Davis Park both received a Parent Overall rating of 2.6, suggesting significant improvements are needed to promote increased park use. El Portal Field and Kennedy Plaza were the lowest rated parks with scores of 1.7 and 1.2. Each city park was designed with specific use in mind: Brentz Lane serves as a neighborhood park (less than 1.5 acres) and Davis Park, Kennedy Plaza, Wanlass Park, and El Portal Field are classified as community parks (more than 1.5 acres).⁸ Below, each park's ratings are discussed in detail.

Wanlass Park: Wanlass Park consistently received a score of 3 or more across all survey categories and was rated particularly high for the Young Child Experience. Surveyors also recognized Wanlass Park in the areas of Amenities, Maintenance, and Transportation Accessibility. One survey respondent remarked on Wanlass Park:

"We really enjoy visiting this park...because the play area and picnic area are close in proximity, the play structures for big and small children are also together, and usually the park is clean and well lit".

Another participant noted:

"The tot lot [or the play equipment for children ages 0-5 years] is separate from the older kids area. Looks like new equipment".

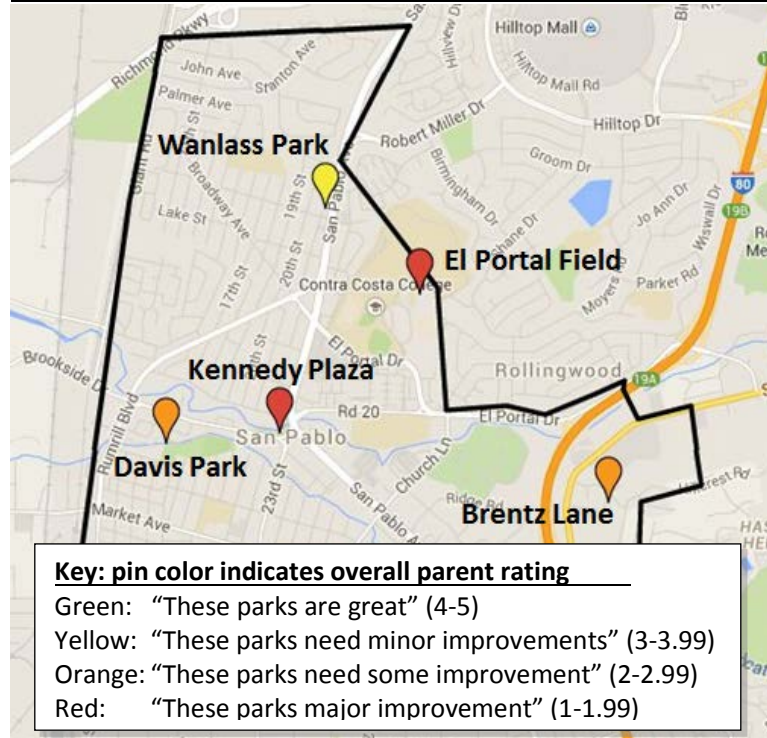
Survey ratings and comments about Wanlass indicate that there is room for some improvement in the areas of safety, bathrooms, and landscaping. One surveyor commented:

"The creek is dangerous—tall grass. I don't think it is safe because I have seen [people who are] homeless, graffiti, and used condoms."

Another respondent observed:

"The bathroom supplies are insufficient—no seat covers or changing tables. The parks are not intended for young children and families. In the evenings, people come to drink and smoke. The plant beds are not being used [and there are] no plants. In the back there is a lot of vandalism."

Image 2: San Pablo park locations by Parent Overall ratings



Brentz Lane Park: Brentz Lane Park was noted for its Play Equipment and Maintenance. As one surveyor articulated:

"[There is] no sand box and the surfacing is safe. [The] tot lot is separate and sufficient."

Another parent commented on her daughter's experience of the park:

"She likes it because it has two playgrounds."

The comments concerning desired improvements for Brentz Lane Park centered on Safety, Young Child Experience, Accessibility, and Innovation. Perhaps a result of the park's small

neighborhood design and location, parents repeatedly remarked on the basic play structures, lack of bathrooms, and difficulty accessing the park. One respondent stated:

"I won't come again. [There are] not many amenities [and the park] is too small."

Furthermore, surveyors commented on the lack of Play Equipment for young children and children of all abilities. Surveys also indicated numerous safety concerns with the play area, surrounding neighborhood, and insufficient lighting. In the words of one parent:

“[The park] needs interactive games for children 0-5 years. There are glass chips in the pavement and children can get hurt.”

Davis Park: As the largest park in San Pablo, parent surveyors agreed that Davis Park has much it can offer children and families. The parents enjoy the soccer fields, artistic mural, natural creek, and separate play structures for children of different ages.[†] Many residents surrounding the park rely on Davis Park for physical activity and as a space for active play for their children. One surveyor explains:

“We go to Davis...a lot. [It is] near our home and we like to get outdoors with our son.”

Another parent surveyor described her children’s experience at the park:

“It seems like they enjoy the park. They have fun. Parks are free spaces. They love to come to the park”.

Survey ratings and qualitative comments revealed that while Davis Park can potentially offer a positive experience for families, the lack of park Safety and Amenities poses a great challenge. One respondent stated:

“My girls love [Davis Park], but what I do not like is that the bathrooms are never open and I immediately leave the park because there is nowhere to take them.”

Another surveyor articulated:

“[The park] is not safe. I wouldn't go out of my way to come here. Its facilities are old and dirty. My kids usually want to leave half-an-hour after arriving. It has youth delinquency issues that should be addressed. [The park is] not safe at times due to...drug use by [people who are] homeless on the other side of creek. [The] restrooms are filthy. Davis Park needs a facelift.”

El Portal Field: Surveyors agreed that El Portal Field provides San Pablo’s residents with nice soccer fields for practice and competitions. El Portal Field also serves as a site for community events. As a result of the open, green space that El Portal Field provides, surveyors believed that the park has potential to offer residents a more complete park experience and offset the dearth of citywide park acreage per capita. Survey ratings also recognized El Portal Field in the areas of Maintenance, Transportation, and Safety. Surveyors noted the park “was good for field sports,” had sufficient parking, and appeared to be safer than other city parks.

[†] Since the time of the assessment in October 2014, City of San Pablo staff have removed the Davis Park play structure for older children and have plans to install a new structure by late June 2015.

Nonetheless, El Portal Field received one of the lowest Parent Overall ratings of the assessment. The survey data indicated that El Portal Field could benefit greatly from more Amenities, Play Equipment, and ADA Accessibility. One surveyor explains:

"[There is] no play area and it needs one, considering how many families come to play soccer here on the weekends."

Another survey comment elaborates:

"This is not a park for kids. It needs restrooms and a picnic area...I have seen people urinating on trees because the porta potty is so dirty. I have viewed many soccer games here. This park needs bleachers and a play structure for kids."

Kennedy Plaza: Kennedy Plaza received the lowest Parent Overall rating of all the parks assessed. Surveys ratings and comments indicated that Kennedy Plaza does not have the necessary Amenities or Play Equipment to serve as a viable park and playspace for children. As one parent explained:

"I can picture children running back and forth on the grass, playing make-believe games by themselves. But this space was not designed with children in mind. There is no play structure, no activities, nothing fun for them to do."

In addition to the lack of Play Equipment at Kennedy Plaza, survey responses revealed that insufficient Safety, Maintenance, and Amenities pose a barrier to park use for children and families. Comments from a surveyor describe her impressions of Kennedy Plaza:

"For me this is not a park. There is a lot of garbage and a homeless encampment. The river is very dangerous for children and there is no division between the streets and park. There are discarded clothes, underwear in plain view, and exposed wires for children to grab. The park is not suitable for children. There is graffiti carved on trees. It seems like a public dump. It's a wasted area when it could be of great benefit to the community and children."

Table 3: Representative comments, highlighting thematic priority areas across all parks	
Safety	<i>"There is a lot of unsafe activity [and it is] not well-lit at night. [The] play equipment is not safe for kids. The fence...[and] the creek [are] not safe."</i>
Play Equipment	<i>"It is not a park. There is a green open space [but] no tot lot or nothing for kids. It doesn't look like a park."</i>
Bathrooms	<i>"I don't like it. The bathrooms are in very bad condition [and] there is standing water in front of the bathrooms."</i>
Garbage	<i>"There is a lot of garbage. I do not like it because there is a lot of trash."</i>

PRIORITY AREAS ACROSS ALL PARKS

Across all parks assessed, four thematic priority areas emerged from the data analysis: safety, play equipment, bathrooms, and garbage (Table 3). An analysis of the qualitative data showed that most negative survey comments related to one of these four priority areas.

The issues highlighted in the comments captured in Table 3 are representative of the common themes that arose across all parks assessed. Both assessment data and community workshop discussions indicated that, in order to facilitate family access to San Pablo parks, all parks in San Pablo need improvement most to the four priority areas of safety, play equipment, bathrooms, and garbage.

PARK ACCESS, POVERTY, AND HEALTH

San Pablo census data shows that nearly 35% of San Pablo's residents are facing dire poverty (living at 150% below FPL).⁹ Taken together, survey and poverty data indicate that the lowest-rated parks are located in the city's lowest income neighborhoods (Image 3 and Table 4).¹⁰ All of the four parks needing the most improvement (Kennedy, El Portal Field, Davis, and Brentz Lane) are located in the lowest-income areas of San Pablo (defined as areas where at least half of the population is living below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL)). Wanlass Park, which needs the least improvement of all the parks, yet still requires some minor improvements, is located in a neighborhood where over a third of the population is living below 200% of the FPL. As discussed in the Background section above, San Pablo currently has an average park-per-capita ratio significantly less than the goal of 3.0 acres/1,000 residents outlined in the Municipal Code.¹¹ In other words, San Pablo's residents are both economically poor and park poor.

Given the economic hardship facing many of San Pablo's residents, park access is even more critical. The World Health Organization, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, along with many other public health experts, have identified the link between poverty and chronic disease.^{12,13} Low-income populations are at highest risk for contracting obesity, heart disease, Type II diabetes, cancer, and suffering premature death. When parks are accessible, safe, and appealing, residents are more likely to increase their physical activity and improve their health.¹⁴ The findings from this San Pablo Parks Assessment mirror national research, showing that low-income communities and communities of color tend to have fewer opportunities for physical activity and access to quality parks than higher-income populations.^{15,16,17} With over half of San Pablo's children experiencing overweight and obesity, improved access to quality parks is essential to promoting health among San Pablo's youngest and most vulnerable residents.

Image 3: Park ratings, percent of population under 200% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL)

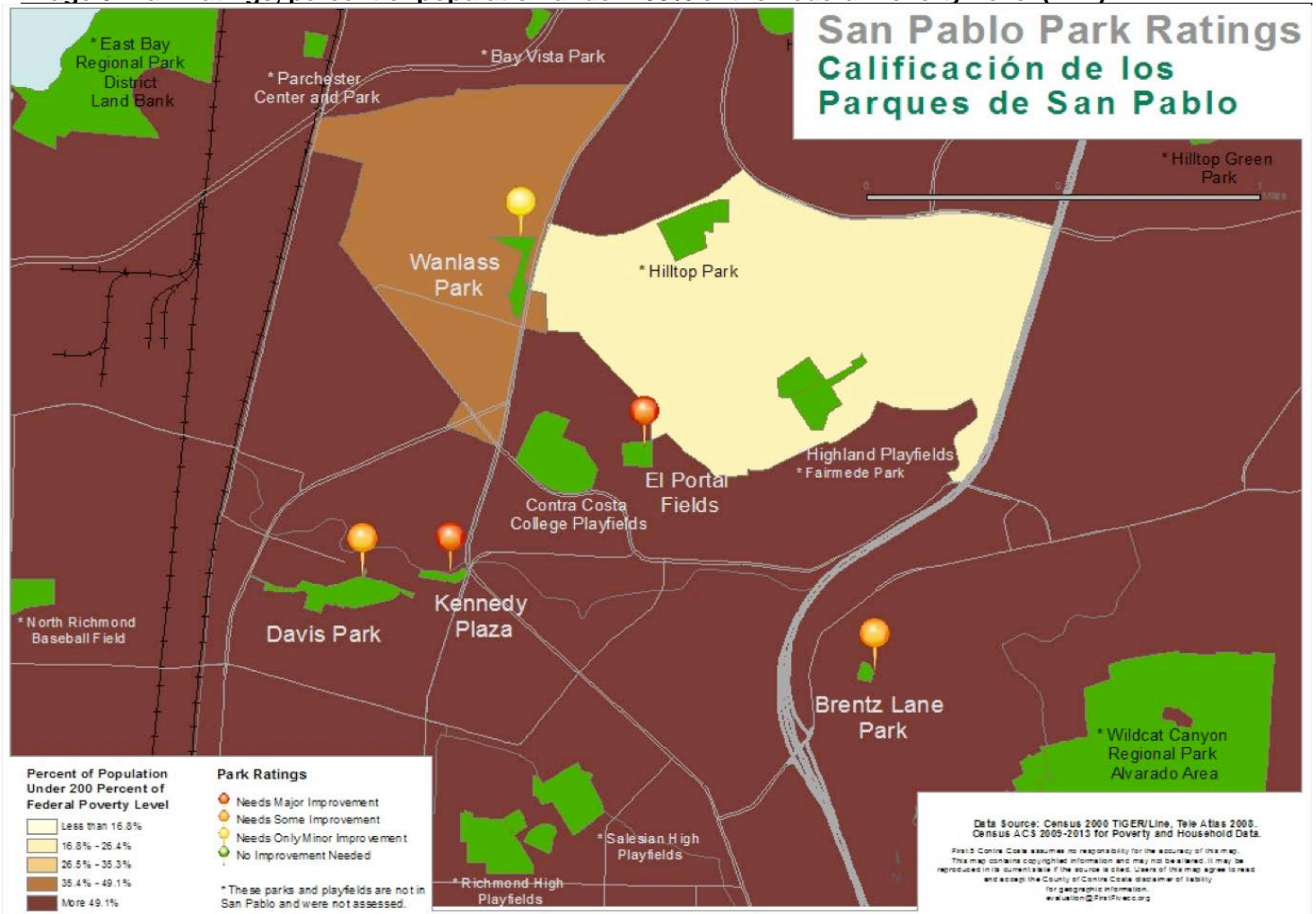


Table 4: Park ratings, stratified by percent of population living under 200% FPL in area surrounding park

Table 1: San Pablo Park Ratings									
Park Name	Amenities	Maintenance	Safety	Play Equipment	Innovation	ADA Access	Transportation	Child	Parent
Wanlass	3.5	3.5	3.3	3.4	3.0	3.1	3.4	4.1	3.4
Brentz Lane	1.9	3.0	2.6	3.4	2.5	2.3	2.2	3.3	2.6
Davis	2.2	2.6	2.1	2.6	2.2	2.5	2.6	3.4	2.6
El Portal Field	1.5	2.4	2.4	1.2	1.4	1.4	2.1	1.5	1.7
Kennedy	1.3	1.5	1.4	1.1	1.6	2.3	1.8	1.3	1.2

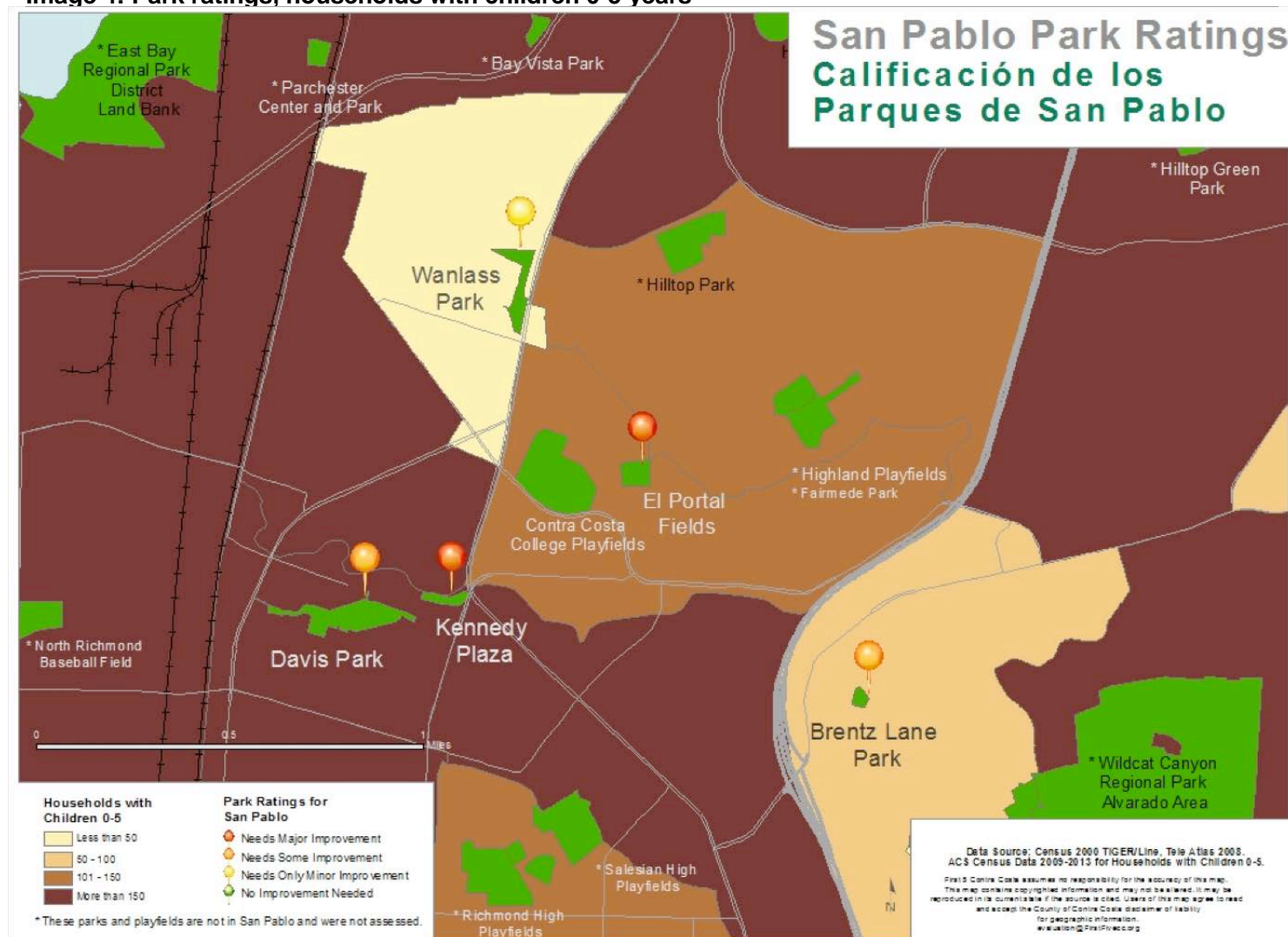
Color Coding Key			
4.00 – 5.00	3.00 - 3.99	2.00 - 2.99	1.00 - 1.99
No Improvement Needed	Needs Only Minor Improvement	Needs Some Improvement	Needs Major Improvement

SURVEYED PARKS AND YOUNG CHILDREN

According to U.S. Census data, sixty percent of San Pablo's parks are located in neighborhoods with a relatively high concentration of young children under age five (more than 150 households with young children per census tract) (Image 4). Two of the five city parks are located in areas with the highest concentration of young children. Davis Park and Kennedy Plaza are located in neighborhoods that are both very low-income and home to the city's highest concentration young children. Wanlass Park is located in a neighborhood with the lowest concentration of young children. These findings suggest young children in San Pablo live closest to Davis Park, Kennedy Plaza,

and El Portal Field. Given the importance of park use in fostering optimal early childhood development and health, park quality in areas with a high concentration of young children is of particular concern for San Pablo.

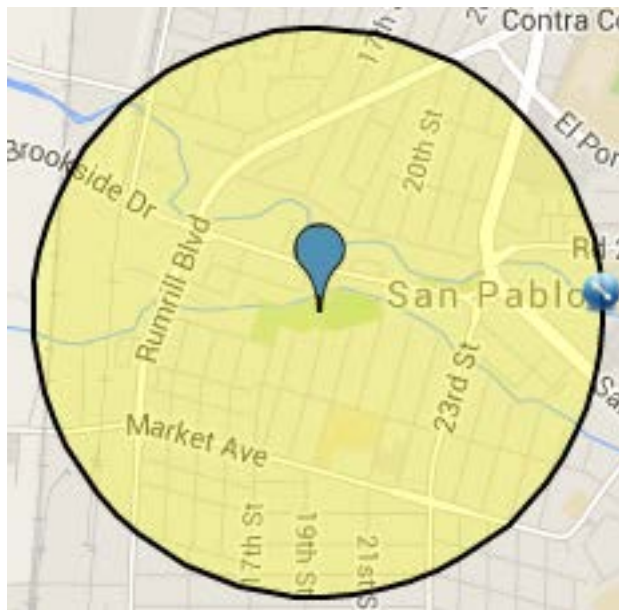
Image 4: Park ratings, households with children 0-5 years



LOW-RATED PARKS AND COMMUNITY SAFETY

As a component of overall park analysis, the partners consulted crime data requested from public safety departments in the City of San Pablo, City of Richmond, Contra Costa College, and Contra Costa County Sheriff's Department. Davis Park is patrolled entirely by the San Pablo Police Department and El Portal Field is patrolled by all four jurisdictions. Included among the parks located in the lowest-income neighborhoods with a relatively high concentration of young children are Davis, Kennedy, and El Portal Field. Public crime data from January 2014 through December 2014¹⁸ demonstrates that a high incidence of certain crimes occurred near (within 0.5 mile radius) these low-rated parks, particularly, Davis and El Portal Field (Images 5 and 6). During this time period, over 22% of total aggravated assaults occurred near Davis and over 14% took place near El Portal Field. An alarming 32% of all sexual assaults in San Pablo

Image 5: Davis Park, 0.5 mile radius



A map of the Contra Costa College area. A red circle highlights the campus and surrounding streets. The map shows Contra Costa College, El Portal Dr, Rd 20, Church Ln, and San Pablo. Other streets visible include 19th St, 20th St, 1st St, and Rollingwood. A blue pin is located on the map.

Crime Type	Davis	El Portal Field
Aggravated Assaults	22.5	14.29
Sexual Assault	32.18	21.74

All of San Pablo's parks are located in low-income areas. Survey data shows the present state of these parks is inadequate for young children. Research shows that the presence of parks alone does not ensure access or usability of these critical community spaces, but instead, public parks need adequate amenities, play structures, and safety to be frequented.¹⁹

The following recommendations reflect extensive input from San Pablo families with young children, community stakeholders, city staff, and public health research on best practices for park promotion. Overall, the partners recommend that the parks prioritized for immediate improvements are those located in very low-income areas and those areas where a relatively high concentration of young children live. The partners recommend that the attention given to these parks focuses on the four priority areas of safety, play equipment, bathrooms, and garbage. Furthermore, the partners recommend

that the city explore strategies for increasing San Pablo's park acreage per capita, to reach the goal of 3.0 acres per 1,000 residents established in the Municipal Code.

In particular, the partners recommend that Davis Park and El Portal Field receive immediate and comprehensive attention in the areas of safety, play equipment, amenities, and maintenance (Table 6). While analysis of the data indicates all San Pablo parks are in need of at least minor improvements, ultimately, the partners prioritized Davis Park and El Portal Field for immediate improvement because they: received low ratings; are located in the lowest-income neighborhoods; are located in neighborhoods with high rates of violent crime; and are located in areas inhabited by a

"Every child deserves to be able to go down the block and enter the world of wonder that is the local park, but for many of us, a safe and clean park is not down the street but across the city. It is sad to know that only a select amount of children are allowed to have that." –Regional Group Member

Table 6: Priority Park Improvement Recommendations by timeframe, issue area, and priority

Priority Area	Term	Davis Park	El Portal Field
Safety	Medium	1. More surveillance cameras 2. More lighting 3. Park programming	1. Lighting 2. Park programming
	Long	1. Fence along Wildcat Creek 2. Park patrols or rangers	1. Surveillance cameras 2. Park patrols or rangers
Amenities	Short	1. New water fountains by bathrooms 2. Stainless steel counter in bathroom 3. Bilingual signs with police and maintenance phone numbers	1. Basketball courts 2. Additional pavement games 3. Bilingual signs with police and maintenance numbers
	Medium	1. Existing bathrooms with Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) updates 2. Water fountains throughout park 3. Picnic tables and barbeque grills	1. Water fountains throughout the park 2. Picnic tables and barbeque grills
	Long	1. Additional bathrooms at 20 th Street, near play structures 2. Walking path	1. Bathrooms 2. Walking path
Maintenance	Short	1. Waste and recycling receptacles	1. Waste and recycling receptacles
	Medium	1. Bulk waste mitigation strategies	N/A
Play Equipment	Medium	1. Play structures at 20 th Street	N/A
	Long	N/A	1. Play Structures

relatively high number of young children under age five. Additionally, the partners selected Davis Park as a priority park because it is widely used by many San Pablo residents and, according to partners and city staff, it has structural potential for the partners' recommended improvements. Furthermore, the partners selected El Portal Field as a priority park because, presently, there are viable possibilities to transform it into a full-service park. Remodeling El Portal Field into a full-service park would increase access to quality park space in San Pablo, and consequently, increase opportunities for physical activity among families with young children. Overall Davis Park and El Portal Field demonstrate a pressing need for improvement and are most adequately designed and positioned for the recommended park changes at this time.

"As a kid, I spent my summers at my local park. I learned so much about the outdoors, people, and myself during those hours spent running around playing. I did not have to worry about glass in the sand, unsafe play equipment, or the lack of water fountains. I also did not have to travel far to play. I would have missed out on so many great moments and lessons if I did not have that great park by my house and, unfortunately, too many children do not have the chance to play at the park and build similar memories. I know that we can do better for our kids" –Regional Group Member

To increase the amount of needed park space across the city, the partners ask that the City of San Pablo: 1) adopt a Parks Master Plan that reflects the partners' recommendations; 2) allocate city capital improvement funds to the recommended park improvements; and 3) work with the partners to seek additional park improvement grant funding for the recommended renovations. The partners also encourage San Pablo city staff and elected officials to work with community partners—including the partners in this park assessment project—to explore land-use policies and revenue-generating strategies to achieve the recommended park improvements at Davis Park and El Portal Field, as well as increased park acreage citywide. Lastly, the partners recommend that a coalition of San Pablo residents, local law enforcement, city staff, and community safety advocates is formed to implement a

robust violence prevention strategy in the neighborhoods where Davis Park and El Portal Field are located. Because residents identified safety as a pressing issue, it is critical that community health prevention strategies are explored to address the root causes of the area's poor park conditions.

These recommendations reflect a comprehensive vision for park redesign that community members assert will promote equitable park access, increased park use by young children and families, increased social cohesion, and improved neighborhood safety in the City of San Pablo.

4. CONCLUSION

Public parks are essential spaces for promoting community health, and in particular, physical activity among families with young children. City of San Pablo parks have great potential. With improvement to park bathrooms, play equipment, safety, and cleanliness, San Pablo's existing parks could be excellent spaces for physical activity and recreation among families with young children. The park partners recommend that Davis Park and El Portal Field are prioritized for immediate improvements—particularly in the areas of amenities, maintenance, safety, and play equipment. These two parks not only rated very poorly on the assessments, they also are located within San Pablo's lowest-income neighborhoods; are surrounded by high incidence of violent crime; and are inhabited by a relatively high concentration of young children under age five. Furthermore, given the low per capita ratio of existing park acreage, the partners recommend that the city consider transforming El Portal into a full-service park, in order to increase citywide family access to playspaces for young children.

It is well established that early childhood is a critical time in the life-course for promoting health and preventing chronic disease. With improved access to quality parks in their own neighborhoods, the youngest children of San Pablo are more likely to benefit from opportunities for a healthy start to their lives.

The data and findings of this report are distinct in that community members were central to the park evaluation process from beginning to present. This community-based participatory project is uniquely positioned to provide rich, invaluable data and promote innovative health improvement strategies that are possible when local organizations, city governments, and residents join efforts to improve community health.



Pictured above: WCRG Members in Davis Park, following one of their community data analysis workshops

Appendix Image 1: San Pablo Park Survey Tool



Name of Park: _____ Parent Name (first name, last initial): _____

Time and Day: _____

Parks Check-List

A. Family Amenities:		Yes	No			Yes	No
Restrooms? (How many?)				Group Sports Courts (i.e. Basketball, volleyball, etc.)			
* Are they functional?				Sports fields			
* Clean?				Water fountains			
* Are there supplies? (i.e. Toilet paper, soap, etc.)				* Are they functional?			
* Is there a family bathroom (i.e. Changing table, etc.)				Shade			
BBQ pits				Seating			
Picnic area							
Overall Rating	1= Bad		3= Average		5= Very good		
	1	2	3	4	5		
Comments:							

B. Maintenance:		Yes	No			Yes	No
Landscaping				Trees?			
Litter				Surfacing is in good shape			
Play equipment like new (no rust)				Plastic bags for dog waste available?			
Appears clean				Are there enough trash cans?			
Signs (w/phone # of maintenance)				Are the trash cans emptied?			
Overall Rating	1= Bad		3= Average		5= Very good		
	1	2	3	4	5		
Comments:							

C. Safety:		Yes	No			Yes	No
Well lit/Lights				Is it a safe neighborhood?			
Is there graffiti?				Do you detect noise pollution?			
Do you think the park needs surveillance?				Do you detect air pollution?			

Don't forget to take pictures if you can! Drive safely! Hand your sheet to your team leader.

Appendix Image 1 (continued): San Pablo Park Survey Tool

	Yes	No		Yes	No
Is your perception that the park is safe? Why? Write below			Are play spaces visible from the street?		
Are play spaces protected from the street? (i.e. fenced in; away from street)			Is there unsafe activity conducted at the park? (i.e. adults/teens drinking/doing drugs/smoking; prostitution; loitering; camps)		
Streets are safe (crosswalks, not too much traffic)			Signs (w/emergency phone #)		
Overall Rating	1= Bad		3= Average		5= Very good
	1	2	3	4	5
Comments:					

D. Play Equipment

	Yes	No			
Is play equipment accessible for young children?					
Seating at play area?					
Is there a sand box?					
Is sand box safe? (No needles, glass, garbage, etc)					
Is the surfacing safe in the play area?					
Is tot lot (0-5) separate from older kids' area?					
Is play equipment sufficient for toddlers?					
Overall Rating	1= Bad		3= Average		5= Very good
	1	2	3	4	5
Comments:					

E. Innovative/Creative Play Atmosphere for young children?

	Yes	No			
Art					
Nature					
Water					
Gardens					
Free standing activity panels					
Active play? (i.e. Climbing structure, crawling tunnel)					
Imagination Play (i.e. Jeep, boat, tower, playhouse, etc)					
Overall Rating	1= Bad		3= Average		5= Very good
	1	2	3	4	5
Comments:					

F. Wheel-Chair/Special Needs Accessible? ADA Requirements:

	Yes	No
Wheelchair accessible (multiple entry points)		
Ramps		

Don't forget to take pictures if you can! Drive safely! Hand your sheet to your team leader.

Appendix Image 1 (continued): San Pablo Park Survey Tool

	Yes	No
Paths are 5 ft. wide		
Surface (rubber, concrete, mulch)		
Easy wheelchair transfer points		
Wheel -chair swing		
Braille learning panels		
If there are picnic areas are they connected by paved path/pad? If N/A , circle here		
Overall Rating	1= Bad	3= Average
	1	2
	3	4
	5	5= Very good
Comments:		

G. Transportation:

	Yes	No
Is there a visible bus stop?		
Is there sufficient parking?		
Are there bike racks?		
Is it easy to walk to the park?		
Overall Rating	1= Bad	3= Average
	1	2
	3	4
	5	5= Very good
Comments:		

H. Young Child Rating:

	Yes	No
Are the children enjoying the park?		
Is your young child happy?		
Playing		
Running around		
Entertained		
Having fun		
Overall Rating	1= Bad	3= Average
	1	2
	3	4
	5	5= Very good
Comments:		

I. Parenting Rating:

	Yes	No
Have you been to this park before?		
Why or why not?		
Any other comments/ notes?		
Your opinion Overall	1= Bad	3= Average
	1	2
	3	4
	5	5= Very good
Comments:		

Don't forget to take pictures if you can! Drive safely! Hand your sheet to your team leader.

References

- ¹ Harnik, P., & Welle, B. (2009). Measuring the Economic Value of a City Park System. *The Trust for Public Land*, 1-28.
- ² Taylor, W., & Lou, D. (2011). Do All Children Have Places to Be Active? Disparities in Access to Physical Activity Environments in Racial and Ethnic Minority and Lower-Income Communities. *Active Living Research*, 1-24.
- ³ Minkler, M., & Wallerstein, N. (Eds.). (2003). *Community based participatory research in health*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- ⁴ Chen, A., Dyett, M., Khan, V., Lai, S., McMahon, M., Szydluk, M., . . . Waldeck, R. (2011). San Pablo General Plan 2030, 1. Retrieved April 9, 2015, from <http://www.sanpabloca.gov/DocumentCenter/Home/View/669>
- ⁵ City of San Pablo Childhood Obesity Prevention Task Force Community Action Plan: Raising Healthy Future Generations. (2014).
- ⁶ Moore, E., Prakash, S., Garzón, C., Hernandez, C., McNeil, L., Pérez, C., Violich, C. (2009). City Park Conditions. In *Measuring What Matters: Neighborhood Research for Economic and Environmental Health and Justice in Richmond, North Richmond, and San Pablo* (p. 105). Oakland: Pacific Institute.
- ⁷ U.S. Census Bureau, 2008-2012 American Community Survey. Obtained by Contra Costa Health Public Health Epidemiology, Planning, and Evaluation Department, April 2014
- ⁸ City of San Pablo. *San Pablo General Plan 2030*. *ibid*
- ⁹ U.S. Census Bureau, 2009-2013 American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates. Accessed April 2014 at: <http://factfinder2.census.gov>
- ¹⁰ U.S. Census Bureau, 2008-2012 American Community Survey. Obtained by Contra Costa Health Public Health Epidemiology, Planning, and Evaluation Department, April 2014
- ¹¹ *Ibid*. *San Pablo General Plan*
- ¹² (2015, January 1). Retrieved April 9, 2015, from http://www.who.int/chp/chronic_disease_report/part2_ch2/en/
- ¹³ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report, 62(3). (2013). Retrieved April 9, 2015, from <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/pdf/other/su6203.pdf>
- ¹⁴ Gustat, J., Rice, J., Parker, K., Becker, A., & Farley, T. (2012). *Effect of Changes to the Neighborhood Built Environment on Physical Activity in a Low-Income African American Neighborhood*. Retrieved April 9, 2015, from http://www.cdc.gov/pcd/issues/2012/11_0165.htm
- ¹⁵ Hannon, C., Cradock, A., Gortmaker, S., Wiecha, J., El Ayadi, A., Keefe, L., & Harris, A. (2006). Play Across Boston: A Community Initiative to Reduce Disparities in Access to After-school Physical Activity Programs for Inner-city Youths, 3, A100.
- ¹⁶ Moor, L., Diez Roux, A., Evenson, K., McGinn, A., & Brines, S. (2008). *Availability of Recreational Resources in Minority and Low Socioeconomic Status Areas*, 34, 16-22.
- ¹⁷ Powell LM, Slater S, Chaloupka FJ, Harper D. (2006). *Availability of physical activity-related facilities and neighborhood demographic and socioeconomic characteristics: a national study*, 96:1676-80.
- ¹⁸ Public Records requests to public safety departments of: City of San Pablo, City of Richmond, Contra Costa College, Contra Costa County Sheriff: 2014. Retrieved in March and April 2015.
- ¹⁹ Wen, M., Zhang, X., Harris, C., Holt, J., & Croft, J. (2013). Spatial Disparities in the Distribution of Parks and Green Spaces in the USA. Retrieved April 1, 2015, from <http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s12160-012-9426-x/fulltext.html>