

# BAY POINT PARKS ASSESSMENT REPORT



*A community-based  
participatory research  
and evaluation project*

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

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## **ABSTRACT**

In the fall of 2017, a collaborative team of residents, early childhood advocates, and public health organizations assessed nine Bay Point parks in Contra Costa County to determine their suitability for young children and families to play and engage in physical activity. The partners included the East County Regional Group--a parent advocacy group of Bay Point and East Contra Costa County residents; First 5 Contra Costa Children and Families Commission; Healthy & Active Before 5 (HAB45); Contra Costa Health Services; and resident leaders. During follow-up workshops, these partners analyzed park assessment data, selected priority parks and improvement needs, and developed recommendations for improvements. The group found that the overall quality of the nine assessed parks was low, with improvements most urgently needed in the areas of play equipment, amenities, ADA accessibility, and maintenance. The group partners recommended immediate improvements at Ambrose and Lynbrook parks because of their location in neighborhoods with high poverty and crime rates and large numbers of young children. Bay Point community members further agreed that Ambrose and Lynbrook had the greatest transformative potential as lively, popular parks, widely used by the community.

# 1. INTRODUCTION

Public parks are crucial community assets that promote physical activity, social cohesion, and healthy neighborhoods. Parks improve environmental health and can enhance the economic value of neighborhoods. Safe, quality, public parks facilitate the social, emotional, and physical development of young children and support community health.

Park access is particularly important for low-income families at increased risk of physical inactivity and overweight and obesity. Opportunities for safe outdoor play are essential for promoting early childhood health equity and preventing chronic disease.<sup>1,2</sup>

With approximately half of Bay Point's school-age children experiencing overweight and obesity, access to quality parks is critical to the health of Bay Point's youngest and most vulnerable residents.<sup>3</sup>

To increase park use among young children, in August 2017, a collaborative team of East Contra Costa County residents, early childhood advocates, and public health organizations embarked on a community-led project to assess the quality of public parks in the unincorporated area of Bay Point, Contra Costa County, California. Project partners included the East County Regional Group (ECRG), First 5 Contra Costa Children and Families Commission (First 5), 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), defined by Minkler and Wallerstein, as a "collaborative approach to research, [that] equitably involves all partners in the research process and recognizes the unique strengths that each brings. CBPR

## About the Partners

**East County Regional Group (ECRG):** A multicultural group of East Contra Costa parent volunteer advocates whose mission is to create a healthy, safe, and equitable community by building leadership, advocacy, and power on behalf of low-income and underrepresented young children and families.

### **First 5 Contra Costa Children and Families Commission (First 5):**

First 5 invests Proposition 10 tobacco tax revenues in local health and education programs for expectant parents and for children, age 0 to 5. First 5 funded programs help young children to grow up healthy, ready to learn, and supported in safe, nurturing families and communities. First 5 sponsors the ECRG.

### **Healthy & Active Before 5**

**(HAB45):** A collaborative of over 80 Contra Costa County organizations that advances health equity through local policy and environmental changes to support the health and well-being of children age 0 to 5 and their families. The collaborative steering committee includes: CocoKids, Contra Costa County Employment & Human Services Community Services Bureau (Head Start), Contra Costa Health Services, Contra Costa Health Plan, Contra Costa WIC, First 5 Contra Costa; John Muir Health; Kaiser Permanente, and La Clínica de la Raza Health Center.

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.”<sup>4</sup>

The following report summarizes park assessment findings and final recommendations. We share it with the hope of fostering community health for children and families by encouraging immediate public and private investment in the neediest and most promising Bay Point parks. Lastly, the report highlights a community-based assessment methodology that served to strengthen partnerships, build leadership capacity, and empower residents through shared project ownership and participation.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

Prior to assessing the parks, the collaborative partners developed a park survey tool incorporating community input, questions from an independent park survey,<sup>5</sup> and key-informant interviews with local evaluation and Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) experts. The survey covered eight assessment areas: family amenities, maintenance, safety, play equipment, ADA accessibility, park accessibility / transportation, young child experience, and overall parent rating (Table 1).

Table 1: Survey Tool, Areas Assessed	
Category	Description
Family Amenities	Restrooms, water fountains, picnic area, BBQ pits, sports fields/courts, walking paths, shade, seating
Maintenance	Graffiti, garbage/waste, landscape/surfacing
Safety	Park equipment and amenities safety, fencing, criminal activity, trees, neighborhood safety, signs, cameras, lighting, traffic, noise
Play Equipment	Play structure (age 0-5), Play structure (5-12), innovative/creative play, play structure maintenance
Wheelchair/ADA requirements	Ramps, clear paths, smooth surfaces, all abilities/ADA equipment such as wheelchair-accessible swings, braille learning panels
Park Accessibility/ Transportation	Visible bus stop, walkability, crosswalks, bike paths, bike racks, bike lanes
Young Child Rating	Parent impression of young children’s experience of the park
Overall Parent Rating	Overall Parent rating of the park

The survey included a combination of Likert scale ratings and open-ended questions to capture respondent observations. Partners consulted the Ambrose Recreation & Park District website and staff to identify all District owned parks, and then performed a preliminary review of the parks to confirm their locations (Appendix, Image 1). On August 19, 2017, staff, ECRG members, and Bay Point residents conducted an assessment of

all nine Bay Point parks. After collecting 360 surveys, staff compiled the data and facilitated two community workshops with ECRG members and other Bay Point residents in January and February 2018. During the workshops, staff and community members analyzed the survey data to identify themes across parks. Partners also consulted data from the East Contra Costa County health indicator report, local crime rates, and U.S. Census Bureau<sup>6,7</sup> data to identify two priority parks and agree on recommended park improvements.

### **3. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS**

The following assessment results primarily reflect the perspectives and needs of parents who rely on parks to support their young children's optimal development. The "Overall Parent" rating was used as an indicator of overall park quality, with a low score of 1 and a maximum possible score of 5.

Bay Point currently has 28.76 park acres serving its residents and surrounding communities with an average park space of 1.3 acres per 1,000 residents.<sup>†</sup> This is significantly lower than the recognized standard of 3 acres per 1,000 residents<sup>8</sup>, as well as the median of 13.1 acres per 1,000 residents for low density cities across the United States.<sup>9</sup> Only 59% of Bay Point residents live within a quarter mile of a park,<sup>10</sup> the recommended distance for optimal park use. To promote optimal community health, advocates and residents alike identified the need for increased green space, especially in the Shore Acres area.

#### **PARK RATINGS**

No park received an overall survey rating higher than 3, indicating that all parks in Bay Point need improvement. With an Overall Parent rating of 2.6, Ambrose Park received the highest rating while five of the nine parks received a rating below 2, indicating the need for significant improvements. Trade Winds (0.9), Alves Lane (1.3), and View Pointe (1.8) received the lowest ratings. Trade Winds, Boeger, and View Pointe, all under jurisdiction of the Ambrose Recreation and Park District, are small neighborhood pocket parks lacking amenities.

#### **PRIORITY AREAS ACROSS ALL PARKS**

Across all parks assessed, the data show four priority areas for improvement: play equipment, amenities, ADA accessibility, and maintenance (Table 2). Most negative qualitative survey comments related to one of these four areas.

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<sup>†</sup> Per capita park acreage is calculated using the acreage for each of the nine parks in Bay Point--provided by the Ambrose Recreation & Park District--and the 2012-2016 American Community Survey 5-year population estimates.

Table 2: Representative comments highlighting thematic priority areas across all parks		
Priority Area	Survey Comments	Themes
Play Equipment	<i>"Fun equipment but poorly maintained."</i> --Parent <i>"I wish there were more swings."</i> --Child	Lack of structures for children age 0 to 5, broken equipment, many parks with no equipment.
Amenities	<i>"Who goes to a park with no bathrooms and no water?"</i> --Parent <i>"This would be a great park for gatherings if there were bathrooms and fountains."</i> --Parent	Most parks lacked bathrooms and water fountains. Where they existed, all were broken, non-functional, locked, or dirty.
ADA Accessibility	<i>"Even though we have ramps, the entrance is not accessible to the play structure."</i> --Parent <i>"The ramp is accessible but there is no ADA play equipment."</i> --Parent	Uneven surfacing, lack of engaging play equipment for children of all abilities.
Maintenance	<i>"The slide is broken and there is glass in the mulch near the playground."</i> --Parent <i>"No landscaping, dead plants everywhere, no number to call for maintenance."</i> --Parent	Garbage, graffiti, lack of signage, unsafe items, broken equipment.

The comments highlighted above are representative of the common themes across all parks assessed. It is notable that of the nine parks assessed, only two had a water fountain, and only one a bathroom. Assessment data and community workshop discussions indicated that, in order to increase family use of Bay Point parks, all of them require the greatest improvement in the four priority areas: play equipment, amenities, ADA accessibility, and maintenance.

## PARK ACCESS, POVERTY, AND HEALTH

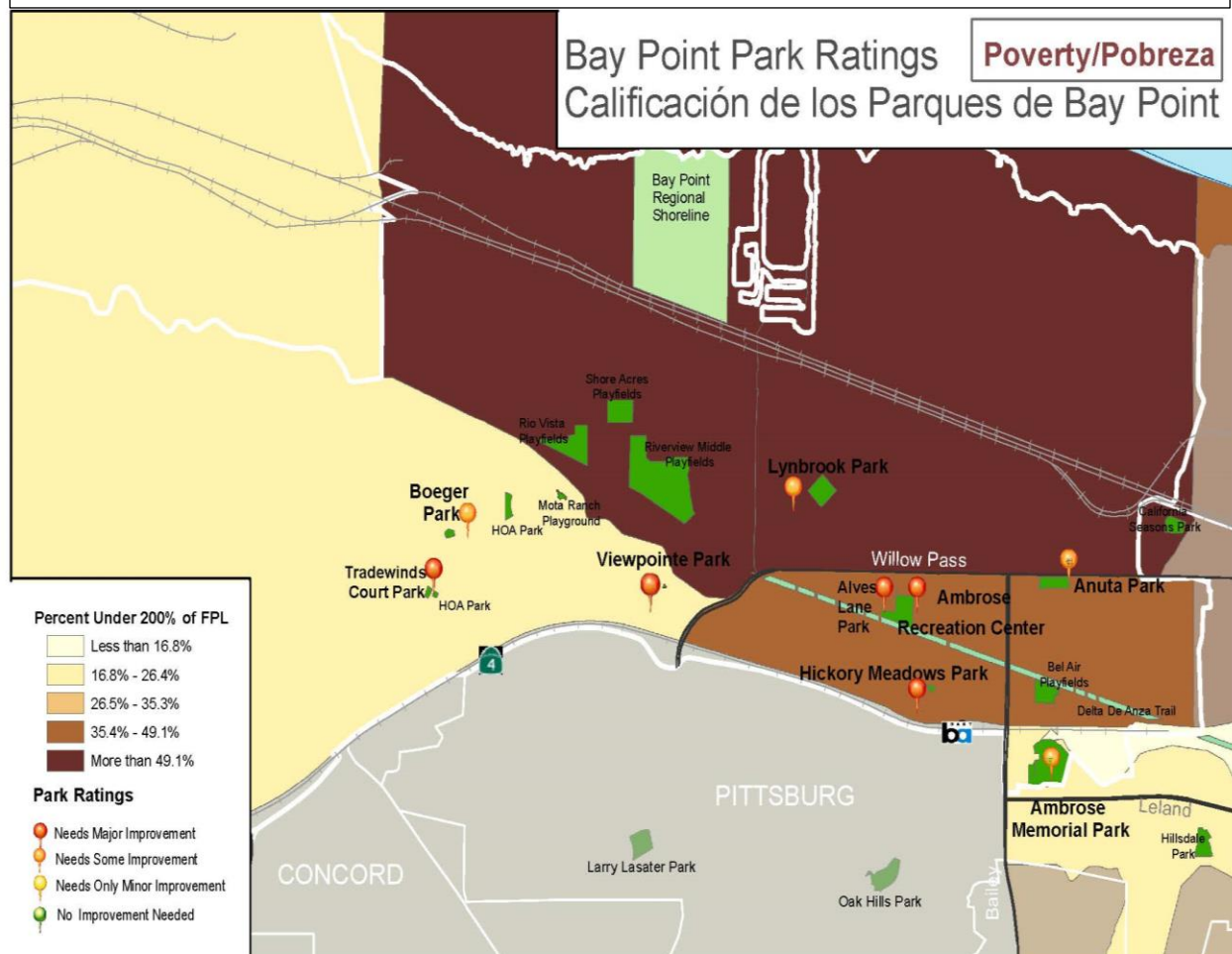
Census data show that 43.4% of Bay Point families live at or below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL).<sup>11</sup> Taken together, survey and poverty data indicate that 56% of the lowest rated parks are located in the city's lowest income neighborhoods (Appendix Image 2).<sup>12</sup> Three of the four parks needing the most improvement (Alves Lane, Hickory Meadows, and Ambrose Recreation Center) are in neighborhoods in which at least one-



third of the population lives below 200% of the FPL. Lynbrook Park, which needs some improvement, is the only park in a neighborhood where at least 49.1% of the population lives below 200% of the FPL.

Given the economic hardships facing Bay Point residents, park access is critical. The World Health Organization, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and numerous public health experts, have identified a link between poverty and chronic disease.<sup>13,14</sup> Low-income populations are at highest risk for obesity, heart disease, Type II diabetes, cancer, and premature death. When parks are accessible, safe, and appealing, residents are more likely to increase their physical activity, resulting in improved health.<sup>15</sup> Findings from the Bay Point Parks Assessment mirror national research demonstrating that low-income communities and communities of color have fewer opportunities for physical activity and reduced access to quality parks compared with higher-income populations.<sup>16,17,18</sup>

Image 2: Park ratings, percent of population under 200% of the Federal Poverty Level



Percent of Population under 200% Federal Poverty Level  
 Por Ciento de la Población Menos del 200% del Nivel de Pobreza

Map produced January 2018 by First 5 Contra Costa  
 Data Source:  
 Park Ratings: East County Regional Group sponsored by First 5 Contra Costa  
 Census 2016  
 Poverty Levels: Table C17002  
 Households w/ Children <6: Table B09002  
 Home Ownership: Table B26044  
 First 5 Contra Costa assumes no responsibility for  
 the accuracy of this map. Map info: Evaluation@Firstcoco.org



**Table 3: Park ratings, stratified by percent of area living under 200% of the FPL**

% population ≤ 200% FPL	Park	Amenities	Maintenance	Safety	Play Equipment	Wheelchair/ ADA Accessibility	Young Child Rating	Overall Parent Rating
16.8% - 26.4%	Ambrose*	2.62	3.07	2.57	3.15	1.95	2.33	2.59
	Boeger	1.40	3.80	3.39	3.25	1.78	2.15	2.41
	Trade Winds	0.78	1.50	1.45	0.30	0.60	0.49	0.90
	View Pointe	0.40	2.50	2.60	2.63	0.95	1.32	1.79
35.4% – 49.1%	Alves Lane	1.34	2.00	1.05	0.40	0.80	1.03	1.13
	Anuta	1.40	2.67	2.40	2.35	1.80	1.78	2.15
	Ambrose Recreation	1.36	2.17	2.15	2.00	1.70	1.77	1.92
	Hickory Meadows	0.78	2.23	2.55	2.40	1.20	1.85	1.88
>49.1%	Lynbrook	1.72	2.73	2.40	2.75	1.60	2.41	2.34

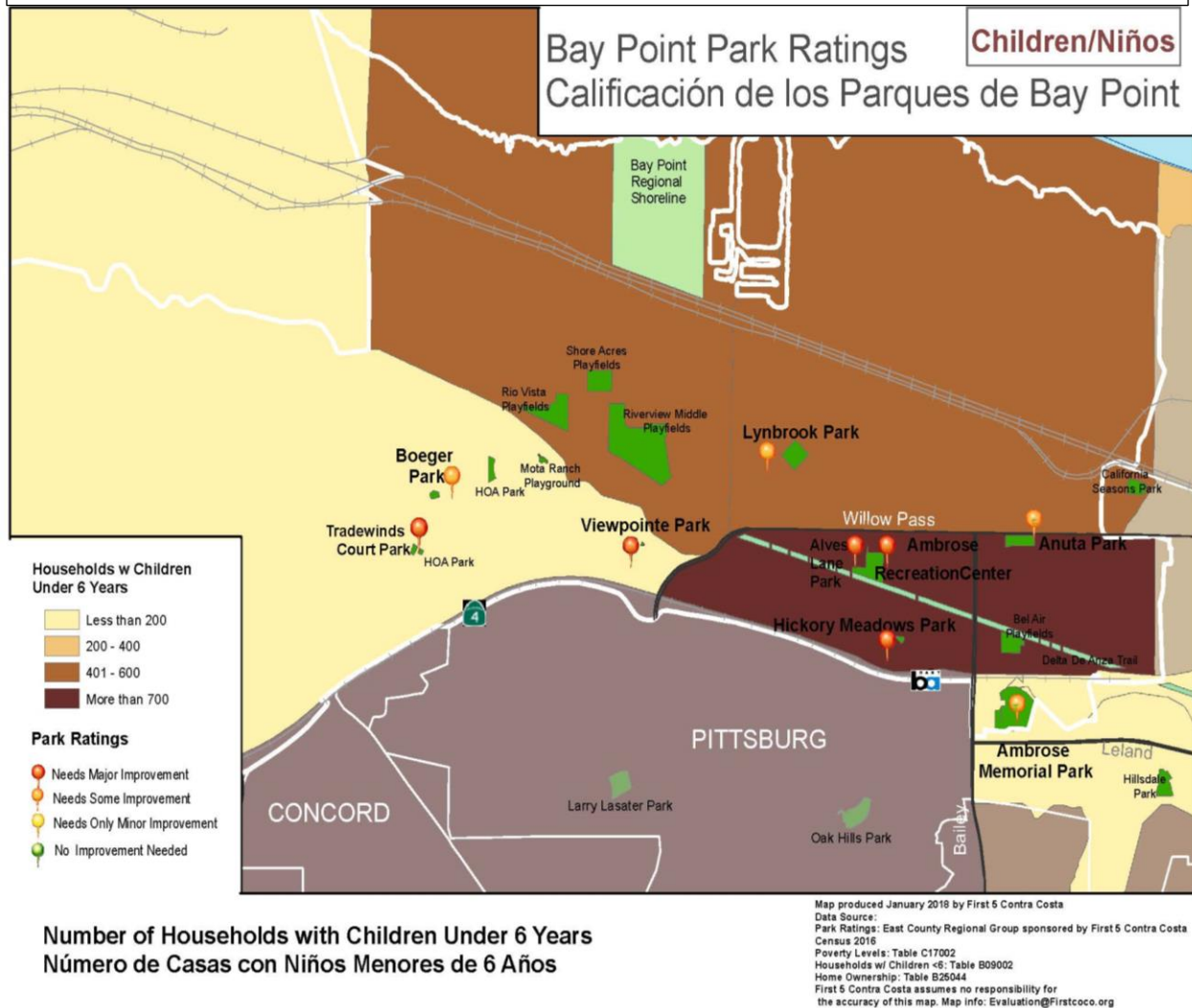
\*Ambrose Park is located in a non-residential area. Census data shows that at least one-third of the residents in surrounding neighborhoods are at/below 200% FPL.

4.00-5.00	3.00-3.99	2.00-2.99	0-1.99
No Improvement Needed	Needs Minor Improvement	Needs Some Improvement	Needs Major Improvement

## SURVEYED PARKS AND YOUNG CHILDREN

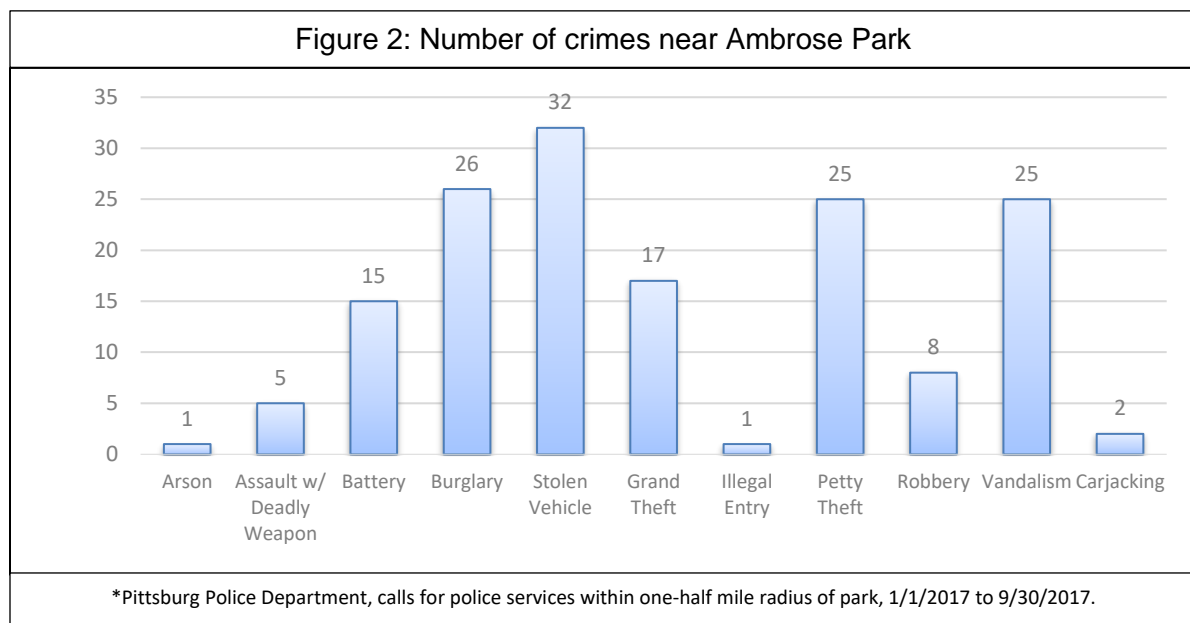
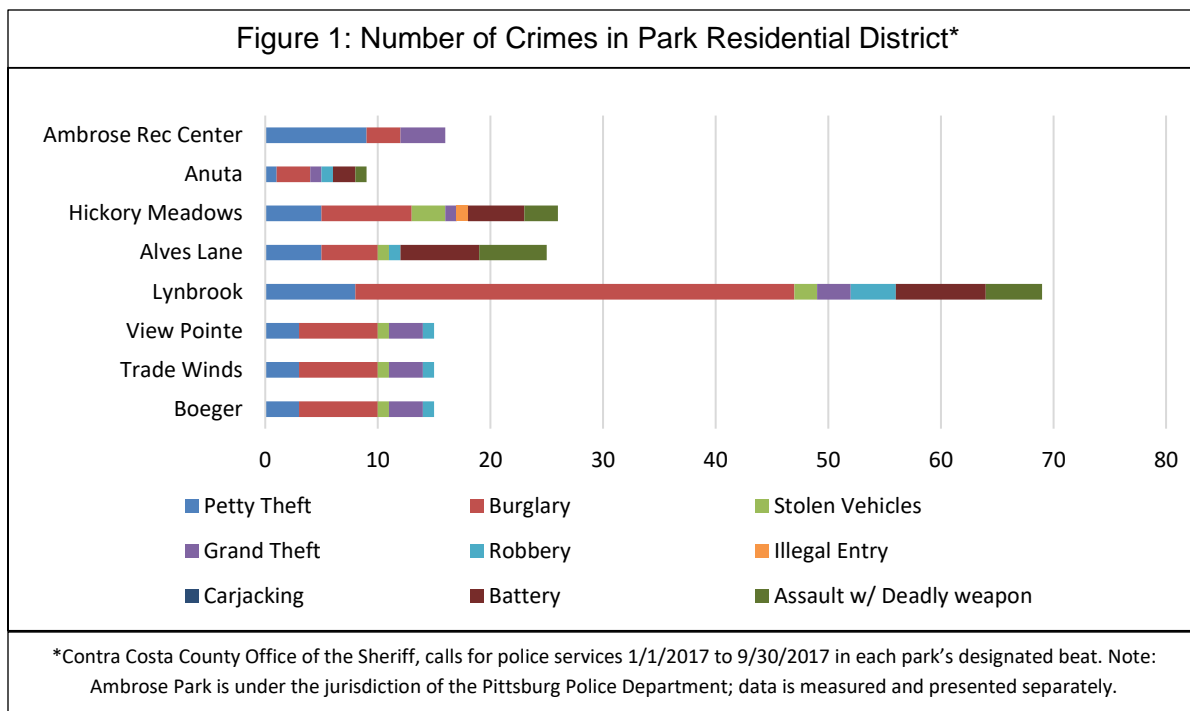
According to Census data, over half of Bay Point parks are located in neighborhoods with a relatively high concentration of children under age six (Appendix Image 3). Three of the five lowest-rated parks are in areas with the highest concentrations of young children and over half (55%) in neighborhoods with comparatively high numbers of young children. Given the key role of park access in optimal early childhood development and health, high park quality is critical in areas with large concentrations of children ages 0 to 5.

Image 3: Park ratings, households with children 0 to 5



## SURVEYED PARKS AND COMMUNITY SAFETY

Real and perceived lack of safety presents significant barriers to park use among Bay Point families with 89% of parks receiving a below average rating for safety. Data from the Contra Costa Sheriff's Office demonstrate that a large number of crimes, in particular violent crimes, occur near Lynbrook, Alves Lane, and Hickory Meadows parks (Figure 1). Ambrose Park crime data from the Pittsburg Police Department reveal a high incidence of burglary and property crimes (Figure 2). Prevalent crimes near Bay Point parks--including burglaries, theft, battery, and violent assaults--deter families from park use and pose challenges to physical activity and outdoor play necessary for optimal health.



## QUALITY PARKS ARE USED PARKS

Most Bay Point parks are located in very low-income areas and survey data show these parks to be inadequate for young children in their present state. National research shows that the presence of parks alone does not ensure access or usability of these critical community spaces. Instead, public parks need adequate amenities, play structures, and safety to be frequented.<sup>19</sup>

## 4. RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations below reflect extensive input from families with young children, community stakeholders, Ambrose Recreation and Park District staff, and public health research on best practices for park promotion. Overall, the partners recommend that attention be given to all parks in the areas of play equipment, amenities, ADA accessibility, and maintenance.

In particular, the partners recommend that Ambrose and Lynbrook Parks (Appendix, Images 4-7) receive immediate and comprehensive attention in the areas of bathrooms, water fountains, play equipment, safety, and ADA access. While analysis of the data indicated that all Bay Point parks are in need of improvements, the partners prioritized these two parks for immediate attention.

Ambrose Park received low ratings in multiple categories and was selected as a priority park because of its historical significance, potential, and meaning to residents. It has a relatively high crime rate and is located near a low-income neighborhood. District staff highlighted the potential to generate revenue in this park through swimming pool admission and other revenues. While the recent Ambrose swimming pool renovation is a great asset for Bay Point families, survey data show an urgent need to improve the condition and availability of bathrooms and water fountains. Participants also identified the need for an updated play structure accessible to those of all ages and abilities. Further, the group recommended a number of improvements such as better lighting, repairs and maintenance to unused structures, and bilingual signage around the park to reduce crime. Together, these priority improvements have the potential to create a quality park standard at Ambrose Park for Bay Point children and families.

*"The changes that I think are necessary for the parks are first that they're in good condition, additionally that they're safe, and also that all parks are the same in all parts of the city. No matter the area, let there be equality."*

*--Parent*

*"Ambrose has the potential to be a crown jewel." --Parent*

*"Needs a lot of work to bring it back like it was." --Bay Point resident*

Lynbrook Park is located in Bay Point's highest poverty area with at least 49.1% of residents living below 200% FPL and a large number (401-600) of households with young children. Participants noted several assets at Lynbrook, including large sports fields and a walking path. Nonetheless, significant improvements are needed to increase park use by children and families. Specifically, the partners recommend adding bathrooms, upgrading play equipment, repairing water fountains, and improving ADA access.

*“This park has so much potential, but it needs some serious love. There are a lot of families in the community but no one at the park. It could be way better.”*

*--Parent*

*“So much potential but no real ways for families to use it.” --Parent*

Table 4 shows specific improvements recommended for these two priority parks.

Table 4: Ranked Priority Recommendations for Priority Parks
Ambrose Park
1. Renovated, clean, accessible restrooms
2. Functional, clean water fountains
3. ADA accessible and engaging play structure for all ages and abilities
4. Lighting in and around park and parking areas
Additional priorities: Maintenance of basketball courts, baseball fields, and jogging trail, bilingual signage, improved condition of vacant lot near park entrance
Lynbrook Park
1. Renovated, clean, accessible restrooms
2. ADA accessible and engaging play structure for all ages and abilities
3. Clean and functional water fountains
4. Improved ADA accessibility for play structure and walking paths
Additional priorities: Walking trail or track around sports field, picnic tables and other seating, BBQ grills, lighting, shade

The recommendations above reflect a comprehensive vision for park redesign that community members believe Bay Point children serve. They assert that these changes will promote equitable park access, increased park use by young children and families, and improve social cohesion, and neighborhood safety. Assessment partners recommend that the Ambrose Recreation & Park District allocate funds and work with project partners to seek additional funding to implement the suggested improvements. Partners further encourage staff and elected officials to work with community partners--including the partners in this assessment--to explore robust revenue generating strategies to fund recommended park improvements at Ambrose and Lynbrook parks.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Public parks are essential spaces benefitting community health and reducing health disparities; in particular, by promoting physical activity and outdoor play among families with young children. Bay Point has many parks with potential for improvement to their play equipment, restrooms, water fountains, ADA accessibility, and maintenance. The park assessment partners recommend that Ambrose and Lynbrook parks be prioritized for immediate improvements due to their location in neighborhoods with a large number of low-income families with young children, safety concerns, and a community perception that these parks have great potential to become safe, appealing community spaces for Bay Point families.

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 Bay Point are more likely to benefit from a healthy start to their lives.

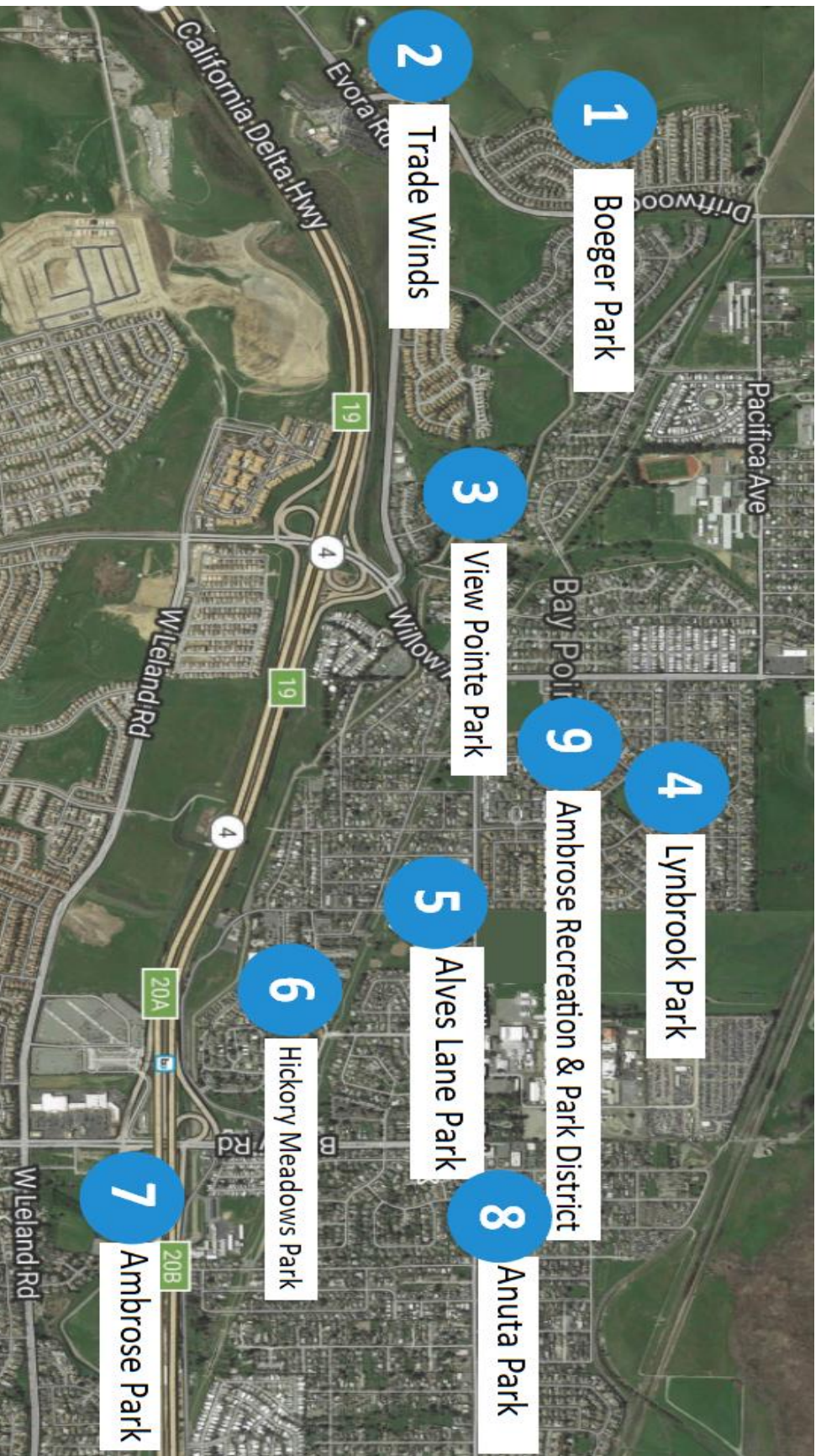
The data and findings presented in this report are distinct in that community members were central partners in every aspect of the park evaluation process, offering critical input and leadership. This community-based participatory project is uniquely positioned to provide rich data promoting the kinds of innovative health improvement strategies possible when local organizations, governments, and residents join together to improve community health.

*"I grew up in Bay Point and I have a kid now, so I'm glad to see that people are taking an interest and wanting better for our community and wanting to see our parks improve . . . I'd like to see my kids have a safe, clean environment where they could go play sports and run, and not be locked up inside all day.*

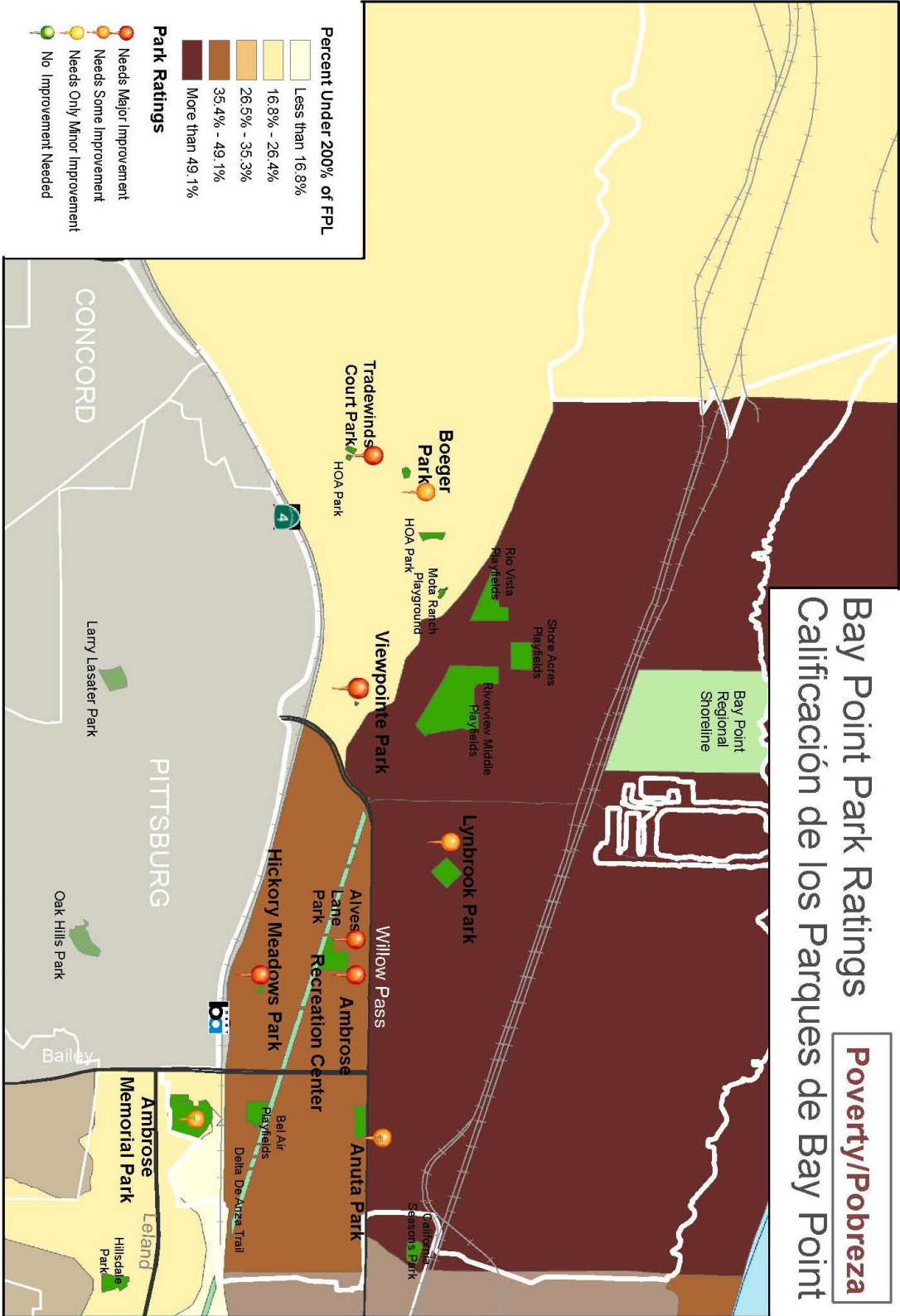
*--Bay Point resident*



APPENDIX Image 1: Bay Point park locations



**APPENDIX Image 2: Park ratings, percent of population under 200% of the Federal Poverty Level**

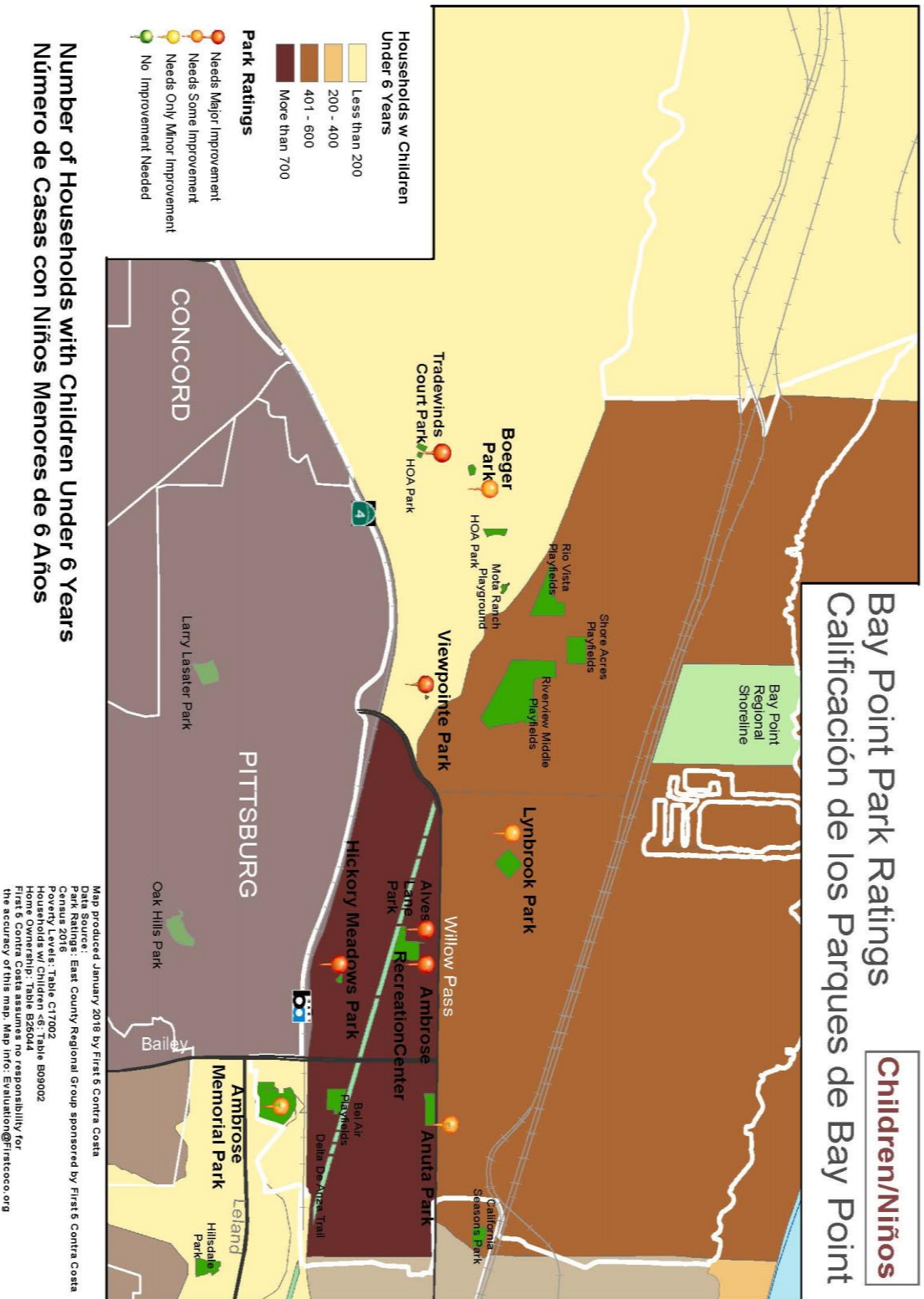


Percent of Population under 200% Federal Poverty Level  
Por Ciento de la Población Menos del 200% del Nivel de Pobreza

Map produced January 2018 by First 5 Contra Costa  
Data Source: Contra Costa Regional Group  
Park Ratings: East County Regional Group sponsored by First 5 Contra Costa  
Census 2016  
Poverty Levels: Table C17002  
Households w/ Children <5: Table B09002  
Home Ownership: Table B25044  
First 5 Contra Costa assumes no responsibility for the accuracy of this map. Map info: Evaluation@first5cc.org



**APPENDIX Image 3: Park ratings, households with children age 0 to 5**



**APPENDIX Images 4 and 5: Photos of Ambrose Park**

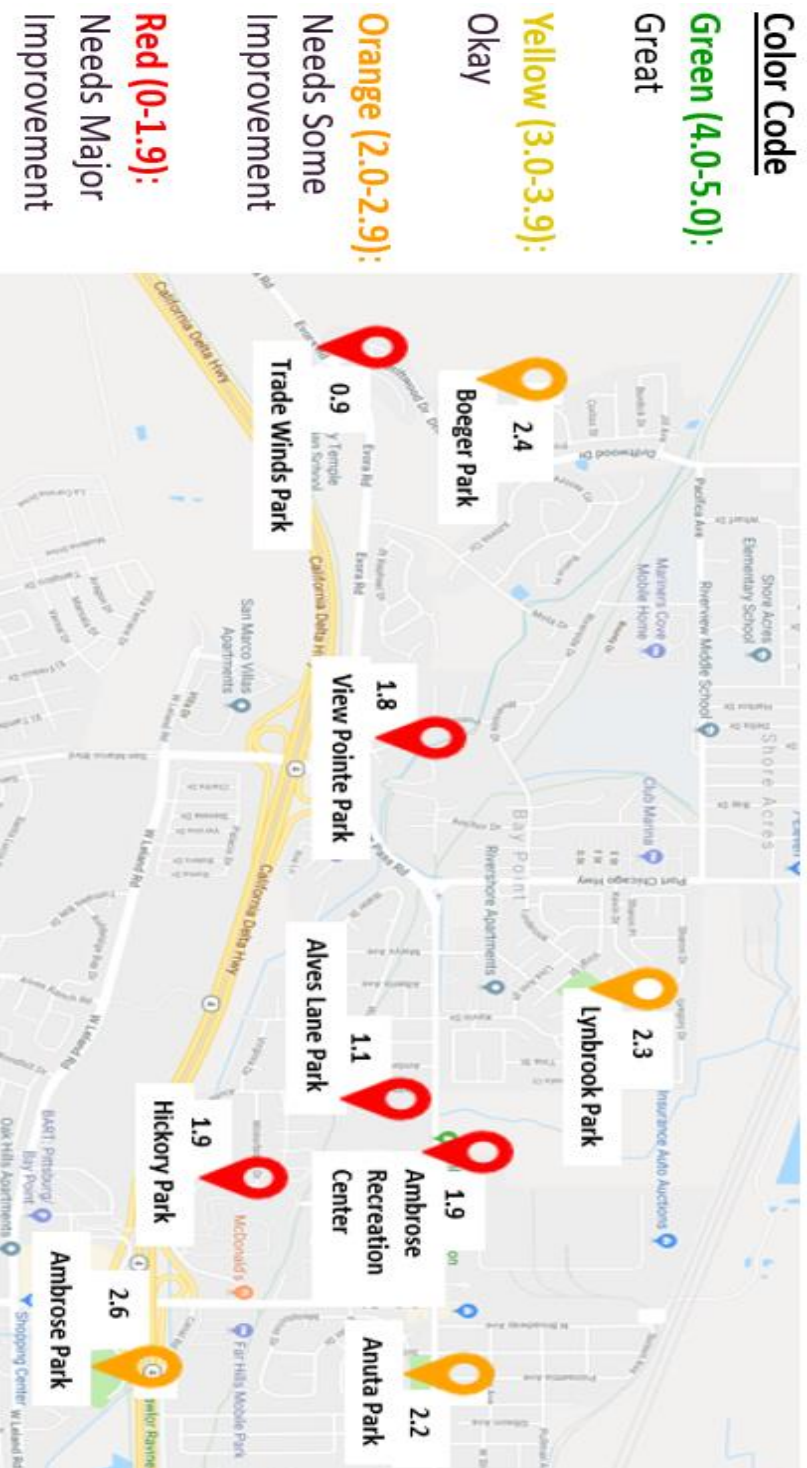


**APPENDIX Images 6 and 7: Photos of Lynbrook Park**





**APPENDIX Image 8: Bay Point park locations by Overall Parent rating**



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