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**Community Assessment for Parks and Open Space Identifies
Six Neighborhoods with Significant Barriers to Open Space Access**
Residents cite urban trail connections and community gardens as greatest needs

San Jose, CA – June 29, 2016: The Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority has released its *Understanding Our Community* report, which details barriers that prevent residents in its jurisdiction from going outdoors to enjoy nature and reaping its health and other benefits. The report identifies six neighborhoods where a greater concentration of barriers exists and deeper engagement is warranted to help ensure equitable access to parks and open space lands. Resident feedback at recent community meetings also helped to identify high priority open space and park needs in Santa Clara County.

“Our overall goal in completing this research is to expand and improve the quality and reach of the Open Space Authority’s efforts in connecting communities to Nature and the outdoors,” said Marc Landgraf, External Affairs Manager for the Authority. “The assessment data also helped us to identify six areas of the county that face greater barriers to accessing parks and open space lands. With this information, we can prioritize these neighborhoods and ensure we are equitably serving all of the Authority’s constituents.”

The Authority is in its first year of implementing Measure Q, a measure supporting open space protection that was passed by the voters in November 2014. “The *Understanding Our Community* report will inform the Authority’s implementation of the Urban Open Space Grant Program, a Measure Q program that will be launched this summer,” said Andrea Mackenzie, General Manager for the Authority. “The data and findings will guide us to invest in the neighborhoods with the greatest need for parks, trails, community gardens and other open space amenities and achieve the greatest impact.”

The community assessment findings show that the highest levels of support for Measure Q often came from very densely populated, ethnically diverse, and low income areas of San Jose – these areas were found to frequently overlap with neighborhoods possessing greater open space access barriers as well as the most severe environmental burdens. Barriers to accessing open space include language, income level, and access to private transportation. Based on the California EPA’s CalEnviroScreen, which was used in the assessment, environmental burdens include air and water pollution, traffic density, solid waste sites and facilities.



Based on the report data, the Open Space Authority defined six neighborhoods as **Deep Engagement Communities** that experience greater environmental burdens and barriers to access. Together, they include approximately 205,000 residents, or 15% of the total population in the jurisdiction.

“The Open Space Authority works diligently to connect all of our communities with Nature and open space and all of the critical benefits they provide. We strongly believe that everyone should have access to nature, no matter where they live,” said Marc Landgraf. “With a focus on Deep Engagement Communities, the Authority will launch increased community engagement and form strategic partnerships with community leaders and organizations of these areas in order to achieve a more balanced distribution of parks and open space amenities across the Authority’s jurisdiction.”

The Authority’s jurisdiction spans the cities of San Jose, Santa Clara, Milpitas, Morgan Hill, Campbell and unincorporated Santa Clara County and encompasses some 1.4 million residents. The region’s population is ethnically diverse, with residents being 33% Asian, 31% White and 30% of Hispanic/Latino origin. The City of San Jose has the largest population of ethnic Vietnamese outside of Vietnam. Diversity of cultures, ages, experiences, and backgrounds contribute to the region’s vibrancy and prosperity. However, the region is also one of disparity when it comes to distribution of wealth, environmental burdens, linguistic isolation, and access to open space. According to the state of California, over 100,000 residents in our region live in Disadvantaged Communities. The *Understanding Our Community* report analyzed and mapped the following demographics and attributes for residents in the Authority’s jurisdiction.

- 1. Ethnicities:** The largest three ethnicities within the Authority’s jurisdiction are Asian (456,000 or 33%), White (436,000 or 31%) and Hispanic/Latino Origin (421,000 or 30%). Of the area’s Asian population of 456,000, the six most populous are: Vietnamese (29%), Chinese (25%), Asian Indian (22%), Filipino (19%), Korean (5%), and Japanese (5%).
- 2. Languages Spoken:** 52% of the population (age 5 and older) speaks a language other than English at home. 21% speaks Spanish, 8% speaks Vietnamese, 6% speaks Chinese, and 4% speaks Tagalog. And another 13% of the population speaks a language other than the top five spoken languages of English, Spanish, Vietnamese, Chinese and Tagalog.
- 3. Linguistic Isolation:** 31% of the jurisdiction’s population (439,000 individuals) lives in a community that is in the state’s top 25% for linguistically isolated households. A high degree of linguistic isolation among members of a community raises concerns about access to health information and public services, and effective engagement with regulatory processes.
- 4. Income Level:** 11% of our jurisdiction's population (150,000 individuals) lives in low income households, defining low income as under half of the county median household income level of \$91,702.
- 5. CalEnviroScreen Top 25%:** 8% of the jurisdiction’s population (106,000 individuals) lives in a community that is designated as disadvantaged by the Environmental Protection Agency’s definition

of disadvantaged communities. These communities fall within census tracts that rank in the state's top 25% on the CalEnviroScreen (CES) score.

6. **Age:** Youth under the age of 18 make up 24% of the jurisdiction's population (330,000 individuals). Another 11% (147,000 individuals) are seniors over the age of 65.
7. **Education:** 60% of the jurisdiction's population over the age of 25 (550,000 individuals) has not attained a Bachelor's degree, while the other 40% (367,000 individuals) has a Bachelor's degree or higher.
8. **Vehicles:** Of the 444,000 households residing in the Authority's jurisdiction, 95% of them have access to at least one vehicle, which means that nearly 22,000 households do not have access to a vehicle.
9. **Open Space Support:** There are 558,000 registered voters within OSA's jurisdiction. Measure Q passed in November 2014 with a 68% approval rating. The vast majority of the District's foreign-language voters — 85.8% of Vietnamese-language voters, 83.2% of Spanish-language voters and 76.2% of Chinese-language voters — reside in the city of San Jose where the measure passed with a 68.7% approval rating. City Council Districts with larger proportions of foreign-language voters tended to support Measure Q the strongest.

The report's findings informed the Authority's planning of seven community forums to include a wide diversity of residents. Spanish and Vietnamese translation was provided for select meetings. At every meeting, residents expressed that they want better trail and park connectivity, urban community gardens, increased access to open space, and more opportunities for young people to engage in nature. While most community members spend time outside walking, hiking, or riding bikes, many barriers prevent them from enjoying nature more frequently. Specifically, proximity to open space was cited as the greatest barrier to spending more time outside. Other access issues included the lack of transportation and the financial burden associated with visiting parks and preserves. Safety was also a major concern for many residents.

[Understanding Our Community: A Community Assessment Project](#) and follow up community meetings were conducted by [Basecamp Strategies](#). These studies are designed to lay the groundwork for the Open Space Authority to make strategic conservation investments with a better understanding of community demographics and barriers to accessing parks and open space – and to increase opportunities for residents to enjoy the many benefits of parks, open space and natural areas. Visit the [Authority's website](#) to review the full reports.

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The Santa Clara Valley 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. Since 1993, the Open Space Authority has protected nearly 20,000 acres of open space lands. Visit openspaceauthority.org or call 408-224-7476.