

C/CAG's Equity Assessment and Framework Development Project

Draft Historical Perspective

Racism and discrimination are ubiquitous in San Mateo County's and California's history. Starting with the State's founding, White settlers used laws, violence, and other tools to accumulate and hoard wealth, power, and privilege. At first, discrimination focused on Native American, Mexican, and Chinese residents. As demographics shifted, African American and other racial minorities faced discrimination as well. These actions created economic and social disparities that continue to this day.

The birth of the California Republic and the Native American genocide: Before European colonization, the Bay Area was home to tremendous biological diversity that helped support one of the densest populations of people living in the US. According to Parish (2018), "Approximately one-third of all Native Americans in the United States were living in the area now known as California prior to contact with Europeans" (Parrish, 2018).

Before and after California's statehood, governments and their citizenry murdered and practiced forced assimilation of Native people in what is now recognized by the State as a genocide. This was coupled with theft of the land that we now inhabit. "The State of California's laws and policies discriminating against Native Americans and denying the existence of tribal government powers persisted well into the twentieth century" (*Executive Order N-15-19*, 2019). The development of the State's economy and settlement patterns are based on these historical facts, yet the State of California, the Bay Area, and San Mateo County have yet to rectify this legacy.

Perhaps miraculously, considering the violence and oppression towards them, a small percentage of Bay Area and California Native people were able to survive. Today, the Bay Area and California is home to the descendants of these survivors, as well as Native Americans from other parts of the US.

The Bay Area has... become one of the largest populations of Intertribal Indians in the country with people coming from communities in the Southwest, Great Plains, and Eastern Woodlands areas.

Now, California is home to close to 200 tribes with only 109 of them recognized by the U.S. federal government. (*Indigenous Populations in the Bay Area, n.d.*)

Discriminatory actions targeting Chinese and Japanese immigrants in California: In the late 1800's and well into the 1900's, people of Asian descent faced discrimination and harassment. Three years before the Federal Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, State of California lawmakers imposed their own ban on Chinese labor (*Chinese Exclusion Act, 2022*). In 1879, the California legislature passed Constitutional Amendment Article 19 under the premise that "the presence of foreigners ineligible to become citizens of the United States is declared to be dangerous to the well-being of the State" (*Constitution of the State of California, 1880*). The effect of these policies was, among other things, the rapid depopulation of Chinese residents in California and the US.

Several decades later, another sizable minority became the focus of State and Federal action - people of Japanese ancestry.

California adopted alien land laws in 1913 and 1920 with the purpose of driving Japanese farmers out of California agriculture and undermining the economic foundation of Japanese immigrant society... Before the alien land laws were struck down, forced internment of people of Japanese descent during World War II resulted in a massive loss of property and community in the Bay Area... During World War II, Californians aggressively sought to enforce the alien land laws to prevent

interned Japanese Americans from returning. The laws remained in place until 1952. (Moore et al., 2019, p. 19-20)

Racism in land use and housing laws, policies, practices, and other actions:

Land use and housing policy is an important part of San Mateo County's historical context. How we planned and built our cities has major implications on many equity-related issues, including barriers to employment and other opportunities for EPC's, the wealth gap, public health disparities, segregation, and housing affordability. Racist land use and housing actions that took place in San Mateo County include forced dispossession of Native people from their land, exclusionary zoning, redlining, racial steering, and blockbusting (Moore et al., 2019). Local, regional, and state actions are documented in detail by multiple sources, including the Haas Institute for a Fair and Inclusive Society in their report "roots, race, & place - A History of Racially Exclusionary Housing in the San Francisco Bay Area".

Examples cited by the Haas report with references to San Mateo County, include:

Violence	'Sundown towns' were a formal expression of the threat of violence to people of color existing in a town after dusk... In the 1940s, some realtors proposed designating the entire San Mateo peninsula a sundown area. An Atherton real estate agent 'urged exclusive 'white occupancy in the region,' stating that the peninsula was 'not a proper place' for 'Negroes, Chinese, and other racial minorities.' The Pacific Citizen reported that other members of the realty board 'felt the only way to handle the minority problem was to set aside acreage and subdivide it for minority groups with schools, business districts, etc.' Though the proposal for a sundown area was shelved, threats and violence largely kept people of color from moving in. (Moore et al., 2019, p. 23-24)
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<p>Zoning</p>	<p>Incorporated municipalities... turned to exclusionary land use policies like large minimum lot sizes, growth boundaries, and caps on new units. For example, immediately after Atherton was incorporated in 1923, the town adopted a zoning ordinance imposing a one-acre minimum lot for housing. In the mid-1950s, more suburbs, typically seeking to prevent annexation, followed suit in adopting stringent land use regulations. (Moore et al., 2019, p. 34)</p>
<p>Covenants and Homeowner Association Bylaws</p>	<p>The first homes in the subdivision of Westlake in Daly City were sold in 1949 and included a racial covenant that covered all properties in the development... While unenforced, racially restrictive regulations remained within homeowner association bylaws in some instances as late as the 1990s and 2000s, such as... Cuesta La Honda in San Mateo County. (Moore et al., 2019, p. 35-37)</p>
<p>Racial Steering</p>	<p>Realtors and community advocates servicing northern Santa Clara County and southern San Mateo County reported widespread racial steering in the 1960s... Real estate agents attempted to dissuade Black buyers from purchasing in all-white areas, sometimes explicitly telling those families that neighbors would object to their purchase or that the current owner would not want to sell... The real estate community forced the majority of the area's Black population into a "small region lying partly in the city of Menlo Park and partly in an unincorporated portion of San Mateo County known as East Palo Alto". (Moore et al., 2019, p. 49-50)</p>
<p>Blockbusting</p>	<p>Blockbusting was a form of racial steering where real estate investors would provoke fear of racial change in the neighborhood so they could profit from the transactions. For instance, after the first African American family moved to East Palo Alto's new Palo Alto Gardens subdivision in 1954, real estate agents carried out a blockbusting campaign.... A realtor in San Carlos boasted that steering Black applicants away from</p>

	the area had kept the city entirely white as of 1957, stating, “We are proud that we have no Negro living here in San Carlos. (Moore et al., 2019, p. 51-52)
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These land use and housing actions and practices created and reinforced areas with high concentrations of people of color and low-income households. These communities were often redlined areas separated from White communities by space or infrastructure, located in flood zones or places less desirable for development, and/or unincorporated areas of the County without direct representation. East Palo Alto (EPA), is a San Mateo County Equity Priority Community (EPC) with extensive documentation related to its formation and historical injustices. Before incorporation as a city, EPA was an unincorporated area of the County, during which major land use decisions took place that resulted in a high concentration of low-income people of color and polluting industries.

After World War II, the predominantly white cities that surrounded East Palo Alto used property tax rates, land use laws, municipal services and racial covenants to facilitate development of Silicon Valley’s tech industry, “clean” manufacturing and high-end suburbs, while excluding “undesirable” populations and land uses. However, because [the residents of East Palo Alto] lived in an unincorporated area... the county, not the residents, controlled land use decisions. While some white East Palo Alto residents attempted to shut Black and Asian Pacific American families out of East Palo Alto, they did not have the power to enshrine their biases in local law. As a result, many of the people and the industries excluded from neighboring cities settled in East Palo Alto. (Layton & Johnson, 2019, pg. 4)

Areas like East Palo Alto, with high numbers of low-income people of color, were susceptible to disenfranchisement. This disenfranchisement in turn resulted in inadequate service provision and the

concentration of negative infrastructure. It also resulted in a lack of beneficial infrastructure such as parks and open spaces.

San Mateo County cited a disproportionate number of harmful industrial projects in East Palo Alto, including the county landfill, the regional hazardous waste recycling plant, auto dismantling facilities and pesticide and herbicide producers. These activities benefitted the county but imposed substantial local economic and environmental burdens on East Palo Alto. For example, the Romic hazardous waste plant operated in East Palo Alto from 1964 until 2007, when it was shut down in response to community pressure... Soil and groundwater contamination from the plant extended 80 feet below ground level. (Layton & Johnson, 2019, pg. 4)

Beyond land use and economic development decisions, governmental actions that harmed East Palo Alto included the planning and construction of Highway 101.

In 1958... the expansion of the Bayshore Freeway... led to the erasure of East Palo Alto's main business district and the closure of over 50 shops, only a few of which relocated within the community. Appeals by local residents to shift the route to spare the business district were rejected. Freeway construction also prompted neighborhoods to the west of the Bayshore to leave Ravenswood School District, which served East Palo Alto and parts of Menlo Park, and to join the Menlo Park School District, thereby worsening existing patterns of racial segregation in schools. (Skidmore, 2022)

The types of actions described above have contributed to inequality and generational impacts to EPC's in San Mateo County. These impacts and inequities persist to this day.

History of anti-racist and social justice community organizing/mobilization in San Mateo County EPC's:

Over the course of the history shared in this document, there is a parallel history of survival, resistance, and organizing. From the uprisings of California Native people in response to genocide and the occupation of their homeland, to local manifestations of the Civil Rights Movement and contemporary social justice struggles, examples abound.

East Palo Alto, for example, is home to the Nairobi Movement, which made important local contributions and influenced activists across the nation and beyond (San Mateo County Libraries, 2022). Another often cited East Palo Alto example is Youth United for Community Action's (YUCA) successful campaign to close down Romic Chemical Corporation after decades of toxic contamination and health impacts in the community (Center for Health Journalism, n.d.).

The issues of inequality and injustice would be even worse had it not been for the resistance and organizing of EPC leaders and social justice movements. These struggles have helped move us closer to the ideals of democracy, equity, inclusion, and justice.

Equity Connections with C/CAG's Work Across Program Areas (Draft)

C/CAG's program areas are wide ranging. C/CAG works on issues related to land use and housing, transportation, energy, water/stormwater, air quality, and climate change. Each of these issue or program areas have far reaching equity implications. Thus, C/CAG has an important role in contributing to equity advancement as part of a broader governmental effort to improve outcomes for those most affected by the legacy of past discriminatory actions and most vulnerable to the negative impacts of our economy and way of life. While each C/CAG program area highlighted below is in many ways distinct, they also share some common themes regarding their connections with equity. For example:

- Those least responsible for the impacts created by our economic and political system are often those most harmed and less able to adapt.
- Race and class are critical to focus on across program areas, but other demographics are important to consider as well. These include but are not limited to age, disability, and gender.
- C/CAG's program areas are often interrelated. Equity advancement in one program area, such as transportation, can lead to benefits in other areas, such as climate and air quality. This offers opportunities for cross-cutting strategies that provide broader community benefits.
- Solutions to these issues are often complex, may need significant funding, and may call for collaboration across departments and jurisdictions.
- A focus on those with the greatest needs can help achieve a greater return on investment and improve outcomes for the demographic plurality of San Mateo County.

Housing and land use - The way our cities and the region are shaped, and the quality, diversity, and availability of housing has major social equity implications. This includes:

- economic, health, and wealth disparities,

- housing affordability and homelessness,
- segregation, gentrification and displacement,
- access to employment and other opportunities,
- climate change, and local and regional air pollution, and
- energy consumption.

Low density suburban land uses are the predominant type of development in San Mateo County. This includes shopping malls, strip malls, suburban residential neighborhoods, and corporate office parks. The exception to this suburban character is the County's rural and open space lands, as well as compact and walkable areas concentrated around the Caltrain and El Camino Real corridors. These primarily low-density land use patterns have been paired with a wide range of inequitable land use and housing policies and actions. This includes historic segregation, inadequate low- and moderate-income housing production, and insufficient tenant protections. Only a limited number of people can afford to live in San Mateo County, and this has wide ranging implications. One Community Working Group (CWG) participant convened as part of C/CAG's Equity Framework Project expressed, "It is counterproductive to design a system where people are forced to commute from further and further away to workplaces. Employees are working here but spending elsewhere. It's unsustainable."

Transportation - Transportation planning can either be vehicle for or an impediment towards equity advancement, for example, resulting in:

- Healthy, safe, efficient, and affordable access to jobs and other critical needs for all modes for people living in EPC's, or
- Barriers to opportunity for transit-dependent populations and roadways that encourage motorists to speed through EPC's at the expense of people that walk and bike.

Transportation equity is often focused on race and class, as well as other demographics and circumstances, including, but not limited to:

- the safety of women and children walking and biking,
- freedom of movement for people with disabilities, youth, and seniors, and
- concentrated toxic air pollution near roadways with significant truck traffic and where people with respiratory and chronic health issues are concentrated.

Energy - The degree and way in which we obtain, transport, consume, and dispose of energy and its by-products has local and global consequences. The US is one of the world's largest energy consumers, resulting in an oversized impact to the environment. Within the US and other nations, people with higher incomes consume more energy compared to lower income populations. This overconsumption results in a greater amount of energy related pollution on a per capita basis.

The negative impacts related to the energy sector are diverse and profound. For example, in the US natural gas stoves are a major source of indoor air pollution and a contributor to higher asthma rates among children. Oil and natural gas extraction have contaminated California's coastline, groundwater sources across the nation, and remote ecosystems as far as the arctic and the Amazon rainforest. Diesel, the predominant source of fuel for the nation's goods movement, is a major source of particulate matter pollution, which tends to concentrate near busy roadways.

Across these and other energy related issues, higher income nations, communities, and people tend to benefit the most from energy production and are more able to buffer themselves from the negative consequences. The inverse is also true of lower income nations, communities, and people. In the Bay Area and San Mateo County, these inequities manifest in many ways, including:

- the location of oil refineries such as Chevron in Richmond,

- concentrated air pollution at ports like West Oakland,
- toxic waste disposal sites such as the former Romic facility in East Palo Alto,
- the lack of control of renters over the energy efficiency and energy sources of their homes, and
- the air pollution impacts to renters and homeowners living near roadways with high levels of auto and truck traffic.

Transitioning to a cleaner, efficient energy system will benefit all communities and populations. The implications for those most burdened, however, can be particularly significant if agencies focus their strategies and actions on these populations.

Water and Stormwater - Protecting our water supply and ensuring all have access to clean water is vital for the health and wellbeing of people and ecosystems. Because of the characteristics of water and the water cycle, what one does locally has implications globally. Thus, all people are affected by water related issues. Higher income nations, communities, and individuals, however, often have greater means and political influence to adapt. This includes getting access to clean water and avoiding or adapting to areas prone to flooding.

The Environmental Justice movement in the U.S was sparked by the concentration of toxic facilities in communities of color and low-income communities across the nation. In Silicon Valley, one of the first sources of toxic pollution was mercury in our waterways from mining during the Gold Rush. Later, the semiconductor industry became a major source of toxics in our groundwater. These and other historic water pollutants pose current day public health threats to low income and BIPOC populations and communities. Pollution exposures include mercury pollution fishing in the Bay, differences in access to clean drinking water, and the potential of toxic groundwater pollution surfacing over time due to rising sea levels. And as one Agency Partner meeting participant pointed out, “we are still making decisions

about where industrial land uses take place in proximity to low income communities.” These land uses have the potential for future exposures to populations already burdened by pollution.

One water related issue for some EPC’s in San Mateo County is that of drinking water. Many cities along the Peninsula have access to clean water from Hetch Hetchy in Yosemite National Park, but some places such as East Palo Alto have for decades received other sources of water. As a member of the Project’s Community Working Group stated “We don’t want to use bottled water anymore. There are different types of water for different communities, including East Palo Alto.”

Finally, many Equity Priority Communities located close to or east of Highway 101, such as East Palo Alto, Belle Haven, and North Fair Oaks, are more prone to flooding. They will also be among the first to be threatened by rising sea levels. As one participant of the Project’s Agency Partner meeting noted “There is a higher likelihood of flooding impacts in certain locations and related infrastructure issues around drainage. Areas that flood tend to be lower income areas. Areas to implement improvements to avoid those impacts are typically a mile upstream in areas that may be higher income or may be in different cities.” This comment also highlights the need for collaboration across jurisdictions and departments.

Air quality and climate change - As is the case with other C/CAG program areas, those most responsible for air pollution and climate change are more able to buffer themselves from the impacts. There are several examples of local air pollution and carbon emission-related inequities. For example:

- Low income communities tend to have a deficit of green spaces and tree cover. This will be problematic as temperatures rise over time due to carbon pollution.

- Redlining and segregation have resulted in “neighborhoods that are more affordable being closer to the freeways and harmed by pollution” according to an Agency Partner meeting participant.
- Another Agency Partner meeting participant shared, “those subject to climate change are those generating the fewest GHG pollutants. Some jurisdictions that get grant funding are generating the most greenhouse gas emissions.”
- The potential for economic strain on low income families and small businesses that do not have the resources to adapt to new climate and air pollution policies and regulations.

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Draft C/CAG Equity Definition and Commitment

C/CAG defines equity as acknowledging and addressing historic and existing disparities so that race, class, and other demographics no longer determine economic, health, and quality of life outcomes.

Advancing equity entails providing forms and levels of support for the needs of underserved and impacted communities, improving outcomes for all.

In San Mateo County and across the nation, public agencies and other public and private institutions systemically discriminated against people of color through laws, policies, investment decisions and other actions. Discriminatory actions also extended beyond race to other Equity Priority Community (EPC) demographics, including people experiencing low incomes and people with disabilities.¹ The City/County Association of Governments of San Mateo County (C/CAG) recognizes these actions led to historic inequities and existing unequal economic, health, and quality of life outcomes for people of color and other EPC demographics.

C/CAG is a countywide agency working across multiple program areas, including transportation, land use and housing, stormwater pollution and water, energy, and climate change. C/CAG commits to leveraging these program areas to help rectify historic harms, underinvestment, and resulting disparities. We will improve outcomes for those in greatest need and center the voices of EPC demographics through all relevant aspects of our work.

In our equity advancement journey, we commit to focusing on both process and outcome equity. We will:

- Leverage our operations and programs to help address longstanding disparities,

¹ Metropolitan Transportation Commission's (MTC) Equity Priority Community (EPC) demographic factors include: People of Color; Low-Income (<200% Federal Poverty Level-FPL); Limited English Proficiency; Zero-Vehicle Household; Seniors 75 Years and Over; People with Disability; Single Parent Families; Rent-Burdened

- Establish equity goals, performance measures, and targets, and report on progress over time,
- Ensure areas of greatest need have access to resources and investment,
- Ensure greater access, influence, and decision-making power for vulnerable and underserved communities, and
- Provide countywide leadership and work in coalition with public agencies, nonprofits, and other potential partners.

If we are successful in advancing equity around topics and issues associated with our programs and responsibilities, C/CAG will optimize the community benefits of our work, create greater community inclusion and trust, and bring San Mateo County closer to a more equitable future.

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