

Social Equity

Impartiality, fairness and justice for all people in social policy



Clean Air for All

Monitoring air quality yields benefits for low-income neighborhoods.



The Impact

Initiatives to improve air quality equity have led to air quality monitoring programs in low-income, people-of-color communities. Additionally, the push for air quality equity has increased educational resources available to these communities on air quality. Policies have been implemented in several areas to decrease air pollution, and more work is being done to purify both indoor and outdoor air.

Where It's Been Implemented

Air quality monitoring is taking place throughout the San Francisco Bay Area. The Bay Area Air Quality Management District has partnered with Aclima, a San Francisco-based technology company focused on tracking air pollution, to gather air quality data using sensors throughout the San Francisco metro area. Clarity, another air-pollution-sensing tech company, has also partnered with various organizations to help monitor air quality in the area.

SMC Lab's partnership with Clarity has resulted in 20 air quality monitors being deployed in San Mateo County (Calif.) to measure levels of air pollutants throughout the county. Brightline Defense, an environmental justice nonprofit based in San Francisco, has also partnered with Clarity to monitor air quality. Brightline's air quality monitoring program is primarily focused on measuring the levels of pollutants in the air of three low-income, people-of-color neighborhoods: Chinatown, SOMA and the Tenderloin. The work of these various monitoring programs has helped focus attention on air quality and how air quality issues intersect with social equity.

Air quality monitoring has helped implement new policies and initiatives to reduce air pollution. One initiative led to car-free "Slow Streets" throughout San Francisco. At the start of the pandemic, car traffic was limited or banned on 24 streets due to the city's Slow Streets Program. This program shut down streets in multiple phases and continued to expand, providing more avenues for pedestrians and bike travel. The expansion of policies encouraging electrification is another approach that local governments are taking to reduce the impacts of air pollution.

Description

In order to ensure clean air for all, on-the-ground work must be done alongside above-ground work. On the ground, programs such as air quality monitoring across neighborhoods help highlight issues with air pollution and existing air quality disparities. Educating communities about the connection between air quality and social equity can also serve as a source of community empowerment on the ground.

Key Drivers

Environmental justice has been an issue impacting marginalized communities for centuries. Often, low-income and people-of-color communities are affected most by environmental hazards, such as dealing with water pollution, air pollution and other man-made toxins. They are overlooked when it comes to implementing policies that could protect their health. Increasing the use of air quality monitoring programs, coupled with educating communities that are being monitored, will allow for increased awareness by residents about their environmental conditions and shine a light on the air quality issues that government leaders must step up to fix. Policies and practices to reduce air pollution will further help protect vulnerable communities.

Key Factors for Success

In order to continue the success of air quality monitoring, partnerships with companies with monitoring technologies such as Clarity and Aclima need to be made and expanded. In addition, the information collected from these monitoring programs needs to be circulated to local government leaders and the public, demonstrating air quality inequities by using physical evidence collected from local communities. Such information can help rally advocates to push for improved air quality.

On the policy side, advocacy from the public for expanding initiatives such as the Slow Streets program in San Francisco to new areas, as well as public support for clean energy policies, will help to further improve air quality.

Key Obstacles

A lack of public funding for projects to monitor air quality or educate people about air quality in low-income communities can serve as a significant obstacle to air equity. Without this knowledge, it is difficult to build the public support necessary to push lawmakers to implement environmental justice-related policies. Fortunately, the U.S. government provided \$50 million for ambient air quality monitoring as part of the American Rescue Plan Act on July 7, 2021. The Environmental Protection Agency is allocating \$20 million of these funds for monitoring air quality in and near underserved communities across the U.S. through competitive grants.

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Cottage Food Laws

Streamlined laws make it easier for low-income cooks and small businesses to profit from food sales



The Impact

Food laws that permit the sale of homemade foods directly to consumers help home cooks and small businesses make a living from selling their creations, improve food access in various communities by offering fresh home-cooked meal options, and promote sustainability by encouraging people to purchase food locally.

Where It's Been Implemented

Every U.S. state now has a cottage food program which allows residents to sell baked goods and other shelf-stable, nonhazardous foods directly to consumers, with regulations that protect the health of buyers. Only California, Utah and New Jersey have enacted “microenterprise home kitchen operations” (MEHKOs), which permit the sale of a broad array of home-cooked meals, including those that contain meat, while requiring inspections and permits. Unlike Utah, California requires individual cities and counties to opt in. As of August 2022, nine counties and one city in California had opted in and passed ordinances approving MEHKOs: Riverside, San Diego, Solano, Imperial, Lake, Sierra, Santa Barbara, Alameda, San Mateo and the City of Berkeley.

Description

Selling homemade foods used to be prohibitive. Home cooks were subject to the same regulations as commercial restaurants and bakeries, and food safety laws forced owners to set up or rent part of a retail kitchen and prepare all their products there. The cost of rent, plus compliance with health regulations, made it difficult for small-scale homemade food businesses to make a profit.

Today, thanks to the widespread adoption of cottage food laws, there are countless stories of home cooks developing prosperous businesses from a treasured family recipe. In areas devoid of

farmer's markets, homemade foods can provide fresh, healthy foods. Since items are produced locally, home-cooked foods also have a smaller environmental footprint.

Key Drivers

The small-scale sale of homemade products and meals provides valuable opportunities to local communities. Foremost, cottage food laws provide economic empowerment for low-income, minority and vulnerable communities by providing an avenue for home cooks from these communities to profit from their work and have their own businesses. Due to COVID-19, thousands of workers lost their jobs. Legalizing the sale of homemade goods also offers unemployed workers the opportunity for financial security and agency as business owners.

In addition, cottage food laws benefit the health and safety of the wider community by implementing mandatory health standards for these kitchens that might not have been in place previously in underground kitchen operations.

Finally, these food laws allow the community to support the local economy and have access to fresh, local foods, providing healthy options for underserved communities and promoting environmental sustainability.

Key Factors for Success

To ensure the success of these laws, more states need to implement home cooking laws that promote greater food freedom. States that have these ordinances can help encourage other states to enact them. States with requirements for individual cities or counties to opt in should provide incentives for them to do so. Petitions from the public can also help push counties and cities to adopt these laws.

Permit fees for home kitchens are around \$1,000/year. However, in 2021, San Mateo County used American Rescue Plan Act funds to provide small local food businesses with grants, helping boost the success of these operations.

Key Obstacles

While it is evident that state and local governments need to adopt food freedom laws to ensure their success, there are a few obstacles that may discourage them from doing so. One is the lack of national cottage food regulations, meaning that various states may impose different requirements and there are no national standards for consumers to rely upon. Location restrictions, taxes, business licenses and signage restrictions may also affect the success of a home business.

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Coordinator, California Food Policy Council, peter Ruddock@yahoo.com, 650-283-0978

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[Institute for Justice, "Recent State Reforms for Home-Based Food Businesses"](#)

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Equitable Sea Level Rise Adaptation Strategies

Understanding socioeconomic factors can help communities address the challenge of flooding due to climate change.



Construction of a seawall in Foster City, Calif.

The Impact

We are already seeing the impacts of sea level rise, which is projected to rise up to a foot in the next 30 years and up to 7 feet by 2100. Proactive cities and counties are engaged in planning, design, and construction efforts to adapt to rising tides. The most effective strategies incorporate local residents of all incomes in a community-based design process that addresses social equity as well as climate change.

Where It's Been Implemented

Many coastal counties, cities and community-based organizations have implemented sea level rise adaptation strategies in California. San Mateo County, which has the most shoreline of any county in the state, initiated a countywide planning effort called Sea Change San Mateo County in 2015. Spearheaded by the county's Office of Sustainability, this initiative completed a vulnerability assessment, identifying the impacts of flooding and erosion on people, places and critical infrastructure. It also provided a menu of actionable solutions. It engaged local residents in visualization events to help them understand the impact of sea level rise, and awarded \$310,000 in resiliency-planning grants to local communities.

Following state legislation in 2019, in January 2020 the San Mateo County Flood and Sea Level Rise Resiliency District (called OneShoreline for short) was established to address climate-driven sea level rise, flooding, coastal erosion, water supply and regional stormwater needs. OneShoreline worked with Stanford University to make sure its planning process was equitable.

A 2021 Stanford study found that close to half of all homes in East Palo Alto, the poorest city in San Mateo County, were at risk of financial instability due to existing social factors or anticipated flooding through 2060. The researchers devised a risk assessment model, the Stanford Urban Risk Framework, that incorporates the socioeconomic context in order to better understand equity implications. This tool is an improvement over the usual method by which civil engineers and economists calculate flood damage estimated in terms of monetary damage to physical structures. As a result, local stakeholders are now shifting their mindset to better understand just how damaging sea level rise is for poorer San Francisco Bay Area communities and are increasing outreach efforts to work with these communities.

The University of Melbourne took a similar approach, performing community outreach in low-income areas to understand just how hard hit their cities might be, and presented its findings in a “Guide for Government” that explains how community values ought to be included in policy making. This communal outreach should prove incredibly important in finding real adaptation solutions, from seawall construction to house demolition and family relocation.

In 2021 the City of Burlingame, which is exposed to flooding risks along its bayfront on San Francisco Bay, became the first city in the San Francisco Bay Area to incorporate requirements related to sea level rise into its citywide zoning ordinance. New buildings in low-lying areas near the water are required to have raised first floors, and some will need to build and maintain creek banks or protection infrastructure like levees or sea walls or leave space for them to be built in the future.

Description

Strategies for addressing sea level rise fall into three main categories: protection, accommodation and retreat. The protection approach entails the construction of newly engineered or natural structures, while accommodation modifies existing developments and retreat relocates or removes existing developments. If land, funding and environmental permits allow, frequently the most effective strategies incorporate more than one of these options.

The protection approach constructs newly engineered hard or soft structures that aim to defend ecosystems and public and private infrastructure. A hard protection approach is an engineered structure positioned along the water such as a seawall, revetment (retaining wall), or offshore breakwater or cross-shore development that traps sand and widens the beach upcoast of the structure. A soft protection approach restores or creates marshes, beaches, sand dunes and reefs as natural protection.

The accommodation approach employs methods that modify existing developments to decrease hazard risks. Strategies on an individual scale include elevating structures out of harm’s way, performing retrofits and using materials to increase the strength of a development. On a community scale, these strategies can be integrated into local government land use plans, zoning ordinances and strategic planning documents.

The retreat approach relocates or removes existing development from hazardous areas and prevents construction of new developments in vulnerable areas. This approach can be a strategic way of relocating the most vulnerable developments away from danger while preserving coastal resources and access for future generations.

Key Drivers

Developing and initiating equitable sea level rise adaptation strategies is critical and urgent to protect coastal communities and public and private infrastructure.

Key Factors for Success

A successful adaptation strategy requires a community-based design process. This process can be simplified into six steps as outlined in the University of Melbourne's Values Approach for Adaption Planning (VAAP) in the "Guide for Government": (1) gathering information on climate scenarios and vulnerability, (2) scoping potential values at risk, (3) confirming actual values at risk, (4) developing a profile of residents and their values, (5) identifying scenarios to guide adaptation planning, and (6) encouraging community participation in development of adaptation strategies. These steps were developed and tested in five communities.

Community outreach and input is advised through public meetings, collaboration with community-based organizations like OneShoreline and presentations to cities, as also legally required by the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). While this may take additional time, the design process is labor-intensive on purpose to ensure that these strategies are equitable, community-focused and effective. One of the most crucial aspects of community outreach is the consideration of equity implications by assessing the needs/interests of poorer communities.

Key Obstacles

Some obstacles one may face when developing and initiating an equitable sea level rise adaptation strategy include getting environmental projects approved, navigating different environmental permitting agencies that have different objectives, incorporating as many benefits as possible into one strategy and using land effectively. The timeline to implementation is often lengthy, but this process is vital to equally support coastal communities and city infrastructure.

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Police Reform

Reconstructing current policing practices and standards can reduce the harmful impacts of police brutality and ensure the safety of all people.



The Impact

On May 25, 2020, 46-year-old George Floyd, a Black man, was arrested for buying cigarettes using a counterfeit bill. Within minutes after the arrest, Floyd's neck had been pinned to the ground under the force of three police officers and he was unconscious. He died shortly afterward. The event was captured on videos taken by bystanders that went viral on various media platforms.

The violent death of George Floyd shocked the nation. However, this was far from the first instance of police brutality. Prior to his death, Eric Garner, Michael Brown, Tamir Rice, Alton Sterling and Breonna Taylor were just a few of many other Black victims killed at the hands of police officers.

Due to these numerous tragedies from police brutality and the resulting outrage and protests that occurred during the summer of 2020, many states began taking action to reform police departments to prevent the continuation of racially based violence and killing by law enforcement officers.

Where It's Been Implemented

In response to these devastating, high-profile cases of police brutality, as of 2021, about 30 states and Washington, D.C., had enacted new police reforms ranging from improved training to new codes requiring officers to wear a body cam. Massachusetts has been noted as having one of the strongest Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST) commissions in the country and has executed numerous reforms that can serve as a model for other states.

Description

In Massachusetts the police reform package, titled the Reform, Shift and Build Act, was enacted on December 31, 2020, to transform the state's policing system via training, oversight and use-of-force protocols. The law includes police training on the history of slavery, lynching and racism in the U.S., a ban on racial profiling by law enforcement, a requirement for data to be collected on all stops, frisks and searches in order to hold officers accountable, and training on de-escalation techniques and how to respond to mental health emergencies.

To provide oversight, the state created a Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST) commission with the power to investigate misconduct independently and with subpoena power to compel witnesses and documents as part of its investigations. In most cases, law enforcement will need a

warrant from a court to run a facial recognition search. A state task force will propose a uniform code for the purchase and use of body cameras, requirements for storage and transfer of the recordings and discipline for not using the cameras correctly. There will also be a review of the civil service system, to promote diversity

Changes in use-of-force protocols include a ban on chokeholds and on shooting at moving vehicles except when deadly force is necessary. Officers need to have tried deescalation tactics, and the harm from the “less lethal” option needs to be proportionate to the threat from the person or group targeted. Any use of tear gas, rubber bullets or dogs needs to be reported to the POST commission.

Before planned mass protests or demonstrations, police departments are required to “attempt in good faith” to communicate with organizers of the event. Police have an explicit duty to intervene and report if a fellow officer is using unreasonable force. And police departments have to have a policy and procedure for officers to report abuse by a colleague without fear of retaliation.

Key Drivers

Increasing the widespread implementation of rigorous police reform laws such as the Reform, Shift and Build Act will have numerous positive impacts on the community. These new practices and restrictions will help reduce instances of police brutality, preventing further deaths at the hands of law enforcement, particularly within the Black community. Such practices will also help counter the devastating impacts of systemic racism that communities of color have been victimized by, such as racial profiling and mass incarceration. With these reforms, citizens' lives will be protected and they will feel more safe in the hands of law enforcement. This reassurance will help citizens feel more comfortable reaching out to the police for help when it is needed.

Key Factors for Success

Furthering the reach of strong police reform bills and ensuring their implementation requires the support of politicians as well as the advocacy of citizens. Police departments must also work to ensure that these reforms are put into practice and successfully enforced over the long term.

Key Obstacles

Obstacles to police reform bills being passed largely involve opposition from some law-and-order advocates who are against reform. Ensuring the implementation of reforms will require the dedication of police departments in the impacted areas.

Timeline to Implementation

The precursor to the Reform, Shift and Build Act was a criminal justice reform bill signed by Massachusetts Gov. Charlie Baker in 2018. Subsequently, a report came out with suggestions for changes to the bill. However, it was not until major upheavals in 2019 and 2020 that significant changes were considered, leading to the most recent reform. Baker signed the Reform, Shift and Act Bill on December 31, 2020.

References and Resources

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Public Housing Revitalization

Rehabilitating existing units can be more cost effective than building new housing



Ping Yuen Housing in San Francisco

The Impact

Public housing revitalization involves rehabilitating existing units of public housing, thus improving the conditions for residents and the overall livability of the area. These renovation projects provide countless benefits to their respective communities, using a method that is often more cost-effective than building new housing.

Where It's Been Implemented

Two major case studies of public housing renovation in San Francisco have been the modernization of the Ping Yuen Housing in Chinatown and the rehabilitation of public housing in the Bayview-Hunters Point Neighborhood.

Description

The original Ping Yuen projects were federally funded government housing created in the early 1950s. The conditions in this housing project worsened over the decades. Ping Yuen had failing elevators, leaky roofs and plumbing that was held together with duct tape. Due to these conditions, in 2014 San Francisco Mayor Ed Lee asked nonprofit housing organizations to help upgrade public housing in the city under a new HUD Rental Assistance Demonstration (RAD) Program. The Chinatown Community Development Center accepted this challenge and took ownership of Ping Yuen and North Ping Yuen in 2016, working with locals to improve the project's conditions.

In 2019, renovations were completed, with 440 units of renovated housing in total, along with a community building, courtyard, green spaces and sidewalks leading to the Ping Yuen community (pictured above). The renovations included upgrades to all major building systems, seismic and structural

repairs, elevator modernization, improved security, all-new baths and kitchens, flooring and paint, as well as new staff offices and community rooms. Chinatown CDC also collaborated with several partners to ensure sustainability in the renovated Ping Yuen, implementing improvements in water and energy efficiency and solar photovoltaic installation.

Another RAD program project at Hunters Point East West and Westbrook created 436 units of affordable public housing for families in the area. This project was a partnership between the John Stewart Company, the San Francisco Housing Development Corporation and Ridge Point Non-Profit Housing Corporation, which successfully completed a \$127 million rehabilitation. This renovation project helped to provide clean, safe housing for hundreds of families in a building complex that was previously dilapidated and hazardous. Renovations included roof and window replacement, a new automatic fire sprinkler system, exterior painting, landscaping, washer/dryer additions, replacement of sewer system, apartment renovations and energy use reductions. In terms of external improvements, the rehabilitation provided a new playground, improved sidewalks and parking, and renovated a community space. The city provided free, high-speed Internet access to all residents, as well as technology training.

Key Drivers

Housing renovation can be very beneficial in cities such as San Francisco, where much of the housing in low-income areas is outdated and dilapidated. Rehabilitating housing can also help revitalize neighborhoods by improving community ties through safer shared spaces and helping to bring down crime rates. In addition, these improvements provide residents healthier living environments with building upgrades that are more environmentally conscious.

Key Factors for Success

Funding and support from residents are essential for the success of public housing revitalization. Individuals living in Ping Yuen Housing were especially vocal about the need for renovation. A sound preconstruction plan is essential to minimize the relocation of current tenants.

Key Obstacles

Rehabilitation of public housing is often more difficult than building new affordable housing. In addition to the lack of available funding, developers must often deal with restrictive land-use requirements, historical preservation mandates, toxic substances such as lead paint and asbestos, and onerous off-street requirements.

References and Resources

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rhodges@smchousing.org

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Tiny Homes and Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs)

Constructing low square footage, environmentally conscious homes promotes greater housing affordability and environmental sustainability



The Impact

Tiny homes are booming in popularity in the U.S., providing a more affordable, flexible and environmentally friendly alternative to typical American homes. California, Colorado, Florida and Texas are among the states where these homes are the most popular, due to flexible zoning laws and permits that have allowed tiny-home communities to grow and thrive.

Description

Tiny homes are a type of accessory dwelling unit (ADU) that can be affordable and applicable for emergency housing, transitional housing and ownership. These homes tend to be between 100 and 400 square feet, in contrast to the median size of a new American home sold in 2020, which was about 2,300 square feet. Tiny homes come in a variety of styles and range from homes on wheels parked in a lot with other homes to others set on a foundation on independent lots. They can be rented or owned, designed by the owner or purchased from a tiny home manufacturer. These units provide owners a more affordable and flexible alternative to the average full-sized home while also having a smaller environmental footprint.

Where It's Been Implemented

Although tiny houses are not explicitly prohibited in any state, there are a few states in which tiny house living is more accessible. The 10 most popular U.S. states for tiny home living are Utah, New York, North Carolina, Arizona, Washington, Oregon, Texas, Colorado, Florida and California.

California has popularized tiny home ownership through various ADU laws. As of January 1, 2020, the California Health and Safety Code required all cities and counties to develop a plan to incentivize and promote their usage. Among the cities that have adopted new zoning laws and regulations that make it easier to live in tiny homes are San Diego, Los Angeles, San Luis Obispo, Fresno, Santa Clara, San Jose, Richmond and Santa Cruz. Counties promoting tiny homes include Nevada County, Sonoma County and Humboldt County.

A company called Abodu, which is based in Redwood City, Calif., is working to address the San Francisco Bay Area housing crisis by selling small, detached ADUs for backyards of single-family homes. These units, which contain one bedroom, one bathroom and a kitchen space, are targeted toward older residents interested in downsizing while remaining near family or young people seeking to rent their own space.

ACCESS Tiny Homes, established by the Cordelia RV Company based in Cordelia, Calif., is another tiny home manufacturer. The company was able to develop about 1,000 units in only six to eight weeks, due to its expertise in RVs and its experience in partnering with a manufacturer that provided emergency housing after Hurricane Katrina.

The company's consumer models start at approximately \$69,000, while its basic unit with vinyl siding sells for about \$54,000. The units themselves are fully furnished with necessary appliances and accessories, and they provide the space and comfort that those facing housing insecurity need.

Key Drivers

One of the biggest benefits of tiny homes is that tiny home downsizers reduce their ecological footprint by an average of 45 percent. These homes use only about 7 percent of the energy that a traditional house uses. Tiny homes can promote environmental sustainability by being constructed with sustainable materials, using clean energy sources and using less energy due to their smaller size. Tiny homes allow for versatility, since units can be used as travel vehicles as well, promoting a flexible travel lifestyle. In addition, they promote more accessible and affordable housing, with the average cost of a "built-to-suit" tiny home being \$59,884 and the average cost of a DIY home being \$23,000, compared to the average national listing price of a home on Zillow, which is \$275,000.

Tiny homes help Americans facing economic uncertainty. A total of 89 percent of tiny house dwellers have less credit card debt than the average American, and 55 percent have more savings than the average American.

Tiny homes also are helping address the problem of homelessness. One example is the Tiny House Empowerment Village project in Oakland constructed by Youth Spirit Artworks, an interfaith job training nonprofit serving homeless and underserved low-income Bay Area youths, in partnership with Housing Consortium of the East Bay, a nonprofit organization that works with nonprofit and for-profit agencies to develop affordable housing and inclusive communities for special needs individuals. The project ran from March 2019 through 2020, creating a total of 26 village houses, along with two community yurts containing a kitchen and meeting space, and communal bathrooms and showers for homeless transitional-aged youth. The village is meant to serve as emergency shelter for these youths, allowing young people to stay a maximum of two years or until they are placed in permanent housing.

LifeMoves is another organization working to combat homelessness using tiny house developments. The organization has created 100 units of tiny home housing for 124 individuals in Mountain View, Calif., with the capacity to house more than 50 percent of the current homeless population in the city in the first year alone.

Key Factors for Success

In order for tiny homes to work successfully, state, city and county governments must implement laws and regulations that encourage the use of tiny homes and minimize barriers to their construction and continued existence. California has already created codes to encourage the usage of tiny homes. However, local governments must alter regulations regarding zoning and permits to promote widespread access to tiny homes.

Tiny home usage also necessitates a mental shift, requiring people to accept living in a smaller space and consuming less.

Key Obstacles

Zoning ordinances and building codes are two major obstacles to the building of tiny homes. States such as Delaware and Connecticut have restrictive zoning regulations that prevent tiny home construction. Building codes governing the design, construction and maintenance of homes can also be a barrier for tiny homes. State and local governments must work together to alter these restrictions. Access to land, limited loan availability for tiny homes and these homes' low resale value are additional obstacles to promoting the use of tiny homes.

Background

While the “tiny living movement” originated in the late 1970s and picked up in the 1980s, it was not until after the financial downturn of 2008 that the movement began to gain significant traction, as home residents began struggling to make mortgage payments.

In the early to mid-2010s, tiny homes began to get attention in the media and tiny home communities started appearing. In 2016 Fresno, Calif., was the first city in the U.S. to alter its development code to authorize tiny homes by passing new zoning laws that allow for mobile tiny homes to be treated as permanent backyard cottages. Several cities and counties began to create more tiny home-inclusive laws in the following years, helping the tiny living movement to spread.

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Urban Community Gardens

Urban gardens provide an innovative way to cultivate community relationships and hyper-local produce in dense city environments.



The Impact

Urban community gardens can have a dramatic impact on the livelihoods of cities, becoming places of community interaction, cultural diversity and a sustainable source of food. Increasing the availability of nutritious food is a key step in fighting food deserts and food insecurity. Furthermore, promoting sustainable agriculture comes with a plethora of environmental benefits, including establishing new natural habitats for species, mitigating water runoff and reducing miles traveled to transport food.

In the past, community gardening in urban areas has struggled, notably due to density and cleanliness issues. However, some urban areas are reversing this trend. During the COVID-19 pandemic, community gardens have continued to play a key role where mingling can still occur (with social distancing), while mitigating the growing food insecurity.

Description

Community gardening has long been a way for a group of clustered homes to raise plants and vegetables together. The idea is simple: A certain number of gardening beds are made available in a specific plot of land decided by the city and community, and residents plant any crop they want. Today, community gardening continues to expand in urban areas, where residents, regardless of income status, can grow local food in the comfort of their neighborhood while also meeting new people. Urban community gardening is a great way for residents to bond, grow sustainable produce and improve their quality of life by removing processed foods from their diet.

Where It Has Been Implemented

Numerous urban community gardens exist throughout the San Francisco Bay Area, including 42 in San Francisco, 16 in Oakland and many throughout San Mateo County. San Mateo County's Office of

Sustainability has been working with local communities to build more gardens by providing resources such as funding for gardening beds and irrigation systems, as well as workshops on how to garden. The City of San Mateo has two community gardens: one near Beresford Recreation Center and the other in Los Prados Park. Both provide fresh produce for lower-income parts of the city.

Community gardens have played a large role in bringing urban neighborhoods together in San Francisco. They enable young elementary school students and low-income residents to participate in educational classes centered around gardening and cooking classes. In 2004 Urban Sprouts was created in the Sunnydale neighborhood in San Francisco as a community garden to serve students through a program called Green Schoolyards. Urban Sprouts has since expanded to partner with another local nonprofit operation by cooking and sharing recipes to prepare food pantry staples at their weekly distribution. It also has developed educational programming and vocational training for transitional age youth. It provides more than 1,000 meals every year to those in need and 50 internships to low-income individuals. It also serves at least 2,000 pounds of garden-grown food each year to under-resourced areas of San Francisco.

Across the U.S., community gardens are becoming more popular. From 2012 to 2018, the number of community garden beds across the United States grew by 44 percent. In America's 100 largest cities, the increase was 22 percent between 2017 and 2018 alone.

Key Drivers

Well-funded county sustainability programs coupled with a strong outreach program are essential for robust community gardens. For instance, San Francisco's Recreation and Parks Department has drawn upon many resources to promote the benefits of homegrown agriculture and expand the opportunities at each site. Sustainability advocates have been instrumental as well in the development of community gardens, particularly in areas that don't focus on sustainability otherwise.

The diversification of plant and produce species is also important to drive community interaction in community gardens. When communities grow a variety of species native to a variety of cultures, they promote cultural diversity as citizens can share, teach and celebrate their cultures and food in relation to the produce they grow.

Key Factors for Success

In order for community gardens to thrive, they must have reliable funding and a neighborhood willing to maintain the garden. They are more likely to be successful in urban areas where residents are willing to farm and are eager for sustainable and affordable produce than in wealthy areas where customers frequently shop from higher-end markets offering fresh, organic produce. Many gardens find success via "champion gardeners" who ensure the gardens are well maintained over time.

Site selection also matters. There needs to be an adequate amount of sunshine and the garden must be connected to the city's irrigation system, in addition to being easily accessible.

Key Obstacles

Every community garden must gain approval from the city. In most cases, the only gardens approved are ones backed by a large group of community individuals with knowledge of gardening and concrete plans for the project. Finding this type of support can be challenging in poorer urban areas unless the effort is driven by a nonprofit organization.

Urban community gardens sometimes present the challenge of growing plants and vegetables in the presence of dirty water and poor air quality. In a 2014 study, Baltimore researchers asked 70 local urban community gardeners if they knew of any soil contaminants and 66 percent responded that lead

was a problem. Because land use in urban areas often changes, plots are frequently prone to soil contamination by chemicals from past land use. A residential plot that was previously occupied by an industrial site may contain more lead, putting homeowners and their gardens at risk.

References and Resources:

Herman Yee, Urban Sprouts, (415) 533-0003, herman@urbansprouts.org

[American Community Gardening Association](#)

[City of San Mateo Community Gardens](#)

[Oakland Community Gardens](#)

[San Mateo County Office of Sustainability Community Gardening Partnership](#)

[San Francisco Community Gardens](#)

[San Francisco Urban Sprouts](#)

[2014 Baltimore Soil Contaminant Study](#)

Other Solutions to Explore

Clipper START Card

Transit discount pass increases ridership by lower-income individuals



The Clipper START program was launched by San Francisco Bay Area transit agencies in July of 2020. A variation of the already-existing all-in-one transit card called Clipper, Clipper START offers lower fares to lower-income individuals who frequently use transit. Eligible card holders must be 19 to 64 years old, live in the San Francisco Bay Area, and must have a household income of no more than 200 percent of the federal poverty level. As of June 2023, those levels were:

Household Size	1	2	3	4	5	6
Annual Qualifying Household Income	\$29,160	\$39,440	\$49,720	\$60,000	\$70,280	\$80,560

In figuring the cutoff for families with more than six members, individuals should add \$9,440 for each additional household member.

Clipper START offers significant discounts on regular fares, including 50% off MUNI, Caltrain, and Golden Gate Ferry and Transit, and 20% off many other transit systems, including BART and AC Transit. Within the first six months of implementation, Clipper START received 1,522 applications and 1,369 were accepted, an 89.9 percent acceptance rate. Nearly 70 percent of card holders live in San Francisco. The

agencies used are skewed toward San Francisco-based transit, with 91 percent of all trips using Clipper START made on BART and Muni.

These results met expectations and suggest that future programs targeted toward low-income individuals have the potential to raise transit ridership among individuals who may not have used transit otherwise, while also raising revenue for agencies.

References and Resources:

[SFMTA income data on Clipper START](#)

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