



8. Engaged Communities

SB 1000 seeks to facilitate transparency and public engagement in local governments' planning and decision-making processes, reduce harmful pollutants and the associated health risks in environmental justice communities, and promote equitable access to health-inducing benefits to address the inequitable distribution of pollution and associated health effects in low-income communities and communities of color. Meaningful participation of all people in decisions that affect their lives and communities is a critical component of environmental justice and a prerequisite for a sustainable and equitable city. As discussed in Chapter 2, the most socioeconomically disadvantaged and environmentally impacted communities in Oakland have been institutionally barred out of decision-making processes, and the result has been a pattern of underinvestment and disinvestment in these communities. Redressing inequities will require a sustained effort to rebuild trust, engage and empower historically underrepresented communities, and focus investments and actions in areas that are cumulatively most affected by environmental, social, and economic burdens.

ENGAGEMENT BEST PRACTICES

Achieving inclusive, authentic community engagement and closing equity gaps requires direct participation by impacted communities in the development and implementation of solutions and policy decisions that directly affect them. As shown in the image below, community engagement can be conducted on a spectrum that ranges from informing to power sharing. This spectrum can also be thought of as series of steps essential for building capacity for community collaboration and governance, and the City will assess and orient community engagement efforts that

advance the level of public impact toward greater community ownership. When the City conducts community engagement, it will start by identifying community assets and build sustained partnerships to support cultural brokers and community-based organizations who already have in-depth knowledge and established relationships in the community.

When designing community engagement efforts, it is crucial to identify potential barriers and address them as part of

Figure EJ-29: Community Engagement Spectrum



Credit: Graphic designed by Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC), based on the framework developed by the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2).

implementation. The City will seek to remove technology, language, education, cultural, and other barriers that have limited participation of Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC); low-income; non-English speaking people; older adults; youth; people with disabilities; individuals across the sexual orientation/gender identity spectrum; unhoused people; formerly incarcerated persons; and other historically marginalized groups. Strategies to address barriers include provision of food and childcare at meetings; transportation vouchers; compensation for time and effort; translation services and materials available in people's desired language, including Braille or other languages accessible to people with disabilities or limited reading ability; venues and materials that are accommodating of work schedules and cultures; physically accessible venues; accessible marketing and informational materials with simple, relevant language; culturally relevant events and meeting formats; partnerships with trusted community organizations; expansion of internet access and coaching in digital skills; and establishment of pathways and resources for City staff follow-up.



8.1 ISSUES AND DISPARITIES

LINGUISTIC ISOLATION

One of Oakland's strengths is its diversity: residents come from many different cultures and backgrounds. Nearly 27 percent were born in another country, and common languages spoken at home (by at least one percent of the city's population, ages 5 and over) include Spanish, Vietnamese, Arabic, and Chinese (including Mandarin and Cantonese).¹

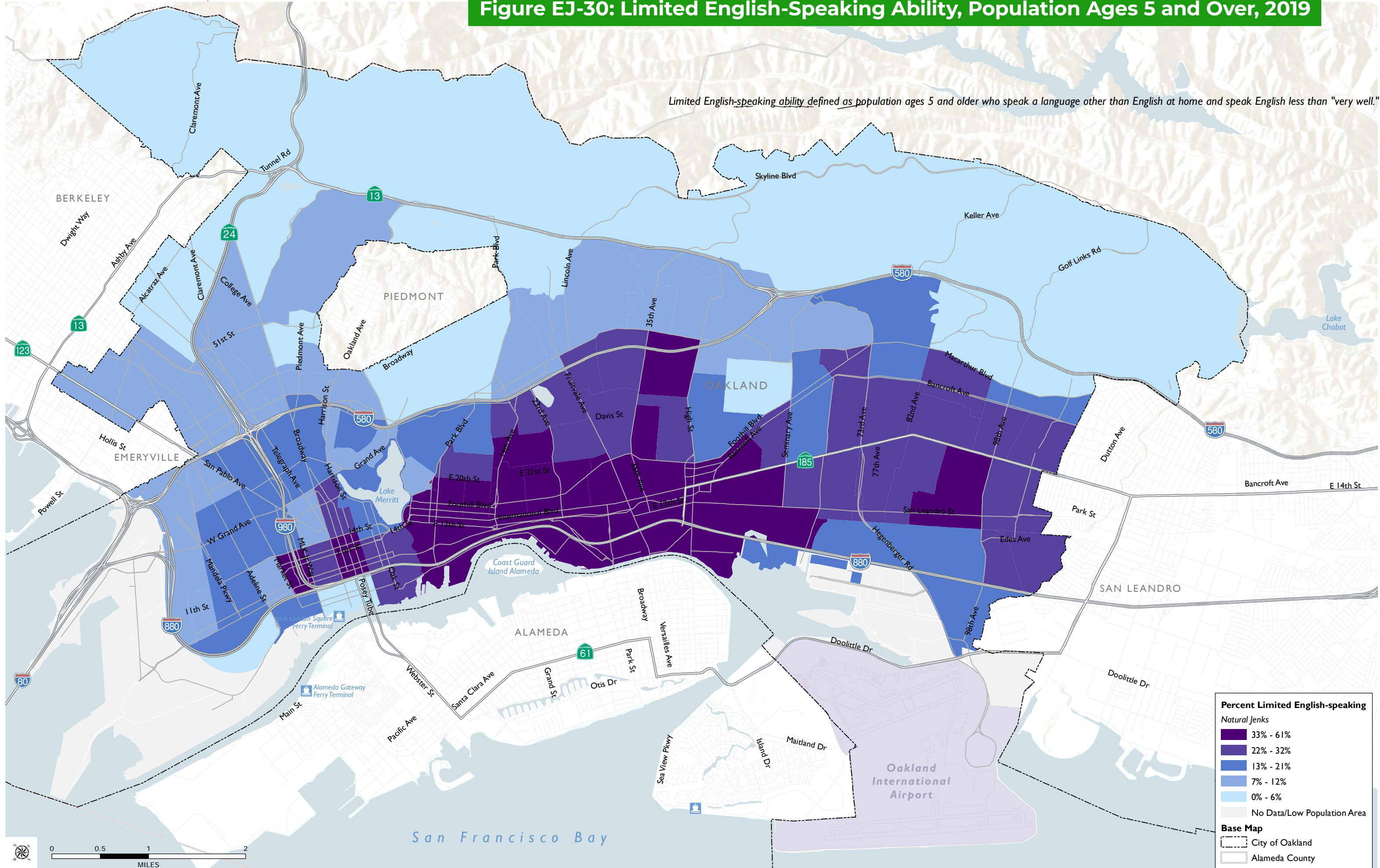
However, many of these residents do not speak or read English as a first language or at all and experience barriers to civic engagement, health and safety as a result. The people and institutions that provide social services and medical care often fail to provide translation or interpretation for adults who are not able to speak or read English well, which means they may not get the health care and information they need. Linguistically isolated households may not hear or understand important information when there is an emergency like a fire, earthquake, or extreme heat waves. A household's limited English proficiency can create even more barriers to social and civic inclusion. A household is considered linguistically isolated when all adults primarily speak a language other than English and have limited English proficiency. **Figure EJ-30** shows areas of linguistic isolation, which are greatest in the Jack London Gateway, Chinatown, Lower Laurel/Allendale, and Elmhurst Park tracts in addition to a large portion of south-central Oakland throughout Fruitvale and adjacent neighborhoods. The City will prioritize interpretation, translation, and connection to linguistically appropriate services in these communities. interpretation, translation, and connection to linguistically appropriate services in these communities. Policies in the Safety Element address linguistic barriers in community education, emergency preparedness, and emergency response.

¹ U.S. Census Bureau, 2019 American Community Surveys 1-Year Estimates Table B16002 [generated for Oakland city, California], <https://data.census.gov/table?q=b16002+oakland,+ca&t=Language+Spoken+at+Home&tid=ACSDT1Y2019.B16002>.

INTERNET ACCESS

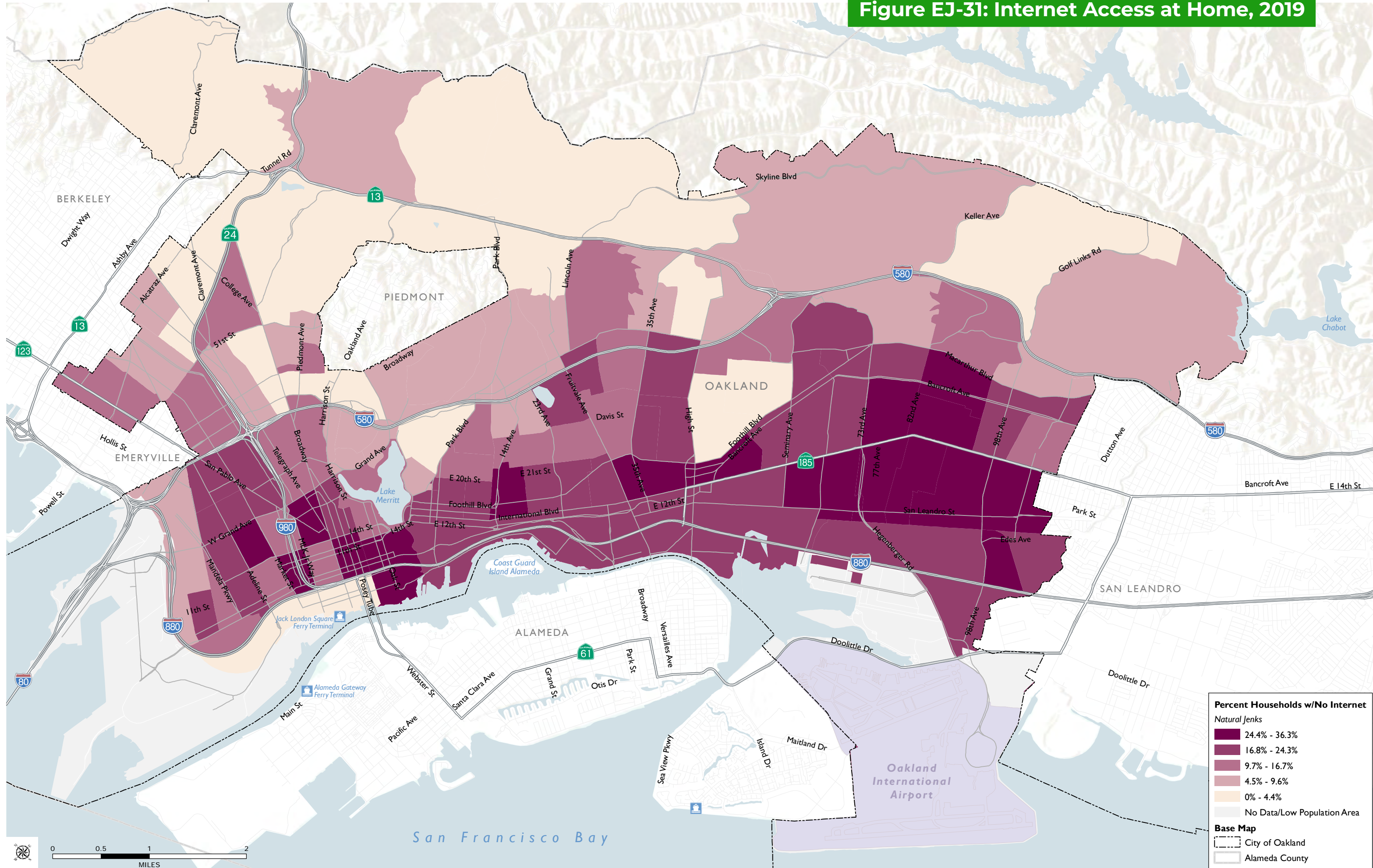
Reliable access to the internet and telecommunications systems plays an increasingly important part in daily and civic life, helping people to work, learn, access services, participate in government, and stay connected to friends and family. Despite this importance, there are still households without access to the Internet or to computers at home. The impacts of digital isolation, especially for older adults, people with disabilities, and communities of color, include less access to resources and decreased ability to participate in civic political and non-political activities, which compounds other barriers to civic engagement and increases impacts of racial disparities in access to resources and opportunities. **Figure EJ-31** shows that tracts with the greatest proportion of households without Internet access are located in the Lockwood/Coliseum neighborhood in East Oakland and neighborhoods in Jack London Square. According to the 2018 Equity Indicators Report, Black individuals were the most likely to not have high speed internet access at home (40.8 percent), followed by Hispanic/Latinx individuals (33.5 percent). White individuals were least likely to lack high speed Internet access at home (14.6 percent). Among Asian individuals, 25.2 percent did not have access to high-speed internet at home, slightly lower than the citywide percent (26.8 percent). Black residents were 2.79 times more likely than white residents to not have high speed Internet access at home. Additional strategies to foster digital equity may include leveraging City infrastructure to provide access to households in underserved areas and partnering with telecommunications and cable providers to offer discounted wireless and broadband plans to low-income customers.

Figure EJ-30: Limited English-Speaking Ability, Population Ages 5 and Over, 2019



SOURCE: ACS 2015-2019; City of Oakland, 2021; ALAMEDA County GIS, 2021; Dyett & Bhatia, 2021

Figure EJ-31: Internet Access at Home, 2019



SOURCE: ACS 2015-2019; City of Oakland, 2021; ALAMEDA County GIS, 2021; Dyett & Bhatia, 2021

Building Resilience: Bridging the Digital Divide

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, essential activities like completing homework, finding a job, working from home, starting a business, making appointments, and accessing government services increasingly take place online. Yet, according to 2019 American Community Surveys (ACS) five-year estimates, over 15,000 Oakland residents do not have a computer and 27,600 do not have internet at home. Inability to access internet or broadband excludes the marginalized from educational and economic benefits available to those who are connected; this disparity between the have and have-nots is referred to as the “digital divide.” The City has developed a program for “digital inclusion” with the objective of achieving digital equity. By targeting four intervention points—advocacy and awareness, internet access, devices, and digital literacy (skills)—the program can positively impact education, healthcare, employment, and economic development.

Funded through the federal CARES Act, the Oakland CARES Act: OAK WiFi Initiative provides free internet access for students, older adults, job seekers, small businesses, the underserved, and unconnected. Beginning in November 2020, the City has provided OAK WiFi live hotspots throughout the city, greatly expanding coverage from West Oakland through Downtown and along the International Boulevard corridor to the San Leandro border.

The #OaklandUndivided campaign is a partnership between the City Office of Education, Oakland Promise, Oakland Public Education Fund, Oakland Unified School District, and Tech Exchange that provides free school-loaned laptop computers, reliable internet connection, and ongoing tech support to public school students.

The City of Oakland also has also collaborated with the Greenlining Institute to address barriers to digital access through a year-long program called The Town Link, which builds digital inclusion and digital literacy through trainings and educational programs; builds awareness around free and affordable broadband plans; provides computers and

tablets to residents that lack devices; and provides \$100,000 in grants and technical assistance to 10 local organizations (\$10,000 per organization) with the goal of increasing internet adoption and digital literacy in priority communities and neighborhoods. In October 2021, the Greenlining Institute announced the grant recipients, which included the following 10 grassroots Oakland organizations: Allen Temple Baptist Church, El Timpano, Homies Empowerment, Oakland Workers Fund, Vietnamese American Community Center of East Bay, Center for Empowering Refugees and Immigrants, Roots Community Health Center, The Unity Council, St. Mary’s Center, and Building Opportunities for Self-Sufficiency.

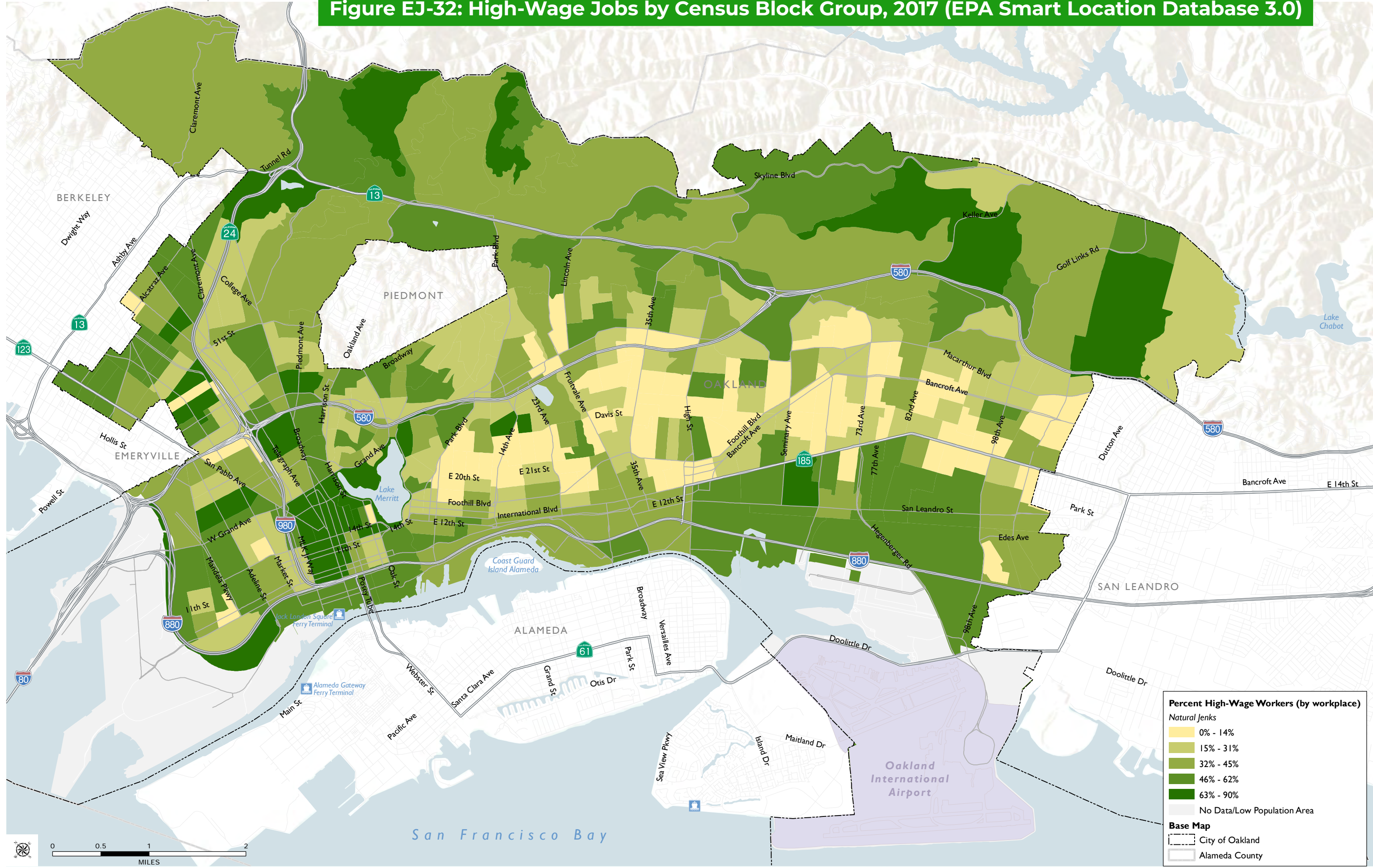
Sources: ACS 5-Year Estimates, 2019; City of Oakland Digital Inclusion Report; City of Oakland “OAK WiFi – A Small Step to Closing the Digital Divide” website; #OaklandUndivided website; Greenlining website

ECONOMIC WELL-BEING

Economic well-being and employment represent a means by which people engage in community life. A state of economic well-being, where people can meet their basic needs, can also make it easier for people to participate in civic processes. Access to jobs and employment opportunities is an indicator of a place’s economic health, and many of Oakland’s smaller businesses represent the beating heart of Oakland’s culture. As the city plans for employment of the future, the city is well-positioned to capture additional jobs in fast-growing Bay Area sectors related to software, social media, life sciences, and the “green economy”, given its burgeoning labor force already employed in these industries as well as its central, transit-accessible location and abundant real estate redevelopment opportunities. By providing enough jobs and the means to live near those jobs, cities can significantly help foster community and support residents. **Figure EJ-32** shows where high-wage jobs are located in Oakland by census block group, based on data from 2017 in the EPA Smart Location 3.0 database. Currently, areas between International Boulevard and I-580 throughout central and East Oakland have a lower percentage of high-wage employment. Downtown Oakland and the industrial area of West Oakland have high proportions of high-wage jobs, ranging between 73 and 90 percent of workers in the census block group.



Figure EJ-32: High-Wage Jobs by Census Block Group, 2017 (EPA Smart Location Database 3.0)



SOURCE: US EPA, 2021; ALAMEDA County GIS, 2021; Dyett & Bhatia, 2021

Preserving existing Oakland businesses is a key component in an equitable economic future. Many of these businesses represent the “beating heart” of Oakland’s culture that strengthens and reflects the neighborhoods they are a part of. However, new economic growth can also mean displacement pressures, and the City must take action to protect these important community assets.

Entrepreneurship, specifically business ownership, is also an indicator of economic opportunity at both an individual and neighborhood level. Policies in the General Plan seek to overcome racial disparities in entrepreneurship opportunities. Additionally, through industry, government, and community partnerships, the City can help build a support system of education, training, and mentorship for industries of the future. These resources can support youth, women, people of color, and formerly incarcerated individuals with the skills and connections to new economic pathways.

The LUTE update will include additional strategies for employment related to business attraction, land use and infrastructure planning, revitalization of underperforming commercial corridors, and a more comprehensive equitable business development and support strategy. The EJ Element includes a focus on opportunities that promote equitable, inclusive, and sustainable growth and support for existing Oakland businesses, culture keepers, and entrepreneurs.

Table EJ-10: Top 10th Percentile Tracts by Indicator – Civic Engagement

TRACT NAME (WITH SCORE)		
LINGUISTIC ISOLATION	UNEMPLOYMENT	INTERNET ¹
Chinatown (1.00)	DeFremery/Oak Center (1.00)	Webster (1.00)
Lower San Antonio East (0.99)	Acorn (0.99)	Lockwood/Coliseum/ Rudsdale (0.99)
Fruitvale/Hawthorne (0.98)	Oakland Estuary (0.98)	Chinatown (0.98)
Eastlake (0.97)	Fremont District (0.97)	Fremont District (0.96)
Jack London Gateway (0.96)	Seminary (0.96)	Arroyo Viejo (0.96)
San Antonio/Sausal Creek (0.96)	Eastmont Hills (0.96)	Uptown/Downtown (0.95)
Chinatown/Laney (0.95)	Cox/Elmhurst (0.95)	Fitchburg (0.95)
Lower San Antonio West (0.94)	Fruitvale (0.94)	Stonehurst (0.93)
Downtown (0.93)	Lower San Antonio West (0.93)	Castlemont (0.93)
Oakland Estuary (0.92)	Melrose (0.92)	New Highland (0.91)
Harrington/Fruitvale (0.91)	Jack London Gateway (0.90)	Elmhurst (0.91)
Eastlake Clinton East (0.90)	Mills College (0.90)	

Note: Census tract names that appear in red are EJ Communities.
 1. Includes only 11 tracts in the top decile due to ties. Next highest score for is 0.88.



8.2 GOALS AND POLICIES

GOAL EJ-8 FOSTER MEANINGFUL CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND SUPPORT COMMUNITY POWER- AND CAPACITY-BUILDING.

- EJ-8.1 Meaningful, Relevant Engagement.** Design and implement public engagement processes and events that facilitate participation from low-income communities and communities of color; are driven by resident priorities, are easily accessible and understandable, and provide meaningful opportunities for participants to influence outcomes.
- EJ-8.2 Sustained Engagement.** Develop and maintain communication channels that allow for ongoing dialogue with neighborhood groups and individual residents; track issues and priorities at the neighborhood level; and foster transparency and accountability. Use this information to inform development of City programs, projects, and services, sharing information across departments to optimize the effectiveness of efforts, and share outcomes with groups.
- EJ-8.3 Innovative Methods.** Explore innovative strategies for increasing community involvement in civic processes and ownership of outcomes, tailoring strategies to best reach target audiences. Strategies to explore may include participatory budgeting, participatory action research, providing staff assistance to support community-driven planning and policy efforts, or other approaches that emphasize the active participation of community members most affected by the questions at issue.
- EJ-8.4 Community Partners.** Partner with community-based organizations that have relationships, trust, and cultural competency with target communities as to support engagement for local initiatives and issues. Seek opportunities to support community partners in these efforts such as by providing technical assistance, data, meeting spaces, funding and other support services as feasible.
- EJ-8.5 Community Capacity Building.** Empower historically marginalized community members to participate in local decision-making and engage meaningfully in planning efforts, including through increased representation in employment and civic life; providing educational/training workshops and programs about civic involvement and processes, such as through fellowships and internships; providing organizational support to community-based organizations; and other capacity building activities.
- EJ-8.6 Engagement Infrastructure.** Build City technology, staffing, funding and systems resources to conduct more inclusive, meaningful and community-empowered engagement, including seeking grant funding. Develop flexible but sustained infrastructure for two-way information sharing between City and partner agencies and community members.
- EJ-8.7 Interagency and Interdepartmental Collaboration.** Collaborate with and among public agencies and City departments to leverage resources, avoid duplication of effort and enhance the effectiveness of public participation.
- EJ-8.8 Youth-Centered Events.** Seek out opportunities for meaningfully and authentically involving young people—particularly from EJ Communities—in the planning and implementation of youth-centered events that develop confidence and leadership skills.
- EJ-8.9 Events for Older Adults.** Provide greater opportunity for older adults (ages 65 and over), particularly those from EJ Communities, to be integrated into community events and intergenerational exchanges. Involve older adults in the planning and implementation of events that are accessible to older adults.

EJ-8.10 Linguistically Isolated Communities. Continue to provide interpretation and translation services, assistance in accessing community services and programs, and direct engagement with specific demographic groups. Prioritize EJ Communities as identified in **Figure EJ-30**.

EJ-8.11 Digital Access. Ensure that all meetings, materials, and other engagement that uses technology is easily accessible by mobile devices. Invest in high-speed internet in underserved low-income communities to expand digital access and engagement opportunity. Prioritize expanded internet in public facilities and EJ Communities as identified in **Figure EJ-31**.



GOAL EJ-9 EXPAND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, INCOME EQUALITY, AND OPPORTUNITY FOR ALL OAKLANDERS.

Economic Development and Opportunity

- EJ-9.1 Investments for Inclusive, Equitable Growth.** Make intentional investments to increase and diversify economic growth and living wage jobs in an inclusive and equitable manner that focuses on neighborhoods and their unique needs, particularly in EJ Communities.
- EJ-9.2 Small Business/Startup Support.** Support the development and retention of small business startups and new firms — particularly POC/women/veteran owned businesses - by providing assistance with business planning, expansion, and access to capital.
- EJ-9.3 Business Incubators.** Encourage occupancy of existing buildings with incubators for specific industry/trade groups and for artisans and craftspeople, where small startup businesses can share existing facilities and equipment.
- EJ-9.4 Public Procurement.** Continue to use the public procurement process to stimulate small business development, prioritize certified underrepresented business enterprises, including businesses owned by people of color, women, LGBTQIA+ community members, veterans, and individuals with disabilities, and locally-owned businesses in particular, and coordinate with anchor institutions such as universities, hospitals, public agencies, and school districts to help launch new products and services.
- EJ-9.5 Local Business Needs Assessment.** Continually assess business workforce needs and other requirements and use the findings to assist in developing a qualified workforce that meets the demands of established and emerging business and smaller, value-added businesses such as artisan foods, digital media, recording

and sound technologies, smart engineered, cooling technologies, green industries (such as urban agriculture, urban forestry, riparian restoration, infrastructure resilience, and others and green building product development.

Workforce Development and Training

- EJ-9.6 Labor Force Skills Development.** The City shall partner with educational institutions, employers, and community-based organizations to develop a local labor force with skills to meet the needs of the area's businesses and industries. Continue and expand local-hire initiatives, training, apprenticeships, and partnerships with employers.
- EJ-9.7 Barriers to Workforce Participation.** The City shall collaborate with regional and local partners to identify and address barriers to workforce participation and access to training. Solutions to explore may include:
- Two-generation programs that link education, job training, and career-building for low-income parents with supports for their children;
 - Bridge programs that prepare people with low academic skills for further education and training; and
 - Transitional jobs programs that provide short-term subsidized employment or training for formerly incarcerated individuals.
- EJ-9.8 Entrepreneurship and Social Enterprise Training.** Support education and training in entrepreneurship and social enterprise as an alternative pathway to traditional jobs.



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