

Oakland 2045 General Plan Update

Summary of Discussion Groups May 2022

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I Introduction

I.1 General Plan Update

The State of California requires each city and county to have a comprehensive General Plan that outlines the community's long-term policies related to growth and development. Many of the elements in the current General Plan were last updated over 20 years ago. The GP provides a consistent direction for future development and is an opportunity to engage our community in the planning and decision-making process. The General Plan establishes a citywide vision and a direction around housing, environmental quality, land use, built environment, and transportation. With this comprehensive update of the General Plan, the City has a once in a generation opportunity to advance its commitment to create a "fair and just" city through equitable goals, policies, and implementation measures. The GPU will be conducted using a racial equity lens – to identify the racial and equity impacts of the proposed policies and programs and to identify more equitable approaches.

More information on the General Plan Update is available at <https://www.oaklandca.gov/topics/general-plan-update>.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT AND PARTICIPATION

The process of drafting a new General Plan enables the community to assess opportunities and challenges, establish a vision for the city's future, and outline a systematic process to achieve the vision. Preparation of the General Plan is far more than a legal formality – it is an opportunity for community members to define Oakland's future, and to ensure a high quality of life for themselves and for subsequent generations.

While the planning process will take direction from many sources, the most important voice is that of the community. The valuable input of community members is essential to the creation of a new General Plan that accurately reflects the common goals, needs, visions, and desires of the community. In addition to the discussion groups that this report covers, key outreach efforts in the General Plan process to date include community workshops and town hall meetings, pop-up events, cultural celebrations, neighborhood-specific workshops, and other events.

Summaries of the above are available at <https://www.oaklandca.gov/topics/meetings-and-events>.

I.2 This Report

This report describes the results of discussion groups, which were designed to bring together key individuals representing agencies, businesses, and community groups for one-on-one or small group discussions with project staff. Representatives from 53 organizations participated. The purpose of the discussion groups was to solicit the knowledge and expertise of these stakeholders regarding conditions in Oakland, and to ensure that the General Plan's vision and policies accurately reflect the priorities of the groups these stakeholders represent. The format was a relatively free-form discussion; interviewers from the project staff used a list of questions as framework/prompts for the discussion, with identification of key issues and priorities left to the discussion group members.

The following section highlights major themes that emerged across all interviews; section three provides a summary of the perspectives, ideas, and priorities from each interview; and the Appendix contains the notes taken from each interview.

2 Discussion Notes

Below are notes taken from each the interviews. These are ideas, priorities, and perspectives of the participating public agencies, business groups, and community groups. Summaries are provided for longer discussions.

2.1 Environmental Justice and Conservation

Stakeholders Represented: Mycelium Youth Network, HOPE collaborative (Healthy People for Oakland's Environment), Greenbelt Alliance, Center for Biological Diversity, Trees for Oakland, The Sierra Club, Save the Bay, West Oakland Environmental Indicators Project (WOEIP)

SUMMARY

Participating groups frequently noted the need for more effective community engagement strategies. Many groups mentioned that communities they interact with have already identified the environmental challenges they face, but struggle to see their input integrated into concrete policy or materialize in their neighborhoods. Some members accredited this disconnect to the ways public feedback is collected, and suggested that planning staff consider more informal and accessible ways of gathering diverse viewpoints (hosting meetings in the evening.)

Youth engagement was a particular focus for environmental groups. Several environmental groups described their work with local youth groups, explaining how traditional forms of public engagement with the planning process (public comment in particular) made youth engagement a challenge. They discussed the need to reach student more effectively, in the classroom, where they live, in their neighborhoods etc. How can community engagement efforts not just consist of checking a box?

On the topic of youth engagement, several groups described work leveraging schools as local hubs for climate resiliency. In addition to environmental education programs, schools have provided urban communities with much-needed greenspace. Programs like Green Schoolyards have helped accelerate a program of schoolyard greening in Oakland.

In the interest of more effective environmental policy, participants described the need for better public education initiatives. One issue offered as an example was the need for infill housing, which environmental groups see as a tool to improve urban sustainability, limit urban sprawl, and keep housing development from spreading into areas prone to fire or flooding. However, participants suggested that public education surrounding infill housing was not sufficient, leading to lack of interest in the community. Most participants acknowledged their support of dense, transit-oriented housing development focused in the urban core. Many environmental groups encouraged more concerted focus on environmental issues in East Oakland in

particular. Participants described East Oakland's history of disinvestment, and cumulative environmental hazards that have remained for many decades.

DISCUSSION NOTES, MAY 12, 2022, 3:00 PM – 4:30 PM

Held via Zoom

Key Issues and Current Needs

- Youth-focused participant suggested offering resources and thinking about how to integrate youth into planning processes and the general plan
- Greenbelt alliance have resilience playbook and have worked closely with planners to have different avenues of public engagement; think of more informal and accessible ways of gathering diverse feedback. For example, meeting times, co-creation of engagement methods themselves.
- One participant noted that conventional planning spaces (giving public comments at meetings etc.) can be intimidating to youth/less experienced folks.
- Some environmental heat issues one participant noted included: urban heat, stormwater runoff filtration. This participant representing Save the Bay provided a link to Save the Bay Greening Policy <https://resilienceplaybook.org/harnessing-the-power-of-nature/>.
- Community member requests more opportunity for community input before decisions like trying to build fire-station on San Antonio Park in Oakland. The Open Space, Conservation, and Recreation element (OSCAR) was intended to protect parkland, suggests prioritizing maintaining existing parks.
- Sierra Club representative noted that problems related to homelessness are terribly distressing and requested that the city devote as many resources as possible to housing unhoused individuals.
- Mycelium Youth Action Network: the provisions in the GP so far are not enough, and asks youth to participate in spaces and formats that were designed for them (e.g., city council meetings). Principles often don't translate to the grassroots level. How can community engagement efforts reach student more effectively, in the classroom, where they live, in their neighborhoods etc. How can community engagement efforts not just consist of checking a box?
- School closures are also a big issue, the massive gentrification in East Oakland is pushing out Black students, and this is an EJ issue. Communities are communicating what they need, the barrier is getting the city to integrate this feedback into policy.
- Center for Biological Diversity: Urban greening can cause displacement, and policies should be community-driven and implemented at the behest of communities.
- Participant suggested that the recent redistricting might have changed access to the Deeply Rooted youth fellowship. Environmental ordinances must be accompanied by public education, or policies won't be effective. The City doesn't provide enough information or resources on public information or outreach; website is difficult to navigate.
- City of Oakland: City is currently following with state has asked us to do (look at environmental justice issues), and would like to collect other issues that remain unaddressed by the states.
- Center for Biological Diversity: Suggests creating greenspace in communities, incorporating native plants and creating habitat for native birds and other wildlife. Participant also mentions fire zones in connection with luxury sprawl development; more development in high fire-hazard areas increases risk of wildfires, in addition to putting people living in those communities at risk. Developers often claim

that building out on available vacant land outside the core is necessary to address affordable housing crisis, but participant notes that we can instead build more densely in the urban core.

- Greenbelt Alliance notes that need for infill housing is not extremely apparent to many in the general public, particularly in more traditional environmental circles. Need more cross-departmental conversations occurring between people preparing Housing Element and Environmental Issues. Regionally environmentalists have leveraged environmental reasons to avoid developing more housing.
- Sierra Club: Sierra Club generally formulates policy in response to what members bring forth, members have not historically opposed development in the Oakland hills, but Sierra Club tends to support TOD development and would prefer future Oakland hills development to involve transit connections. It seems like there has been a lot of development in downtown Oakland lately, can't be sure if it's all residential.
- City of Oakland: Mentioned local carbon sequestration efforts, and wanted to ask group about thoughts on carbon-sequestration. Mycelium Youth Network: Pear Tree Elementary has started a carbon-sequestration garden, micro-scale example of the interest this participant has in orienting schools as climate-resilience hubs.
- Save the Bay: building closer to the shoreline puts communities at risk of rising shoreline, often frontline communities. Infill housing further from shoreline will lessen the risk to communities.
- Mycelium Youth: We Rise with the Water programming, youth-focused programming to push for sea-level rise education. Youth leadership council have been conducting surveys and students are clearly concerned. Additionally, the group is hoping that schools can become areas of climate resilience and education, particularly because schools are one of the few government-run institutions that communities still trust.
- Sierra Club: Participant asked if General Plan directs building ordinance. Project staff clarified that land use elements can direct zoning ordinances but have less influence on building code. Participant suggests that city council should spend less time focusing on obscure building and zoning ordinances and try and streamline by predetermining through the GP.
- WOEIP: Many neighborhoods in flatlands have cumulative environmental justice issues, how to address all the layers on environmental injustice. Participant requested a plan of action to be more supportive of intervention and prevention for these cumulative impacts. Many environmental root causes of pollution come from the Port of Oakland, and the city has not addressed this.

Visioning Exercise

- “SMART-sustainable, mixed-use, affordable, resilient, transit oriented”
- Deeper collaborations with Sogorea'te land trust and Ohlone Nation
- “A healthy biosphere for all living creatures and equitable systems that support them.”
- “A healthy biosphere for all living creatures and equitable systems that support them.”
- “Get rid of all lawns...other cities have done this”

2.2 Parks and Recreation

Stakeholders Represented: Friends of Sausal Creek, Oakland Parks Foundation, Frog Park, Parks and Rec Commission, Oakland Public Works, Oakland Parks, Recreation, and Youth Development

MAY 12, 2022, 1 PM – 3:00 PM

Held via Zoom

Key Issues and Current Needs

- Participants mention many parks are not “up to snuff”, particularly in equity areas. Also, the unevenness of distribution of good park resources.
- Participant (city employee) mentioned the “need for decision-making that keeps homelessness out of parks”, because staff are unable to adequately maintain parks because of homelessness. Youth have limited access to parks because of unsafe conditions. This is an issue across the board. “There is not one park I can point to that doesn’t have this issue” (OPRYD). Palliative steps include more funding for more regular maintenance.
- “Years of deferred maintenance”. Participant mentioned many facilities in need of repairs which have been delayed for years. Measure Q: approved funding for park maintenance and major/minor capital projects. Funding is a big issue.
- All participants agree that maintenance is one of the top issues regarding parks in Oakland.
- Participant representing district 5 identifies a need to increase staff and programming at recreation centers.
- Safety and security needs improvement at parks. Participant from PRAC mentioned need for increased policing at parks, and that facilities require more oversight and vandalism prevention
- Some “out-of-the-box” solutions from participant from Oakland Public Works: one alternative to lack of access to nearby parks could be to bring people to parks instead.
- It can be very unclear where to go if there is a problem in the park. Participant representing Frog Park mentioned a need for more streamlined system to contact city officials to address problems at parks (i.e., closed bathrooms). This participant also mentioned that parks operated by multiple agencies are an issue, and that it is important for representatives from Lakeside Park to have a voice in this process due to the diversity of that park area.
- One user in chat questioned why parks need fundraising compared to other funded city services.
- Need more clarity between public works, parks & rec, different departments when it comes to park service.
- One participant suggested importance of community engagement when considering park maintenance issues, and how important cross-department cooperation is (“getting everyone in the same room”) to effectively facilitate community engagement.
- One participant mentioned need for a policing/law-enforcement middle ground, and that park rangers might be a less threatening alternative to police officers for safety monitoring. This participant also mentioned that public education is important to prevent littering and help shape more respectful behavior at parks and public spaces.

- Funding is not tracked per park, and this makes it challenging to determine equitable distribution of funding and resources. Speaks to the broader need to be more proactive and organized when responding to park issues.
- Corporate money is a small pot, and Oakland doesn't have access to the same funding as San Francisco for Parks & Rec. Participant urged focus on existing park maintenance instead of new park construction.

Opportunities Moving Forward

- Participant mentioned planning for future parks is challenging given lack of available space.
- Participants reiterate importance of focusing on existing parks before thinking about adding parks.
- One participant suggested some big and bold ideas: explore corporate partnerships, hold big polluters in east Oakland accountable. This participant also mentioned importance of park connectivity and establishing trail networks between parks.
- One participant called attention to the diverse definition of what is considered a park; pocket parks, urban greenery, gardens on empty lots and forests are all ways to circumnavigate space issues.
- Another participant echoed this; vacant lots often require significant environmental remediation.
- One participant mentioned that learning opportunities could be incorporated in parks themselves. The participant mentioned that community partners don't always feel respected and that their ideas aren't effectively incorporated into planning decisions.
- Need to legitimize role of community orgs because community buy-in will be key to effective park maintenance. Additionally, the participant proposed employment programs for unhoused residents or youth.
- One participant requested that meetings like this not be held in the middle of the day.

Visioning Exercise

- "Healthy, safe, well-maintained"
- Parks based in accessibility, green, and beautiful
- Park maintained and loved by the people who live near them
- "Community hubs and safe zones"
- "Clean, safe, and maintainable parks"
- "Every park is a jewel"
- "Healthy, safe, well-maintained parks with high level of community engagement"
- "Ecological wonderlands with diverse species and people"
- Place where people can kick back, connect with each other and with nature"

2.3 Cultural Preservation and the Arts

Stakeholders Represented: Cultural Affairs Commission, Oakland Art Murmur, Oakland Heritage Alliance Project, Kenneth Raymond Foundation, Oakland Public Art, City of Oakland Cultural Affairs Division

SUMMARY

A common issue identified by cultural preservation and arts groups was a need for galleries, artist workspaces (not just small businesses), and cultural venues that make art freely accessible to the public. Several groups noted how artists are being displaced because of development or raising rents, and a few participants suggested implementing cultural arts-districts to help establish a more cohesive cultural identity and help preserve artistic spaces in Oakland. However, other participants were less enthusiastic about this idea due to the difficulty of representing many diverse arts and cultural communities within one geographic area, and the risk of unequitable distribution of resources. A few groups suggested that equitable development of parks space could help facilitate more equitable participation in cultural events and affairs.

Arts and Culture groups identified a need for more visual art that reflects community values. Jazz and art are anchor institutions for Black arts district, and outside institutions should present history of jazz and make jazz relevant for new generations. Culture is something that is created by resilient communities, and is the product of a healthy city. Participant mentioned that “developers would be amenable to supporting cultural uses if there was a more concrete strategy in place, stating that “they want to sell vibrancy of location to their tenants.”

Participants mentioned that over time the arts are repeatedly de-prioritized and that there needs to be a way for cities to prioritize cultural resources. As one participant noted “the wealth of the city includes its culture.” Several participants noted the importance of block parties and festivals in providing cultural resources and activities to communities. It was also noted that these events “help create the idea of destination and support existing commercial/retail spaces.”

Participants repeatedly suggested utilizing vacant or underutilized spaces for community centers or cultural and arts purposes, suggested that planning team look to C-rated buildings as potential sites for community centers. Participants noted the need for more streamlined processes for determining funding sources, as well as how to engage and connect with communities. Participant noted that the “specific stress is over capital improvements” which results in difficulty funding parks and cultural centers. The participant suggested that there needs to be policy changes that address this.

DISCUSSION NOTES:

MAY 12, 2022, 3:00 PM – 4:30 PM

Held via Zoom

Key Issues and Current Needs

- Cultural districts and creative place keeping- in terms of cultural preservation, we must realize what are impacts of displacement erosion of cultural history. Already a lack of representation in visual landscape. A mural across street from Malonga Center was covered up by development, then a replacement mural at Greenlining building was created that speaks to activism and art communities, and how they intersect.

- There is a need for more visual art that reflects community values. Preserving and expanding that will improve it. Jazz and art-anchor institution for Black arts district, and outside institutions should present history of jazz and make jazz relevant for new gen. If we lose jazz, then there's whole history of jazz in Oakland that will be lost to future generations. Culture is something that is created by resilient communities, and product of a healthy city.
- There is a need for galleries and artist workspaces- not just small businesses, but cultural venues that make art accessible for free. Participant noted how people are being displaced from locations because of development or raising rents. Participant spoke about existing spaces that could be utilized for cultural orgs like libraries or parks.
- Participants mentioned that school closures are damaging in terms of education and because they remove access to parks and other cultural resources.
- One participant mentioned that "Block parties and neighborhood festivals help create the idea of destination and support existing commercial/retail spaces. The participant identified the Art Murmur as a great example of this sort of programming.
- Participant described the central role of jazz as part of the cultural identity of Oakland.
- One participant mentioned cultural arts districts, a program being piloted in Emeryville. Participant requested long-term art spaces. Galleries are a great way to provide free and public access to art spaces, and stated that efforts should be made to preserve those spaces and ensure they are financially accessible to tenants.
- Participant noted that people come to Oakland for jobs because it's cheaper than SF, but as people come, they "morph what the city is and what it becomes". The participant mentioned the importance of managing that growth and change to mitigate displacement.
- Participant wanted to follow-up regarding the topic of art-district, and suggested looking into the topic and potential funding more deeply. They also identified Oakland's diversity of artistic communities spread across a number of geographic areas and the difficulty of establishing one single arts district
- One participant questioned whether vacant ground-floor retail space could be reserved for "cultural-easements" and offered the example of the empty retail space of Kaiser Permanente, directly off Broadway.
- Another participant emphasized the importance of provisioning in the General Plan to utilize vacant space as an option for long-term arts & cultural spaces. This participant notes the interaction between commercial and cultural infrastructure.
- Equitable Development of parks space could help facilitate more equitable participation in cultural events and affairs. The participant wanted to offer caution about specifically dedicated cultural districts, because it can create cultural enclaves that don't effectively distribute equity.
- One participant mentioned that many new residents are moving in but have limited access to cultural facilities, and suggested increasing the number of libraries, and noted their role as offering cultural hubs to neighborhoods beyond just downtown. Offered examples of story-sharing programs, programs in Demark helping people to meet people and share storied about history. This participant suggested enhancing existing cultural resources.
- One participant mentioned that "developers would be amenable to supporting cultural uses if there was a more concrete strategy in place, stating that "they want to sell vibrancy of location to their tenants."
- "Culture is a movement! but its history informs and educates when it is cultivated and curated from a community-supportive standpoint."

Visioning Exercise

- “Community that sees itself reflected and honored in place”
- “Clear ways to empower individuals to care”
- “Historic buildings welcoming art-creators at no cost”
- “Financial supports so that libraries can be community and cultural centers”
- “A community center in every neighborhood”
- “Tools to support collaboration between city, public, and private entities”
- “Enabling epistemic justice in Oakland”
- “Understanding scales of neighborhoods”
- “Artists districts start where housing and studios are cheap, and they don’t need
- “Preservation, stabilization, and activation; providing staff with resources to connect with the community.”
- “Value cultural and historic preservation in the arts as much as or more than business profit.”
- “Neighborhood involvement with historic and cultural centers”
- “Mutually respecting what came before and is now”

Opportunities Moving Forward

- Participant mentioned that over time the arts are repeatedly de-prioritized and that there needs to be a way for cities to prioritize cultural resources. As another participant noted “the wealth of the city includes its culture.”
- Community centers need to be in every neighborhood, and recently there was a building that could have become a community center was demolished. The participant suggested looking neighborhood by neighborhood to find potential buildings for locations for cultural centers, and proposed making develops pay to support these projects.
- Another participant proposed using vacant, city owned landmark buildings spread out throughout the city that are constantly being vandalized and are uncared for. Participant questioned why these unused spaces could not be used more effectively.
- The participant mentioned their concern about how boundaries in communities are being drawn and said that it made it difficult for residents to determine how their communities are connected. “In order for something like this to fit, the scale is important.”
- One participant commented: "How do you define the appropriate scale for investment in neighborhoods as a unit for measuring equity? (from Belonging in Oakland)"
- One participant proposed “belonging improvement districts” as an idea, and questioned how policy could support local POC business and how to ensure equity and help address historic divestment and redlining. The participant also suggested that rather than taking the approach of “build it and people will come”, planning team should consider identifying where people are already going and focus on those areas.

- Participant mentioned the need for more streamlined processes for determining funding sources, as well as how to engage and connect with communities.
- Another participant noticed the importance of getting culture-focused policy codified in order to hold the city accountable in terms of how it directs energy and resources.

Incorporating Ideas into Policy

- Participant described a 4-part document that begins with 1. Lofty goals and vision 2. Pictorial element that visualizes goals 3. Matrix of policy that directs action 4. What happens if the actions are not taken, penalties, and what are ways to hold city accountable?
- City of Oakland mentioned that many of the things discussed in meeting could be incorporated into OSCAR planning documentation and policy as well, in addition to the Downtown Oakland Specific Plan
- Cultural Affairs Commission participant mentioned that “It would have been great to have Indigenous voices in this group...thinking about historic/cultural preservation.”
- Participant mentioned that culture needs to “be put on equal footing with housing, not an either-or”.
- Participant suggested that planning team look at C-rated buildings as potential sites for community centers.
- Participant noted that the “specific stress is over capital improvements” which results in difficulty funding parks and cultural centers. The participant suggested that there needs to be policy changes that address this.

2.4 Transportation

Stakeholders Represented: Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART), VeoRide, ParkStash, Oakland Department of Transportation (OakDOT), Walk Oakland/Bike Oakland, AC Transit

MAY 13, 2022, 10:00 AM – 11:30 PM

Key Issues and Current Needs

- Work patterns have changed because of the pandemic. Bus services have recovered more quickly serving essential workers, and this AC Transit representative noted that transit needs should be more focused on a broader variety of types of trips. AC Transit plans to broadly restructure lines and maps after doing research about transit needs and getting community feedback. AC transit is hoping for grants to study transit in East Oakland.
- Major challenge of route restructuring is determining how to allocate funding and distribute line service. AC transit takes equity and density of riders into account when planning routes. This participant noted that as agencies restructure routes, the national trend has been to focus on reinforcing and improving the strong and favored services the most.
- BART:
 - Replacement parking is the biggest challenge for BART as they try to free up land for transit-oriented development (TOD). BART only has enough funding to function through 2026, and ridership still hovering around 30%. There are extensive concerns around safety and security

and homelessness. Policing isn't necessarily the most effective solution to improving safety; need ambassadors and other equitable solutions.

- BART has lost a significant number of staff. Transit operators have lost bus drivers, train operators, Measure RR passed to help address state of good repairs, which helped to improve track repairs and maintain service. TOD workplan is a priority for BART.
- The participant described a vision for more people returning to the office and is trying to advance core capacity: adding cars, expanding maintenance warehouses. The participant stated that "the single biggest thing private employers can offer to transit is asking private employers to come back to the office."
- BART is also working on a needs-based, low-cost fare program for low-income riders. 70 percent of passengers are low-income. BART is much different from other transit agencies; more conservative, and much bigger portion of funding comes from farebox (74 percent).
- SPUR:
 - Participant noted that Bay Area has one of the world's highest GDPs but a lackluster transit system; "transit is like the circulation system of the body."
 - Participant mentioned the "need to add 100,000s of people to Oakland," and that all the problems we have are directly related to transportation. Participant urged the city to make downtown Oakland into a serious hub that provides jobs and housing.
 - Bus rapid transit should go on highways, and transit stops should be located at major transit intersection; Rockridge is a good example because the station is located directly under the freeway.

Micromobility

- Micromobility can be complimentary to transit, offering a mobility solution in transit deserts, where buses/BART aren't necessarily available or running.
- UBER:
 - Participant noted that during COVID ridership dropped off for everyone, but not as much at Uber for low-income riders (which is an equity issue). Uber can't be a leader in solutions, but hoping to offer support. For example, Uber has offered services for restaurant workers in Dallas for late night trips when
 - San Diego First mile-last mile program: San Diego is subsidizing fare for first mile last mile trips to downtown San Diego. Program has been well-received. Proposed that Uber could be a partner in helping get to transit, and marketing and informing people about innovative ways to use the service. Participant mentioned that Uber can also offer Paratransit services much more cheaply than other companies.
- ParkStash:
 - Goal is not to create more parking, but to utilize existing unused spaces and also help businesses monetize the spaces. Has been speaking to CEO's about moving back to office, and the key is to make it more enticing to consumers. Transit trips need to be more appealing and consumer behavior needs to change.
- Walk/Bike Oakland:
 - People in the pandemic seem to be rediscovering the spaces immediately around them. Participant noted the opportunity in identifying spaces traditionally used for

automobiles/transit (streets) and using them in alternative ways. Participant has never seen as many people in public parks and spaces as she is now. Participant mentioned that we should prioritize getting people to parks without cars.

Opportunities Moving Forward

- “Biking is forever.” One participant described how e-bikes have transformed people’s relationships to travel and mobility. A three mile radius of transit stations must be transit/pedestrian/bike friendly. Population growth should not accompany roadway growth, and more people on transit can free up space for bus lanes. Areas around essential services should be prioritized: i.e., food, grocery, restaurants, commercial corridors.
- SPUR
 - The participant explained that in 1970’s Copenhagen had a gas crisis, but before that people were moving to suburbs and buying cars. Eventually the government forbid driving on Sundays, which catalyzed bike riding and the revitalization of the city. Ideally the General plan would offer the same shock.
- OakDOT:
 - “Anything is possible.” OakDOT is trying to be creative and responsive to community needs. Emphasized opportunity to grow in partnership with Union Pacific because the railroad cuts off the city. OakDOT representative doesn’t know what’s that process look like, but appreciates the conversations being had and big picture ideas proposed.
 - “Let’s think about how the general plan is used and making sure there are robust policies and actions in place to justify projects as they occur.”

Visioning Exercise

- Auto use is diminished, space for parking is diminished
- Let’s use the Oakland general plan to knit together and transform the Bay Area to make the Bay Area accessible to everyone
- Universal basic mobility benefits for people
- “Walkable Bikeable Slow streets with fast, reliable transit, let’s encourage people to get out into their communities.”
- “All inclusive, accounts for diverse opinions, and incorporates technological innovation.”

2.5 Small Businesses

Stakeholders Represented: Alliance for Community Development, African American Chamber of Commerce, Business Development Division Economic and Workforce Development, Bay Area Housing Advocacy Coalition, Wachira Wines

SUMMARY OF MEETING NOTES:

Small businesses groups noted that ground floor retail spaces in Oakland are often too large for small-business needs. It was suggested that the plan prioritize a greater diversity in sizes and types of spaces available for commercial use. Participants also noted the need to improve the business licensing process with the city. Strategies discussed included setting up outreach in a greater variety of locations including

libraries and making it easier for small businesses to connect with the city. In Oakland, businesses often operate informally and do not register with the city due to permitting barriers and a lack of clarity about the process.

Another key concern expressed was the need to address vacant commercial space concerns in Oakland. Some solutions proposed included vacant space fines, but participants were not confident in the efficacy of fines as a strategy to reduce vacancies, and alternatively proposed working directly with landlords to reach agreeable outcomes.

Several groups discussed the uneven geographic distribution of services for businesses in Oakland. Many businesses are unable to take advantage of flex streets, parklets, and other programs due to location-related challenges, the need to prioritize business zoning along transit-corridors. Participants noted that East Oakland in particular struggles with blight and perception of crime. Many participants suggested an increased focus on supporting businesses in East Oakland given the acute economic challenges caused by COVID and larger economic trends. An important task moving forward is to establish better communication with landlords. Communicating with landlords is often one of the biggest barriers to improvements in economic diversity and equity. Participants described landlords' inflexible behavior and how this has prevented equitable solutions to commercial leasing issues.

Moving forward it will be important to consider ways to uplift a small but important entrepreneurial sector in Oakland. Participants suggested devising ways to support smaller, informal businesses more effectively in Oakland. Solutions proposed included: allowing businesses to share resources and pool rents, creating spaces to reflect these community-based and collective business solutions (food halls, pop-up, informal economic strategies). Participant suggested that the city should consider ways to help these businesses formalize more effectively.

DISCUSSION NOTES:

MAY 16, 2022, 10:00 PM – 11:30 PM

Held via Zoom

Key Issues

- Alliance for Community Development
 - Noted a need for smaller floorplans for ground floor retail. Participant noted that brick and mortar spaces are too big for small businesses. Participant hopes to prioritize retail development along transit corridors, in addition to more broad interest in housing affordability and addressing displacement.
 - Participant advocated for first year free business licenses, because it can be really challenging to get people registered in business directory, especially now that there are so many vacant businesses. Last year this participant was able to work with Greenling institute for data-sharing opportunities with the city, which was helpful.
 - Participant also noted that going out to businesses in different local library drop-in spaces was more convenient for businesses than the downtown option was. Participant recommended prioritization of business development around slow streets and transit corridors for multiple lines of transit access. Participant mentioned that “Place-based initiatives don’t reflect gentrification and displacement patterns, and need programs that more accurately reflect where people live and work.”

- African American Chamber of Commerce:
 - Need better funding for entertainment commission, which has been hard-hit by COVID and even before that, gentrification.
 - One participant noted the need to connect more effectively with businesses in the city, particularly in East Oakland. Additionally, this participant commented on the need for support in overcoming various barriers to business development (i.e., finance, security, crime, lack of affordable commercial space, administrative issues.)
- Another participant noted the need for a greater diversity in types of commercial spaces to accommodate advanced manufacturing needs.
- Participant noted that a consistent comment regarding Clean Green Safe Agenda is that the ability to establish flex streets varies greatly depending on location. It was much easier for some businesses to set up parklets, while others had more limited access to parklets, garbage removal, and had great issues with safety and security.
- Participant noted that there is a great community of business owners in Oakland, and the public transit is very helpful for getting around. Community has endured the pandemic, and they want to be active and supportive in the business community. Participant noticed the importance of supporting the small businesses that support the city.
- Continued concerns for businesses in far East Oakland perceived to be neglected. The blight and perception of crime in these areas makes it difficult for small businesses to be successful.
- The General Plan should lift up small businesses all around Oakland, and needs to offer service out to people in more Industrial corridors where businesses are struggling and have been struggling since before the pandemic.
- There is an effort to reorganize inter-departmental communication and coordination but that there is a lack of coherent strategy with respect to addressing community problems. It's difficult to make change without direction from city council, and because of lack of resources and funding. This participant mentioned a security camera program in East Oakland. It was also noted that there are many commercial space vacancies.
- City of Oakland staff participant mentioned city of Oakland staffing issues, which leads to limited capacity to deal with issues. Participant noted that there is a need to be more innovative and efficient when dealing with issues.

Strategies to Uplift and Amplify Economic Diversity and Equity

- Participant noted the importance of focusing on Deep East Oakland and building capacity within the community to address issues. There are opportunities to leverage additional funding, but staffing shortages limits the extent to which city staff can seek new funding. One strategy suggested was to establish rolling deadline criteria versus programs that are first-come-first serve.
- Participant noted an example of a landlord that recently raised rents and forcibly closed commercial spaces, resulting in many small businesses having to leave and find new commercial space. One of the biggest challenges is communicating with property owners, and it is difficult to bring property owners to the table. Landlords seem to prefer to move people out of spaces rather than reach an agreeable solution.
- Landlords are not flexible, and that many landlords doubled leases during pandemic. There are many properties just sitting open. Participant questioned if there was a way for the city itself to help facilitate

easier access to affordable commercial space leases, rather than relying on external agencies and non-profits.

- Participant noted that the City of Oakland does not own many commercial retail properties, but has been trying to reach out to large property owners to identify the future intentions of the property owners.
- Participant mentioned a program the city is trying to reorganize to offer business owners funding to remodel and rehabilitate existing commercial spaces. Another participant mentioned that there is a lot of opposition to imposing vacant space limitations.
- Participant noted that the City of Oakland has a vacant property tax that has received a fair amount of pushback. Participant described the need for making the tax more equitable and targeted, rather than a flat tax. There is interest in certain areas for businesses improvement districts where people have access to funding to improve the corridor, but this would require business and property owners to tax themselves.
- Participant mentioned that, particularly in low-income areas, there are large property owners who don't seem to care about vacancy fines. It could be more productive to work directly with property owners to make properties leasable rather than just fining the properties.
- A participant noted that the vacant property tax is much less for businesses than it is for individuals, and that it didn't really work in San Francisco when the city implemented vacant property tax.
- Participant noted that vacancy taxes and fines shouldn't be one-size-fits-all. There are many reasons why property owners allow different properties to sit vacant.
- One participant noted that the issues discussed are all the same problems from ten years ago. Participant wondered what could make a difference in the future, and if the problems will remain for 20 years.

Opportunities Moving Forward

- Participant mentioned that the data suggest there is a small entrepreneurship space, but there are a few important and "grounded" smaller business owner. It could be important to think about building sizing to address these smaller business needs, and create diverse types of incubators. One potential solution can be for businesses to share resources and pool rents, and buildings need to reflect these community-based and collective business solutions (food halls, pop-up, informal economic strategies).
- Participant noted that many businesses operate in informal economics, and the city should consider ways to help these businesses formalize more effectively. This could include identifying where pop-ups are and improving word-of-mouth and foot-traffic.
- City of Oakland participant mentioned that there are some innovative ideas relating to permitting responsibilities and other economic strategies.
- Participant noted that it can be difficult for new-business owners to know how to navigate permitting processes in the beginning.
- Participant focused on East Oakland noted a recent grant meant to support communities in East Oakland isn't enough, and there should be more interest in securing additional funds to support the community and allow focus on not losing people from the community due to high rents and other challenges.

Improving outreach to small businesses

- City of Oakland, Business Development Division Economic and Workforce Development.

- Need more small business participation, better outreach to small businesses. For example, this meeting is happening at the times when small businesses are operating.
- One participant asked if it would be possible to partner with organization within their network.
- Another participant from the African America Chamber of Commerce mentioned interest in helping coordinate community outreach.
- Marsha Murrington mentioned that she could act as point person for East Oakland outreach.

Visioning Exercise

- “Build up business community in Deep-East-Oakland”
- “Thriving business Community”
- “Space available for all businesses that need it within the city”
- “Appreciate all the economic activity in Oakland and also upload and assist it”
- “Dignity feels good to me”
- “Need new and innovative policy”

2.6 Medical Services and Public Health

Stakeholders: Alameda County Public Health Department, West Oakland Health Center/Council (WOH), City of Oakland Economic and Business Development Department, Communities for a Better Environment (CBE), Neighborhood

DISCUSSION NOTES:

May 19, 2022, 1:00 PM – 2:30 PM

Held via Zoom

Key Issues and Current Needs

- Participant from WOH mentioned that roots and partnerships are some of their most important assets. Also mentioned that leadership transitions have allowed some of those partnerships to become lost. WHO has found a lot of benefit in re-establishing their connections with community-based organizations, so they can expand the range of services they are able to provide and recommend to their patients.
- Better communication with CBOs and better coordination in making sure CBOs are offering needed services and not all providing the same overlapping services.
- Participant from CBE mentioned that it is important to place health resources in communities are the most effective is key, and helping communities access resources that are affordable to them and even freely given are important assets to support.
- WHO participant mentioned that to effectively support communities it is important to speak directly to them. Three of the top issues that were raised were housing, fresh food, and mental health.
- Neighborhood participant mentioned that vacant lots are important assets to utilize, and subverting zoning restrictions has been an effectively strategy to establish affordable housing in a variety of

contexts (cabin communities, trailers, tiny homes etc.) He found that offering low cost-resources particularly to address addiction are important.

- Participant found that grassroots and mutual-aid focused community-based organizations have been important assets. Participant noted that these groups have been key to building authentic and trusting relationships with local communities.
- Participant mentioned that targeting scarce resources with a racial equity lens has been an important asset to help support the most marginalized communities, particularly in the context of COVID-19.
- Participant noted the food insecurity, housing, utilities, mental health, and violence/safety are at the top of mind for folks when thinking about.
- Participant mentioned the importance of community-outreach directly to groups like schools and other populations such as the unhoused in Oakland. Access to broadband and addressing the digital divide is an important tool for public health, and anything the general plan could do to address disparities in access to WIFI would be helpful.
- Participants note a lack of clarity about the purpose and function of the general plan.
- Participant described need for new sewer lines, and suggested trailer-park style blackwater dumping sites and questioned if that would be a possibility. Participant also noted need for more informal access to electricity (which connects to flush toilets).
- Density restrictions are a roadblock to tiny homes and tiny home villages; according to density restrictions only a few homes are allowed on a massive lot, while many more homes can fit.
- Participant mentioned that in addition to the need for new affordable housing, it's also important to maintain the quality of existing and older housing stock. This is important to prevent lead-contamination, which children are particularly vulnerable to.
- Participant who lives in an Industrial Neighborhood in Deep East Oakland described how the assets in her neighborhood are constantly threatened. Participant described a community farm, Planting Justice, in her neighborhood that has been an important asset, but also noted that there are not many assets in East Oakland because of a history of divestment and racial inequality.
- Participant mentioned a tremendous need for more healthcare workers and noted that there are growing gaps in healthcare staffing. Participant suggested that partnerships with Oakland residents find jobs in the healthcare sector. This would allow community members to get good jobs and build wealth. Employing local community members in healthcare also helps build community trust and relationships.
- Participant mentioned a healthcare services workforce pipeline that engages youth of color and trains them in entry level positions called the EMS Core. Community Health centers train inexperienced staff, but then larger hospitals hire staff once they get trained.
- Other counties can pay medical assistants with a much higher salary, which makes it difficult to retain trained and experienced staff. Another participant mentioned a need for better funding to address wage competition.
- Illegal dumping abandoned cars are an issue for East Oakland sites, as well as lack of parking for staff and patients. Participant mentioned that illegal dumping has resulted in unsafe and unsanitary conditions, in certain cases where children are regularly present.
- Support from the city monitoring and managing homelessness and getting people housing would be helpful. This participant also mentioned that reckless driving has caused safety issues for people crossing the road, and people have been using the bus rapid transit lanes for unsafe and reckless driving.

- One participant and resident of East Oakland noted the apparent disparity between the ability of different areas of Oakland to control Oakland. Another participant mentioned that East Oakland is regularly deprived of services.
- Participant mentioned its extremely difficult and expensive to dispose of bulky items; this is one reason why illegal dumping is tenacious. People don't have a low-cost way of getting rid of things and that's why the illegal dumping problem has proliferated.
- Participant described the experience of not being able to see results from policy changes and getting agencies to not just keep passing the bill off to other agencies. Asking for what problems people are facing isn't helpful unless there is an action items that results from the discussion.

Community Engagement

- CBE suggested that in response to COVID, utilizing outdoor space for meetings and other outreach, but also noted that keeping a hybrid model is a more inclusive model for conducting outreach. Other strategies for more effective community outreach include having longer public comment windows, more interactive methods of planning participation. "Civic engagement is a piece of public health."
- Going into neighborhoods and meeting people where they are gathering is the best way to engage people and begin to facilitate dialogue. People are no longer going to come to you because there isn't a sentiment that anything will be done.
- One participant mentioned that there are many existing meetings and events going are that are happening, and people are trying to take things into their own hands. Going where people are is how to get the word out and how to get people engage.
- Participant mentioned importance of "compensating people for their time and input; also using the input rather than checking off a box to say you engaged the community but did the business-as-usual strategy." Having a response timeline and sticking to the response timeline is an important tool for community engagement, as well as creating a reasonable timeline that prioritizes early community engagement rather than rushing the process. Participant noted that often community engagement is done last or not done in such a way that doesn't incorporate feedback.
- Participant mentioned that it's important to avoid being oppositional, and make sure there are clear follow-up measures taken to show "It's not just listening, it's not just taking, it's important to actually circle back and show how policy is going to change"

Visioning

- Free Housing for Every Person without a home.
- Proportional benefits for those who have been disproportionately impacted
- Good health and good sleep for everyone

2.7 Life Sciences and Commercial Development

Stakeholders Represented: TMG partners Real Estate Development, Lowe, Gensler, Chromata Retail, Brookfield Properties, Steel Wave, The Swig Company, CBRE, Mettler Toledo Manufacturing, Cushman-Wakefield (10)

SUMMARY OF MEETING NOTES:

Office leasing in Oakland has been stagnant for the past two years, and vacancy rates are sitting at 24 percent. Rents achievable are not currently justifying new construction. While rents have not gone down, some participants noted they don't suspect that rents will increase much anytime soon. Several participants mentioned Oakland's business appeal derived from its lower costs than San Francisco, good transit, and diverse neighborhoods. Participants suggested that keeping costs low and not matching San Francisco's approach would be key to success. Oakland is challenged by crime, which makes it difficult to attract businesses. A lack of large office spaces has been a barrier to attracting bigger companies to lease space in Oakland. It is not common for national retail chains to rent in Oakland, so this leaves mostly smaller businesses. In spite of the pandemic-influenced economic downturn, a developer mentioned that the retail market has been steady in Oakland, particularly the food and beverage industry, while fitness and boutiques have suffered.

Life Sciences development is booming in the bay, particularly in a few regional hubs (Emeryville, South San Francisco, San Jose). Oakland could follow suit but there needs to be suitable space and would need to change zoning. Other cities also have faster permit processing times; because Oakland takes much longer to get anything approved it is less attractive to developers. Additionally, parking requirements can get expensive and restrictive in cities that have high requirements. Participants discussed the possibility of developing a life sciences cluster in Oakland and considered that that it could be an effective way to bring life sciences industry to Oakland.

Several participants identified that Oakland might be a better candidate for a more manufacturing focused life sciences industry, which would create jobs for residents that don't require PhDs and master's degrees. Many participants were optimistic that Oakland could introduce and support life sciences industry if it could overcome zoning issues, identify areas with enough space, and speed up plan review process. Some participants expressed concern regarding perception issues that could disincentivize employers from locating business/staff in Oakland, but other participants believed that perception issues were not as negative as others indicated.

Participants mentioned that zoning in Oakland is often unclear and ambiguous, and that clarity in zoning regarding research and development would be helpful. There was some discussion about vertical, tower-style development or retrofit as means of providing space for life sciences uses. While one participant thought this type of development downtown could be incentivized, many participants were skeptical that downtown high-rise buildings could be transformed in a cost-effective way.

DISCUSSION NOTES:

May 19, 2022, 10:00 PM – 11:30 PM

Held via Zoom

Key Issues and Current Needs

- Office. Leasing in Oakland has been stagnant for the past two years, and vacancy sitting at 24 percent, and rents don't justify new construction. Rents haven't gone down, but doesn't suspect that rents will increase much anytime soon. Twitter signed a lease, PG&E signed a lease, Oakland seems to be doing a little better than San Francisco.
- One participant mentioned that her firm was more attracted to Oakland because of the "intrinsic", i.e., affordable housing, good transit, diverse neighborhoods, etc. San Francisco is now the most expensive city to do business in the country and sees a major falloff while Oakland will be the beneficiary of that. Suggests that Oakland shouldn't follow in San Francisco's footsteps in terms of increasing costs of doing business. Unclear whether employers will send employees back to the office, thinks it might hover around two days a week.
- One participant mentioned that the housing element shouldn't miss the opportunity to grow Oakland based jobs and local contracting networks. It's not always obvious how to contract local employees, and there should be a provision in the pipeline to foster a better connection with small BIPOC businesses.
 - This participant also mentioned that LA has used the ADU boom as an opportunity to help bolster the businesses of local small contracting businesses.
- The retail market has been steady throughout the pandemic. Food and beverage is number one, not seeing retail boutiques and fitness has "really taken a beating." Even when a restaurant closes, there's another one ready to take the space. Attributes that to Oakland's "vibe", cheaper rents, and good landlords.
- Downtown Oakland is challenged by crime, makes it difficult to attract businesses. Retail is struggling in CBD- "nowhere to get lunch for instance."
- One of the challenges for Oakland's business district is lack of office space; one participant has lost deals because there isn't enough space to accommodate businesses or provide financial incentive.
- A lot of the retail that's closed is struggling to become anything other a cannabis dispensary, and this participant mentioned the concern about a downward spiral.
- Participant mentioned that it's not common for national retail chains to rent space in Oakland, and that most of the retail space that's coming in are local chains and small businesses.
- One Life Sciences developer works mostly with properties that are pre-leased, and many projects are adaptive re-use. Vacancy is down to around 3 percent, and rents went from \$5 sf to \$7 sf because of lack of space. Emeryville has grown into a great life-sciences cluster is because of its proximity to Cal and business-friendly nature.

Opportunities Moving Forward

- Neighborhoods in West-Berkeley and many traditionally industrial neighborhoods are being redeveloped. Alameda is also starting to become more attractive to life sciences. If Oakland wanted to do a big push to life sciences, it could be successful, but it's a matter of zoning and getting large spaces, which have been important to the success of other cities. South San Francisco is great to work with because of proximity to UCSF, having large sites, being close to Genentech.
- Processing time should be less for adaptive reuse projects conforming to existing zoning; area along train tracks is largely a life science zone already. Emeryville got the project approved in under six months.

- Parking demand for life science is 2.0 per 1,000. Certain cities have much higher parking ratios, which makes it harder because then life sciences must build more parking than they need. Parking is very costly. Structured aboveground parking costs about \$45,000 per stall, and underground parking \$100,000 per stall. It's tough to build below 1.5 ratio, but many of the cities around the peninsula are reckoning with this.
- Participant mentioned that there seems to be two kinds of life sciences spaces: One is the innovative, high-tech, high-talent spaces, which were currently perceived to be a stretch for Oakland. The participant mentioned that it seems unlikely that these businesses would choose to locate campus-like work environments in Oakland. It could be possible for this to change, especially for the second type of life sciences, which are less high talent and more manufacturing focused, and could be beneficial for jobs that don't require PhDs and master's degrees.
- Participant mentioned that West Berkeley already had a Life Science presence and doesn't face the same perception issues. Establishing a life-sciences cluster would be necessary and would need to be geographically intentional.
- Participant mentioned that zoning in Oakland is unclear and ambiguous, and that clarity in zoning regarding research and development would be helpful. Vertical development is not as easily done with life science, but this participant mentioned trying to incentivize developing life science buildings downtown and accommodating the vertical scale. Mentioned that downtown office use offers benefits
- Immense backup in Oakland in plan review, which is not the issue in Berkeley and Emeryville.
- Participant mentioned some tenants are looking into changing office use from office to life sciences, and mentioned that it can be done and has been done in other parts of the country, and zoning would help enable this transition. Oakland is at the center of the bay and has access to important major transit hubs, and downtown Oakland could be attractive simply because the vacancy is so low for life sciences and that if you "build it they will come" for life sciences.
- Participant mentioned there first have to be clear zoning/development before life science tenants can move in. But participant suggested that life sciences will come because there isn't space anywhere else.
- One participant mentioned that high rise is really challenging to develop high rise life-sciences spaces, but that it doesn't seem financially feasible for downtown Oakland high-intensity building conversions. In Berkeley they are converting older industrial buildings that work well and participant thinks it would be better to focus on zoning industrial neighborhoods correctly.
- Participant mentioned that the best life science projects are 5-6 stories, and it doesn't take much to transition to existing industrial buildings.
- Vertical office buildings are difficult to convert to life sciences, vertical buildings have to be purpose built.
- In the next five or six-years, if everything in the pipeline gets built, it will double the supply. There is no downside to making it easier from a regulatory standpoint, and establishing a cluster.
- City of Oakland allows parallel entitlements, which has been helpful for development, which Berkeley isn't allowing.
- Multifamily housing has a negative value right now, so having parallel entitlements is important, for being able to follow the market. Another participant echoed this: "Entitlement flexibility extremely helpful per Manan's thoughts."
- Vertical office buildings are difficult to convert to life sciences, vertical buildings have to be purpose built.

- Oakland perception challenge; according to this participant, the perception seems to be the opposite from what has been said. People on the outside seem to think more fondly of Oakland than it seems, and many people seem to think more positively than even San Francisco right now.
- There is also an emerging big data "life science" type user that is more like a traditional tech user in its use of space. That could more easily go into a downtown Oakland environment, but they still want to be co-located with traditional life science clusters.
- Participant mentioned that a factor getting lost about clusters is that when you look at the industry as a whole, the East Bay is not heavy into R&D research. East Bay doesn't have the same scale as other regions for life sciences, and the demand outsizes the supply. The East Bay had 2.2 million sf additional SF added of life sciences during the pandemic.
- "The quality of life for people commuting on buses 2 hours each way is not working", and HR people for life sciences companies are struggling with retention. This participant noted that these conditions make vertical life sciences an attractive opportunity.
- One participant mentioned that it would be a great idea to get feedback from bigger users.
- Oakland has never really built space for life sciences. There are spaces in the Airport business park, and many other spaces that just need to be built. This participant mentioned that East Bay has better mass transit and that East Bay would be a better fit.
- Oakland hasn't evaluated industrial lands in the past 30 years and city of Oakland is trying to remedy this right now.

Visioning

- lower cost of business / construction
- investing in attracting a major life science user or educational institute in Oakland

2.8 Education

Stakeholders Represented: GO Public Schools, Oakland Reach, Mills College, Alameda County Healthcare Services Agency, City of Oakland, Department of Housing, Board of Education

May 18, 2022, 10:00 PM – 11:30 PM

Held via Zoom

DISCUSSION NOTES:

Key Issues and Current Needs

- Block-by-block approaches are relevant and needed given the speed and scale of gentrification in Oakland.
- Participant commented that housing is way too expensive for families, and described a survey that suggested the cost of housing is a factor making families want to leave Oakland. The participant also urged other members to direct more attention to unhoused families and students.
- One participant stated that 25 percent of families working with her organization have left for other cities like Tracy and Stockton. Participant described the lack of legitimate and timely support for

affordable housing for families, and feeling that city staff and planners are not effectively addressing the affordability issue.

- One participant noted the lack of educator and early-childhood educators in the discussion space and made a point of acknowledging recent OUSD closures.
- One participant questioned if there was data related to school closures and displacement. She mentioned data from her own organization that suggested many families affected by school closures have chosen other schools and Oakland “Parents who know they have choices and choose to travel to other parts of Oakland. Some families just can't.”
- Participant noted families are concerned about rising gas prices and inconsistent public transportation.
- Participant mentioned that questions of access and housing seem to be off the table until kids have access to good quality education.
- Low-income families are limited from building wealth because of income restrictions on affordable housing. The participant also mentioned that data might not necessarily support that families have been displaced by school closures
- One participant mentioned that Oakland’s open-choice housing allows families to choose schools near them, and that the School District is working directly with families to mitigate transportation barriers. Mentioned that housing isn’t necessarily a main issue that school district is focusing on, but that it is a factor. Oakland school district is interested in working with the city to understand how to use properties/sites for housing needs potentially.
- Participant described a cycle of gentrification and school closures; as places become more gentrified, they become more vulnerable to closures. Creating safe routes to schools is important if families and students are needing to go to schools that are further away. In some neighborhoods the numbers of school age children are dropping sharply, and even though new housing is being built there is no way of knowing whether families will grow anymore.
- Mills is dealing with many of the same issues, and is struggling to retain quality staff. People don’t necessarily want to live in Oakland because of safety concerns, affordability, and other issues that many other Oakland employers are dealing with. Mental health is at the top of the list, as well as transportation. This participant mentioned that Mills hasn’t effectively translated data and research regarding local housing and education issues in the past and hoped moving forward to be a better community partner.

School and Neighborhood Environments

- A participant mentioned that the California Air Resources Board (CARB) chose East Oakland as the next community emission reduction area. This participant wanted to know if there was going to be any more outreach regarding environmental issues.
- Two issues top of mind for East Oakland residents that the public health department identified are housing and shootings.
- Some key issues participants mentioned were traffic issues around schools, and providing sufficient affordable housing to prevent kids and families from being unhoused. Participant also identified traffic issues surrounding many of the schools in Oakland as a key problem. This participant commented that a lot of the new housing in Oakland is not family friendly, and this is preventing new families from being able to settle or stay.
- Participant mentioned that walking and travelling to school is not safe for many families who are having to travel farther and farther to access schools.

- Illegal dumping has been a big issue for many schools in East Oakland. Other schools have struggled with air contamination and groundwater contamination
- Green Schoolyard have been an initiative that Oakland School districts have been working on, and questioned if city could plant more trees around schools to provide a better and healthier environment.

Visioning exercise

- “Inspiring places to learn alongside safe and thriving communities.” A big issue is that the education system does not effectively integrate the multiple layers of effective schooling/childcare/housing
- “Healthy healing and whole schools for all youth and families.”
- “For the sake of communities, push away from input of schools as drivers of change and instead focus on outcomes and how families want to be and live.” Participant also described how “Families will thrive and choose the life pathway that will sustain their lives.” And questioned “How do we make that possible and support families and their needs, and not necessarily make schools the entire focus?”
- “Quality community-connected, sustainable schools for every child.”
- “Community if jointly held accountable for all students thriving.”
- “Sustainable community schools supporting and partnering with families for community success.”
- “Oakland has pioneered “community schools” concept, and has focused on offering innovative and supportive services to families”, and participant mentioned a desire to ensure that people think of schools as a central hub
- “Excellent lifetime learning with a safe and equitable foundation”

Opportunities Moving Forward

- Most participants agreed that there was a lack of clarity regarding the future, there’s been so much change that “nobody knows right now” due to large impacts from COVID and gentrification and displacement.
- Participant urged open-mindedness towards different educational models and thinking about ways to encourage people “to want to be a part of public schools and even more broadly the city and the community.”
- Participant described that schools have been experiencing an influx of students from Central America, and encouraged consideration of refugee crises occurring around the world and how they might impact enrollment.
- Participant mentioned that Oakland Equity Indicator report hasn’t been updated, which doesn’t reflect the changes occurring from the pandemic.
- “We haven’t designed education systems around how students learn.”
- One participant noted that there is something to be said about physical facilities, and how they can serve students in many ways (auditoriums, temporary vaccine sites, Wi-Fi, etc.) Need the built environment to serve children in families.