



City of Oakland: EJ Focus Group Discussion #1

July 7, 2022 3:00 PM – 4:30 PM

Held via Zoom

PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS:

- West Oakland Environmental Indicators Project
- Oakland Parks & Recreation Foundation
- Greenlining Institute
- Asian Health Services
- Oakland Public Works Department, Environmental Services Division
- "Better Neighborhoods, Same Neighbors" Partners
- Mycelium Youth Network
- East Oakland Boxing Association
- Acta Non Verba: Youth Urban Farm Project
- California Air Resources Board
- Black Cultural Zone
- Greenbelt Alliance
- Communities for a Better Environment
- Save The Bay
- Roots Community Health Center
- RBA Creative / Consultant to the West Oakland AB617 process (West Oakland Community Action Plan)
- BAM Consulting / Consultant to the West Oakland AB617 process (West Oakland Community Action Plan)
- Oakland Department of Transportation
- Bay Area Air Quality District
- Oakland Climate Action Coalition.
- San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission (BCDC)

SUMMARY OF NOTES:

The structure of the discussion began with an initial presentation and short group discussion to clarify questions and provide general comments regarding environmental justice in the safety element. The group was then divided into four breakout rooms, where planning staff and consultants facilitated smaller group discussions.

During the initial discussion, participants questioned the necessity of the initial presentation given their position as experts and requested access to the slide deck in advance of the meeting. Participants noted the absence of West and East Oakland CERP (AB 617) from the list of plans, and called for a separation of the language used to describe Black Americans, African Americans, and Black people. Another participant



commented on the need for firsthand testimony in the General Plan Update (GPU) illustrating how Oakland residents have been harmed by interpersonal, systemic, and institutional racism. Participants requested information for participation in future EJ and Safety discussions.

In Group 1, participants focused on topics related to **building community ownership, illegal dumping** as a major concern, **participatory budgeting**, and the **housing crisis** in Oakland. Participants in this discussion spoke about the need to address equity at a community level, and how building community ownership now can create resilience for future concerns. Participants were concerned about the city's ability to address known environmental concerns in a timely and effective manner. Participants were keen to explore solutions to longstanding issues, i.e. lack of proper building ventilation or neighborhood pollution issues, and proposed **neighborhood councils with participatory budgeting** of public funds provided by the city to leverage more equitable development.

Key topics identified by Group 2 included the important of taking **enforcement actions** (such as a "**Polluter Tax**"), and community knowledge of **longstanding geographic disparities and key issues**. Participants identified that EJ topics (such as incompatible land uses, poor air quality, pollution and contamination, displacement, illegal dumping, and others) as well as solutions have already been identified by community leaders in West and East Oakland. Group 2 identified the need for more collaborative partnerships between orgs doing EJ work and the city, and proposed **green zones, development that benefits communities most impacted by environmental injustices** (for example, by creating quality jobs), **training staff**, funding **community land stewardship projects** and **green infrastructure**.

Among the topics discussed in Group 3 were **climate adaptation, resilience through green infrastructure** as a solution to climate vulnerability. Participants urged moving future development away from hazard zones and discussed an array of tools to build community resilience such as public facilities and resilience hubs as refuge from climate hazards. A participant from the Oakland Climate Action Coalition urged that the "General Plan needs to be less about informing" and more focused on forming "**active partnership with community orgs** and residents from the beginning."

Group 4 discussed the disproportionately concentrated array of **environmental concerns in East Oakland**, including air-quality, sea-level rise and its effects on frontline communities along shoreline, flooding of groundwater sites. To address these issues, participants identified solutions such as more **collaborative stewardship in Oakland, paying community groups** to get the word out, and creating new ways to collect feedback such as an **interactive mapping** tool for folks to map issues in their communities. To address **toxic contamination and flood risk**, group 4 offered Oakland's GI plan to identify high-value solutions that address multiple issues.



SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION FACILITATOR #1 NOTES

Participant 1: The Greenlining Institute

- Name and lay groundwork for how city and communities will work together on these issues.
- **Building networks between residents**, address equity at a community level.
- Building community ownership to respond to issues now can lend resilience to future concerns.

Participant 2: Roots Community Health Center

- Involved in 40x40 initiative
- **Illegal dumping** is a huge issue
- Feeling that the same city and county who perpetuated the issue is now asking for input—disconnect, mistrust.
- Has the **City been working with communities** to address these issues?
 - Given that air pollution and other issues have been identified for years, why haven't we done anything about it? Who's putting up roadblocks to stop us from doing the work? **Identify barriers** that are stopping equitable change from happening
- Countering new resistance to environmental protections because of the recent EPA Supreme Court Ruling?
- **Adequate ventilation** in buildings

Participant 3: Communities for a Better Environment

- Interested in how environmental justice policies would apply to East Oakland and the greater Bay Area.

Participant 4: Communities for a Better Environment

- Need for a strategy-first approach: communities have already identified what priority pollutants are, for example, and where it is occurring. When an issue is identified, how does the City follow up on that?
- Important that **when a pollution issue is identified, actions are being taken to address it.**
- (East Oakland) Many people hit by cars—connect this issue to transportation, climate change.

Participant 5: City of Oakland (Public Works)

- Interested in how the City can improve efforts to be more strategic. Oakland has done a lot in terms of shifting how they invest funds.

Participant 6: Transportation Planner, OakDOT



- City has done a lot about changing how we invest—insuring infrastructure investments are considering disparate outcomes, advancing equity, meeting communities’ needs.

Participant 6: WOCAP

- **Conditional use permits live with the property**, not the business, so polluting uses stay at that site (even when the business leaves!)
- Intersection between environment concerns and new housing—not putting housing where there’s a lot of pollution, unless the city is putting extra filtration.
- (West Oakland) new residents vs. old residents have different ideas on how to solve these environmental issues

Participant 7: E/J Solutions

- Practicing neighborhood self-determination, develop **neighborhood councils with participatory budgeting** of public funds for equitable climate action—could be funded by the city to leverage more equitable development
- **Crisis of houseless people**, curbside unsheltered communities: historic trend that is on a very fast acceleration. “It’s heartbreaking to see the number of unhoused communities on the rise” — roots of homelessness run deep.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION FACILITATOR #2 NOTES

- It is important to name impacts of environmental racism on the African American and Black community.
 - We need to hear from people who have suffered firsthand from racism.
- Create green zones in heavily polluted areas, so you avoid projects like the Crematorium.
- Create cultural zones, and actually using zoning to implement them – to protect cultural and green areas and land uses.
- Education and pipeline to jobs that suggest we’re stewarding our land together
- Connection to creeks and watershed and waterways.
- Funding for providing land stewardship. Directed to people living in the area
- Green zones are important. The Priority Conservation Area designation through Plan Bay Area are a precursor to green zones. Greening and green infrastructure. We need to make sure there is a neighborhood coalition leading this. Food deserts. We need to invest in infrastructure. Education outreach, resilience hubs. From the neighborhood-based level.
- **Enforcement on bad actors is key.**
 - Tax bad actors and have the funds go directly to benefit communities impacted by its activities.
 - More regulation on bad actors
- Conflict of industrial and residential areas – create policy to address this issue.
- Suggestion that EONI plan area become an “eco” district.
- Remove all staff that is not practicing EJ. Remove staff who is not appropriate for this plan.
- Coordination and working across disciplines is key. Make some connections among the agencies that are in the mix working on EJ – other city departments and partner agencies.
- Shift City’s focus away from supporting development and developers.
- Illegal Dumping is a big issue – “We are out there cleaning our block” This is disheartening.
 - Dumping of trash needs to be addressed with follow-up and follow-through from the City
- Food access and urban agriculture.
 - East Oakland is truly an industrial area and needs food access.
 - We need more community gardens in east Oakland
- Open communication and dialogue.
- Participatory budgeting is necessary.
- Including policies to make housing more accessible to everyone --- prioritizing affordable housing is a key environmental justice issue.
- Climate change also needs to be addressed.
- Barriers:

- Internal staff is not trained or empowered from the top down to help catalyze change. The culture of the Department needs to change. How can we begin to work with DRE?
- Support DRE with more funding to advance racial equity
- Frontline staff at the counter needs to be better trained on environmental racism. Have them participate in toxic tours in East and West Oakland. Root causes of environmental issues?
- Root Causes:
 - Discriminatory policies that justified where Black and Brown people could live, and then dumping polluting uses in those neighborhoods.
 - Redlining
 - Structural Racism
 - Eminent Domain
 - Urban Renewal
 - “There is a lot of discrimination of where people get to live.”
 - Example: Affordable housing not being built above highway 13. People living above 580 & along College BLVD. There is no affordable housing in upper part of college.
 - Locating a Port right next to where people live.
- Gas prices going up, and people can’t afford to take time off from work. Low wages and loss of wages. Covid relief funds need to be distributed.
- Building trades:
- Employment and training programs in the building trades to create employment and good jobs. Root cause of incompatible Land uses:
 - Explore how the decisions were made about citing various facilities. Looking at those decisions of incompatible uses – uncover some of the rules or processes that led to those decisions.
 - Raise awareness about how these land use decisions came about.
- Crematorium:
 - There was not a policy that would not allow the burning of bodies not connected to a cemetery or mausoleum
 - CBE organized a campaign and sued the city.
 - The court ruled them as vested.
 - What do Planners understand about these neighborhoods and environmental racism? Projects like the crematorium did not include any benefits to communities, not in terms of jobs or opportunity, or any other tangible benefits. Only polluting impacts.
- Two important takeaways:
 - Pollution Tax
 - Environmental racism and history

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION FACILITATOR #3 NOTES

Who is here

- Participant 1, RBA creative – WOCAP and Community Advisory Committee for BAAQMD. Most concerned with consideration of framework of repair/reparations instead of just corrective action. “Not just stop bleeding, but also need an infusion.” Still have gap.
- Participant 2, Save the Bay. Climate resilience in EJ element. Climate adaptation, resilience through nature urban greening as solution to address sea level rise, wildfire, climate hazards, air/water quality hazards. SLR max level projected over next century. Development away from hazard zones.
- Participant 3, Sustainability analyst with City of Oakland. Presentation missing building electrification in safe/sanitary homes. Resilience hubs – public facilities as refuge from climate hazards. Places of community development.
- Participant 4, Asian Health Services, Oakland Chinatown Coordinator. Reducing public health disparity lens. Air monitoring studies in Chinatown. Low-income, BIPOC communities have greater health risks due to increased GHG by commuter/commercial traffic. Intersections on HIN – coalition partners advocating for better transit connectivity and conversion of two-way streets to address safety..
- Participant 5, California Air Resources Board – WOCAP. Strategies in WOCAP reflected in GPU. Agency regulating mobile sources – see how LU policies and GP can work with CARB trucks/mobile sources programs/efforts.
- Participant 6, Oakland Climate Action Coalition. Helped with ECAP. Working with city, residents, community for ECAP 2030 and ECAP REIA. (question whether GP REIA is separate from ECAP REIA). Priority conservation areas. Work with East Oakland Neighborhoods Initiative. Concern: how communities left out of process; GP needs to be less about informing, but actually partner/active partnership with community organizations and residents from beginning. Not just tokenization. Power of intentional language. “Just gather input” rather than bridging divide for community engagement process.
- Participant 7, Vanderbilt University student interested in EONI, community engagement. Here to listen in.

What's working

- Transformative climate communities (TCC) – state funding streams. Using for communities (DACs). Identifying vulnerable communities to all sorts of impacts should also be targeted for funding. Natural infrastructure, green infrastructure makes most effective change.
- REIA framework not used in other cities/agencies. More to build on this and evaluate how it shapes policies. Sees this as a first step/approach.

Gaps, Solutions/Ideas

- Innovation deficit. Solutions don't rise to the magnitude of the problem. City has to always go into the efforts with thought that they are making the most innovative, impactful effort. For example – reparations.
- ID'ing hazards posed to EJ communities. Also climate hazards: abstract like wildfire, SLR
- Following leadership of EJ communities themselves. Using existing efforts and actually implementing them. Barrier: neighborhood-based, self-governing associations that look at housing, food, etc. rather than agencies lacking coordination and communication from communities' perspective.
- Dedicated climate equity fund. Wealth in Oakland not equally distributed. What are creative, innovative ways to better distribute those funds to address issues. Renewable source of energy and wealth in Oakland to push all different projects in Oakland, across city.
- Reparations – Berkeley mayor's office. Permanent, renewable source of income applied specifically to repair framework, multifaceted – one element is an EJ harm/repair framework that will be community-identified and governed by community. Not waiting for GP process every 25 years to repair harm. Not chasing grant money. Money is baked in. mechanisms includes identifying financial vehicles at their disposal. Politically heavy lift but worth having. By community, for community. Repair, not just maintenance/correction.
- SLR – projections over next century. Bottom and top range. Natural infrastructure = urban canopy, street trees, bioswales, detention basins, horizontal levees, wetlands restoration. Stormwater flooding. Urban heat/wildfire aspect. Overall air quality. Co-benefits. Raises need for development away from these hazard areas.
- Resilience hubs – how many? Oakland does not currently have any. ECAP to pilot 3 by 2025. 2 are preliminary identified: DeFremery recreation/West Oakland library and Lincoln recreation center in Chinatown. Social services and connectivity for communities they are based in. collocating services (meet them where they're at). Resilience hubs built first in marginalized communities, most impact. Connecting neighbors to neighbors. Network.
- Economy embedded in the work through the GP to improve. Workforce development opportunities. Local businesses doing work.

Report Back

- Creating frameworks for community governance and avenues/solid relationship for actual partnerships, not just gathering input during community outreach process.
- Innovation for solutions that address the magnitude and multitude of issues identified. For example, we talked about reparations, natural/green infrastructure, resiliency hubs. Also emphasizing the importance for identifying and including considerations for all climate hazards.
- Funding sources was another topic we discussed. While the transformative climate communities was brought up as an example of what's working, we also brought up how there's a need to identify sustainable financing sources for



projects that actually implement the projects brought forth by the community and ensure the City's investments are actually equitably distributed and support community efforts.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION FACILITATOR #4 NOTES

- Participant 1, CBE
 - Issues of racist planning; equitable energy access (electricity)
- Participant 2, CBE
 - CBE came to the City in 2015 to discuss EJ element planning after SB1000 was passed, unfortunate the conversation is just starting now but happy to be involved
- Participant 3, BIG Conservation Development Commission
 - Interested in how the city is looking at issues of climate resilience and how it will prepare disadvantaged communities to deal with those issues; toxic siting
- Participant 4, Mycelium Youth
 - How the city will support communities, want concrete results, not just data gathering and processing
 - Approaching process with caution + hope
- Participant 5, Save the Bay
 - Interested in the City focusing on climate adaptation, specifically around sea level rise, flooding, and water quality
- Participant 6, City of Oakland
 - Involved in planning around resilience / respite hubs, want to know where those should be located
- Participant 7, Better Neighborhoods, Same Neighbors
 - Tangible impacts for east Oakland residents
- Participant 8, Save the Bay

Concerns

- Participant 7 – address **air quality concerns** in East Oakland, esp. around AB&I
 - over saturation of industrial land in East Oakland
 - How transportation affects air quality in East Oakland
 - CBE has concerns about the cannabis developments in East Oakland because of the overlap with formerly redlined communities and electricity accessibility for these projects. Will cannabis developments perpetuate bad air quality – unreliable electricity means focus rely on polluting diesel generators
- Participant 8
 - **Sea-level rise**- frontline communities along shoreline
 - **Flooding of groundwater sites**
 - Collaborative stewardship in Oakland
- Participant 3 – a lot of **toxic sites located on school facilities** – prioritize cleaning up school sites

- Oakland should pay for community groups to get the word out and engage the community in the development of the EJ element and the general plan overall as they did for the ECAP.

Policy Recommendations

- Participant 1
 - The City and DTSC should collaborate more on the school toxic site clean-ups like Phoenix said. It also affects teachers and parents as well, and others using the school buildings after hours.
 - How many days will there be to respond to the draft EJ element? Is there greater than 45 days?
 - Ways to collect feedback – interactive mapping tool for folks to map issues and city to respond
 - Prevent the approval of more industrial sites in already burdened communities; also, be consistent in collaborative enforcement of these sites with BAAQMD and DTSC to address air quality issues.
 - How collaborative stewardship in Oakland would practically work since it hasn't worked in the past.
- Participant 2
 - Radical change to internal procedures. Internal procedures say community ideas are not possible – need to change that
- Participant 5
 - Flooding and water quality – use Oakland's GI plan to identify high-value solutions that address multiple issues – align with community priorities for green space

Other

- Participant 4
 - Investment in community orgs already doing work
 - Partnership with indigenous groups? Rematriation of land?
- CBE partnership with resilient by design to prepare for sea level rise in Coliseum area – build on this?

GENERAL DISCUSSION, QUESTIONS, AND CHAT COMMENTS:

- Wanted to know what other opportunities are to engage in the EJ element as its being drafted, especially since it's the first one. How will we be able to provide feedback beyond this focus group?
- "I appreciate ya'll covering this, but weren't we all invited because we're familiar with/work on these issues already?"
- "We should add the West and East Oakland CERP (ab 617) to the list of plans as well. East Oakland's is pending, yet the GPU should uplift it."
- **Black American, African American, and Black:** "I appreciate the use of Black Americans, but ask that you still use African Americans, not everyone identifies as Black Americans," suggests everyone use Black Americans, African Americans, and Black.
- **Provide presentation slides ahead of the meeting:** "Would love to see the slide deck during the meeting and not after"
- **Firsthand Experience and Testimony from Frontline Communities:** Participant commented on the need for firsthand testimony about how race has been used against them, needs to be added to the safety document
 - "The only way you can get this is by talking to people who have had firsthand experience of racism, and that's the only way you can understand what's going on beyond the bureaucracy level. This is more ground-truthing and bottom up."
 - "It should be a planned meeting about people's experiences, can't be done in an hour and a half, about not only interpersonal racism, but also systemic and institutional racism."
 - One thing we have done is put on each page someone's experience, and this should be done in the final report.
 - Tour of toxic areas, i.e. West Oakland. To go see the places and experience the lived experience, especially important for city and consultants.
 - "Great idea, toxic tour - with the mission that in 2045 it will be a green belt tour, eco zone tour!!!"
 - First-hand testimony of people on race/injustice – people 25 and older. Capture within focus group -missing demographic. Also note within acknowledgements/presentation (1-2 paragraphs of personal anecdotal evidence = ground-truthing, bottom-up, ownership). Personal, institutional, structural, planning racism.
 - "Neighborhood Knowledge for Change" has examples of testimonies in document on every page.
- "I just want folks new to this kind of process and space to understand that the city hires consultants to host these types of focus groups and listening sessions more often than they implement changes or participants' feedback. As urban planning consultants be aware of how your work enables the city's harmful policies and resistance to fundamentally change."

- “Let’s keep looking to the future and what we WANT to co-create”
- “Collaborative stewardship needs to start working.”
- “Indigenous groups should be incorporated in planning.”
- **Climate Resilience:**
 - Interest in equitably planned climate resilience (SLR, flooding, heat island) and bay water quality/pollution impacts
 - “I’d like to see how the EJ Element and Safety Element can interact to reinforce climate resilience and adaptation measures for vulnerable communities.”
 - How can climate resilience measures be implemented in an environmentally just way in Oakland?
 - Here to learn from the community and support climate resilience in the EJ element.
 - Identifying and including considerations for all climate hazards.
- **Solutions:**
 - reparative, not just corrective frameworks to be included in the plan
 - City should look at the clean-up green up ordinance.
 - "Greenlining" is a term used in Stockton for the Green Zones that has been designated there.
 - In addition to the enforcement and compliance piece, I'd like to see some of the industrial lands surrounding the shoreline to be repurposed for community. The port has a lot of property, yet it's mostly commercial. Adding to the structural barriers keeping us from the waterfront. I'd like to see the Port pushed more by the city and cbo's to balance the use of the port property for economic gain and neighborhood recreation.
 - Building relationships and frameworks that address issues.
 - Green infrastructure.
 - Need to identify sustainable financing solutions and make sure city equitably distributes resources.
 - Naming and laying the groundwork for community ownership. This is how to address current community concerns and prepare to address community concerns in the future.
 - Fund neighborhood councils and participatory budgeting.
- **Specific Issues and Barriers:**
 - City staff shortages/training/morale, City rarely endorses positive activity, no calls answered.
 - The issues have been known for a while, what are the factors that keep us from addressing them. Ex. Conditional use permits



- Concerned about air quality, and general intersection of how better planning can improve racial and health inequities in Oakland.
- illegal dumping, ventilation.
- History of homeless crisis. What is the historical context that led to current homeless crisis?
- Air Quality concerns in east Oakland, especially around industrial land.
- Reliance on polluting diesel generators for power.
- Toxic contamination on school sites, need to partner with organizations to remediate toxic contamination on school sites.

APPENDIX A: LINKS SHARED

- **Presentation Slides:**
https://drive.google.com/file/d/1SQ2PBP0H4WZZKHgyGd9IQAMExieN_zNX/view
- **Exit Poll:** <https://forms.gle/vJ25ycXNWiWhJMt8A>
- **Sign-up for updates at the General Plan Update Website:**
<https://www.oaklandca.gov/topics/general-plan-update>
- **Interactive Environmental Justice Community Hub:** <https://city-of-oakland-general-plan-update-oakgis.hub.arcgis.com/>
- **Neighborhood Knowledge for Change:**<https://woeip.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/WOEIP-research-neighborhood-knowledge-for-change3.pdf>

APPENDIX B: SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Key Issues. Geographic disparities and key issues have been identified over the years by community members. EJ topics (such as incompatible land uses, poor air quality, pollution and contamination, displacement, illegal dumping, and others) as well as solutions have already been identified by community leaders in West and East Oakland.

- What other emerging environmental issues are there, and what solutions should the General Plan consider?
- What environmental justice issues impact the communities you serve the most?

Current successes: What existing policies and practices do you think are working well as they relate to EJ issues?

Gaps.

- Where are policy gaps related to environmental justice issues?
- What policies or strategies would you recommend the City explore to address these gaps?
- What are the barriers to new practices?

Racial Equity

- What historical context must we examine to understand the root causes of environmental justice (EJ) issues in Oakland?
- What policies or practices contribute to environmental justice issues and racial inequities?
- Do you foresee any unintended racial equity considerations?