

THE TRUST *for* PUBLIC LAND

CONSERVING LAND FOR PEOPLE



SANTA ANA, CALIFORNIA: *Park Deficits and Opportunities Assessment*

At the turn of the century, Santa Ana was the eighth-most densely populated city in the United States. While other large California cities averaged 7.9 acres of parkland per 1,000 residents, Santa Ana had only one acre of parkland per 1,120 residents. The city was unique in other respects as well: more than 75 percent of Santa Ana's population was Latino; almost 20 percent of residents lived below the poverty line; and, at 34 percent, Santa Ana had the highest rate of overweight children in California.

The Trust for Public Land began collaborating with Latino Health Access (LHA) in 2006. LHA was established in 1993 to meet the health needs of Latinos in Orange County. The organization places an emphasis on community participation in providing preventive services and educational programs, and in working towards improving the quality of life of uninsured and under-served Latinos.

LHA's policy team wanted to explore funding solutions to support the joint use of school grounds. With a dearth of parkland in some low-income neighborhoods, LHA staff proposed that after-hours access to school playgrounds could increase opportunities for safe outdoor play.

TPL's role

LHA and TPL collaborated on an all-day training event in Santa Ana to raise awareness about the rate of overweight children and the lack of facilities to promote physical activity. Together they proposed raising public funds to support the programming, operation, and maintenance of school playgrounds for community use.

TPL's GIS team developed maps that revealed a startling lack of parkland in Council District 2, an area in the central/northeast part of Santa Ana populated by many

low-income Latinos. The maps proved a crucial tool during meetings with school officials and other stakeholders.

The TPL GIS team also acquired data on overweight middle school children. By overlaying those data on maps of existing parks, TPL helped community members visually correlate areas with a high percentages of overweight children with neighborhoods that lack nearby parks and open spaces. TPL also collected crime data to identify where safety issues might be impacting use of exiting parks.

Project highlights

The visuals made a convincing case for more places to play, but LHA discovered that people were most concerned about safety. “Unfortunately, kids are getting obese—but kids are also getting shot. People understood the need for kids to play, but how does that fit it into the real problem, which is public safety?” said Dr. Ersoylu, former director of policy for Latino Health Access. LHA decided to reframe their message to encompass both physical activity and safety of Santa Ana youth and neighborhoods.

Throughout 2006 and 2007, LHA met with representatives from the Santa Ana Unified School District, the city manager and his staff, local elected officials, the Santa Ana police union, and community leaders. LHA staff continued to raise awareness by conducting training sessions at neighborhood association meetings and conferences. These efforts encouraged Santa Ana City Manager David Ream to sign a letter requesting technical assistance from TPL to develop a study of various funding options available to the city.

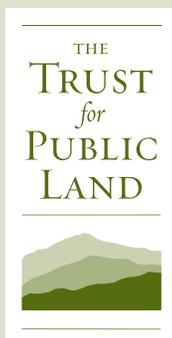
Results

In early 2008, TPL conducted a public opinion poll to determine community support for a ballot measure to support outdoor play. Sixty percent of individuals polled answered that they would back a half-cent sales tax to make school grounds available after hours as safe places for youth recreation. Though encouraging, this number is short of the required two-thirds supermajority required for success at the polls.

In the interim, Santa Ana Mayor Miguel Pulido made a commitment to host a series of events promoting health. The LHA team continues to raise awareness about the need for safe places to play in Santa Ana and is exploring alternative funding sources to support the joint use of school grounds. “This additional time provides us with an opportunity to research and recommend legal steps for nonprofit ballot measure endorsements and fundraising, create a grassroots education campaign, identify and recruit private sector support and build a larger, strong coalition for this measure,” said Ana Carricchi. “Our collaboration with TPL helped LHA to develop a stronger presence with the city. Before our partnership, the city saw LHA as educators in preventative health—now they also recognize us as advocates.”

“The maps were an important political education tool because they clearly and visually represented the issue of park inequity to the elected officials.”

— Dr. Ersoylu, former director of policy,
Latino Health Access



The Trust for Public Land conserves land for people to enjoy as parks, gardens, and other natural places, ensuring livable communities for generations to come.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

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