

# EAST COACHELLA VALLEY: PARKS POLICY

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

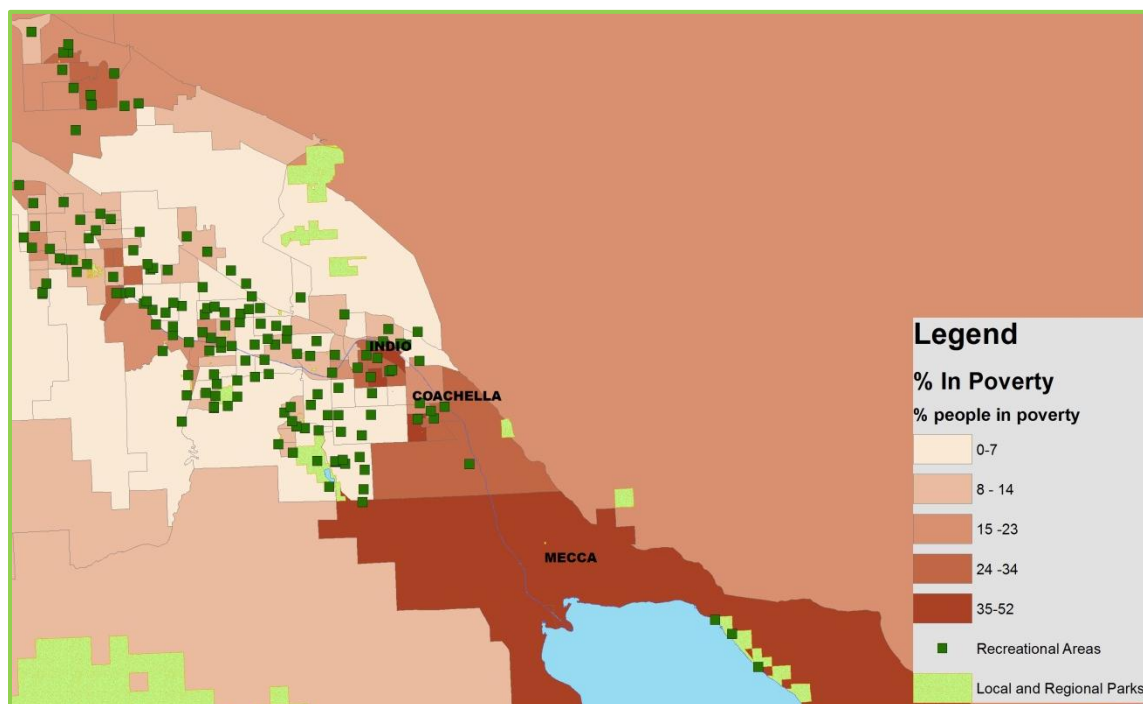
Parks, open space and recreation facilities are all considered necessary infrastructure for healthy and sustainable communities. Park space is an environmental amenity, with implications for health, child development, social capital, and quality of the environment. Likewise, public recreational programs are central to engaging diverse population groups in physical activity, with broad ranging and long-lasting public health implications. As one solution to the high incidence of obesity in the US, the Centers for Disease Control have recommended creating more community parks and playgrounds. In a report on physical activity and health, CDC cites multiple studies showing that when people have access to parks, they exercise more.<sup>i</sup>

## STATEMENT OF THE ISSUE

There is an association between poverty, minority status, obesity, ill health, and substandard neighborhood conditions such as the absence of parks and recreation facilities.<sup>ii</sup> A study that assessed perceived neighborhood characteristics and access to physical activity spaces among 1,796 adults residing in 6 counties in North Carolina revealed that access to physical activity spaces and trails increased with increasing levels of education and income.<sup>iii</sup> Parks and recreation areas improve community environments, improve health and increase physical activity. Overall, parks improve the quality of life in communities. There is a clear differential between the availability of parks and open space in the Eastern Coachella Valley.

Overweight and obesity rates are high in the region and research shows that youth are not getting the physical activity they need to stay healthy. Only 17% of ECV teens are physically active for 60 minutes a day while teen overweight and obesity in ECV is 38%.<sup>iv</sup>

There are 8 parks and recreation facilities in the city of Coachella. This is the largest number of parks for any of the communities in the ECV. Most of them are small and are located in the western section of town. There is a regional park on the south eastern border of the city limits called Canal Regional Park. With a population of 40,704, that means there is one park for every 5,088 people in the city. The national average is 6-10 acres of park space for every 1,000 residents. The other communities in the ECV, with the exception of Mecca, do not have any community parks. Mecca has one park and play space located in the center of town at a school. North Shore has regional and national park space, mostly beaches on the Salton Sea, within the community but there are not playgrounds or other recreation facilities located at these. There is a small playspace at the North Shore Marina.



## POLICY OPTIONS

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Creating environments that are conducive to exercise is necessary to making sure community members in East Coachella Valley get regular physical activity. The opportunity for exercise in close-to-home parks, greenways, and other open spaces must be part of any comprehensive solution to building healthy communities in the region. Policies to support park equity include:

- Land-use and planning policies to require parks
- Increased funding for park-poor communities in the East Coachella Valley
- Each community should have a land area devoted to parks and recreation that is proportional to the size of its population.

The Riverside County Planning Commission makes decisions about regional planning in unincorporated communities. Guillermo Sanchez is the District 4 representative on the County Planning Commission. He served as a Coachella City Planning Commissioner until his appointment to the County Commission in 2012 and lives in Indio. Meetings for the commission should be held in communities affected by decisions and are infrequently held in the East Coachella Valley.

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## POLICY DISCUSSION

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### BENEFITS OF PROPOSED POLICIES

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What is needed are good land-use plans that incorporate parks and recreation areas appropriate for the population. Creating land-use plans for small unincorporated areas that include an integrated system of parks, bike paths and trails will develop a sense of community in these areas while providing spaces for exercise.

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### OBSTACLES TO PROPOSED POLICIES

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Funding of services for municipalities is inadequate and is especially so for unincorporated regions. Public money in the Coachella Valley is concentrated in affluent communities. Funding across the board for municipalities has been cut. So funding for parks, bike paths and trails development may take time. Residents of unincorporated communities need to contact their local representative to the County Planning Commission to make their voices heard and meetings for this commission are rarely held nearby.

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## REFERENCES

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<sup>i</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, *Physical Activity and Health: A Report of the Surgeon General* (Atlanta: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, 1996), 244-247, <http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/sgr/pdf/sgrfull.pdf>.

<sup>ii</sup> King, A. C., Blair, S. N., Bild, D. E., Dishman, R. K., Dubbert, P. M., Marcus, B. H., Oldridge, N. B., Paffenbarger, R. S., Jr, Powell, K. E. and Yaeger, K. K. (1992) Determinants of physical activity and interventions in adults. *Medicine and Science in Sports and Exercise*, June 24, S221–S236.; Sallis, J.F., Hovell, M.F., Hofstetter, C.R., Elder, J.P., Caspersen, C.J., Hackley, M., & Powell, K.E. (1990). Distance between homes and exercise facilities related to the frequency of exercise among San Diego residents. *Public Health Reports*, 105, 179–185.; Godbey, G., Graefe, A., & James, S. (1992). The benefits of local recreation and parks services: A nationwide study of the perceptions of the American public. Alexandria, VA: National Recreation and Parks Association.

<sup>iii</sup> Huston SL, Evenson KR, Bors P, Gizlice Z. Neighborhood environment, access to places for activity, and leisure-time physical activity in a diverse North Carolina population. *Am J Health Promotion*. 2003;18:58–69.

<sup>iv</sup> Building Healthy Communities, Eastern Coachella Valley Health Profile, The California Endowment, November 2011.

[http://www.calendow.org/uploadedFiles/Health\\_Happends\\_Here/Communities/Our\\_Places/BHC%20Fact\\_Sheet\\_Coachella.pdf](http://www.calendow.org/uploadedFiles/Health_Happends_Here/Communities/Our_Places/BHC%20Fact_Sheet_Coachella.pdf)



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