



**Walnut
Creek 2050**
Rooted. Evolving. Thriving.



Healthy Communities

Existing Conditions Report

SEPTEMBER 2026

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Introduction

This Existing Conditions Report (ECR) supports the City of Walnut Creek’s General Plan Update (GPU) by addressing the statutory requirements of California Senate Bill 1000 (SB 1000), the “Planning for Healthy Communities Act”. It provides an assessment of Healthy Community Priority Areas (HCPAs) in Walnut Creek based on a combination of pollution burden indicators, including both exposure and environmental effects data, and population characteristics. The report also provides an overview of conditions that contribute to community well-being and health by examining the City’s current socioeconomic trends, environmental risks and factors that may affect health, and populations that may experience greater vulnerability based on available data. This ECR provides a foundation for developing healthy communities-related goals, policies, and implementation actions of the General Plan.

For more information on the terms and definitions relevant to the Healthy Communities Existing Conditions Report, please see **Appendix A: Terms and Definitions**.

WHAT ARE HEALTHY COMMUNITIES?

Healthy communities are places that foster positive health outcomes for all who live, work, pray, or play in them. Research has shown that a community’s physical environment is one of the social determinants of health that can influence individual and community well-being.

These include factors, such as access to health care, housing safety and affordability, community safety, healthy food access, and exposure to pollution, among others.



Summary of Key Findings

The following is an overview of key findings from the Healthy Communities ECR that will be further assessed during later phases of the GPU. This report explores key environmental health issues affecting the City of Walnut Creek in accordance with SB 1000, which requires cities and counties to identify disadvantaged communities and address environmental justice in their general plans.

Environmental pollution. Environmental pollution can produce long-term costs and impacts on both community health and natural resources.¹ Current studies show that the effects of pollution are inequitably distributed across the state and the region.² Identified pollution sources in and around Walnut Creek include:

- **Air pollution.** Air pollution can cause and/or exacerbate health conditions such as asthma, cardiovascular disease, cancer, and other chronic conditions.³ Data from the State's CalEnviroScreen 4.0 tool identifies traffic impacts and diesel particulate matter (diesel PM) as two of the most common pollution exposures for neighborhoods across Walnut Creek, specifically those adjacent to Interstate 680 (I-680) and main corridors such as Ygnacio Valley Road.
- **Small air toxic sites.** Small air toxic sites, or SmATS, are local sources that emit toxic air contaminants into nearby communities. These sites include common facilities such as gas stations and auto body shops, as well as larger operations such as food processing plants and refineries. At the individual facility level, emissions from SmATS may pose relatively low risks when facilities comply with applicable state regulations. However, cumulative emissions from multiple regulated sources can still contribute to adverse impacts on environmental quality and human health.⁴ Chronic exposure to volatile organic compounds (VOCs) and combustion byproducts has been associated with asthma, respiratory diseases, and heart conditions according to public health research.⁵ Within Walnut Creek, the available data identifies over 40 SmATS.
- **Groundwater threats.** Groundwater threats refer to the potential for groundwater contamination from various pollution sources, such as leaking underground storage

¹ Remoundou K, Koundouri P. Environmental effects on public health: an economic perspective. *Int J Environ Res Public Health*. 2009 Aug;6(8):2160-78. doi: 10.3390/ijerph6082160. Epub 2009 Jul 31. PMID: 19742153; PMCID: PMC2738880.

² California Air Resources Board. People at Risk. <https://ww2.arb.ca.gov/our-work/programs/people-risk/about>.

³ California Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment (OEHHA). Health Studies of Criteria Air Pollutants. <https://oehha.ca.gov/air/health-studies-criteria-air-pollutants>.

⁴ California Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment (OEHHA). Small Air Toxic Sites. <https://oehha.ca.gov/calenviroscreen/fact-sheet/small-air-toxic-sites>.

⁵ American Lung Association. Volatile Organic Compounds. <https://www.lung.org/clean-air/indoor-air/indoor-air-pollutants/volatile-organic-compounds>.

tanks (LUSTs), cleanup and land disposal sites, produced water ponds, industrial sites, dry cleaners, and the East Bay Municipal Water District (EBMUD) Walnut Creek Water Treatment Plant.⁶ There are 12 sites within Walnut Creek that may pose groundwater threats. Bacterial and chemical contamination of soil and groundwater can contribute to cumulative exposure to toxic substances, which may lead to severe organ damage and long-term health effects such as cancer.⁷

- **Hazardous waste.** The definition of hazardous waste is broad and includes various manufacturing by-products and discarded materials, such as cleaning fluids (solvents) and pesticides. Waste generated from scientific, medical, and industrial activities often contains chemicals that can be harmful to human health.⁸ Within Walnut Creek, there are 19 facilities that may be potential sources of hazardous waste. Similarly to groundwater threats, long-term or cumulative exposure to these types of waste can increase vulnerability to chronic diseases, respiratory illnesses, and lasting health impacts, including cancer.⁹

Sensitive populations. Demographic, socioeconomic, and housing factors can have a considerable influence over a person's health and overall quality of life. Groups such as children and youth, older adults, unhoused community members, and low-income residents may face greater exposure to environmental hazards and have fewer resources to adapt or mitigate their impacts, increasing their risk of adverse health outcomes.¹⁰

Unique and compounding factors. As described in the **Key Opportunities** section below, Walnut Creek offers a range of programs and resources to support residents' access to essential needs and services. The city also houses a concentration of healthcare providers and services. Nonetheless, existing challenges and vulnerabilities may compound one another, increasing sensitive populations' susceptibility to environmental pollution and related impacts.

- **Housing cost burden.** Households that spend more than 30% of their household income on housing are typically considered "cost burdened," which can limit their ability to afford other essential living expenses, such as food, healthcare, and transportation.

⁶ California Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment (OEHHA). Groundwater Threats.

<https://oehha.ca.gov/calenviroscreen/fact-sheet/groundwater-threats>.

⁷ U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Potential Well Water Contaminants and Their Impacts.

<https://www.epa.gov/privatewells/potential-well-water-contaminants-and-their-impacts>.

⁸ California Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment (OEHHA). Hazardous Waste Generators and Facilities.

<https://oehha.ca.gov/calenviroscreen/fact-sheet/hazardous-waste-generators-and-facilities>.

⁹ MLI Environmental. Effects of Hazardous Wastes on Human Health and the Environment.

<https://mlienvironmental.com/blog/effects-of-hazardous-waste/>.

¹⁰ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Agency-Wide Climate and Health Task Force, FY 2022 Strategic Framework.

Forty-four percent of renters in Walnut Creek spend more than 30% of their income on housing.

- **Homelessness.** Although Walnut Creek has a relatively small unhoused population compared to other larger cities in the state, annual point-in-time counts indicate a consistent need for shelter, supportive housing, and social services.
- **Disability and access.** Over 10% of Walnut Creek’s population and 30% of older adults living in the city have at least one disability, highlighting the importance of accessibility in the community.

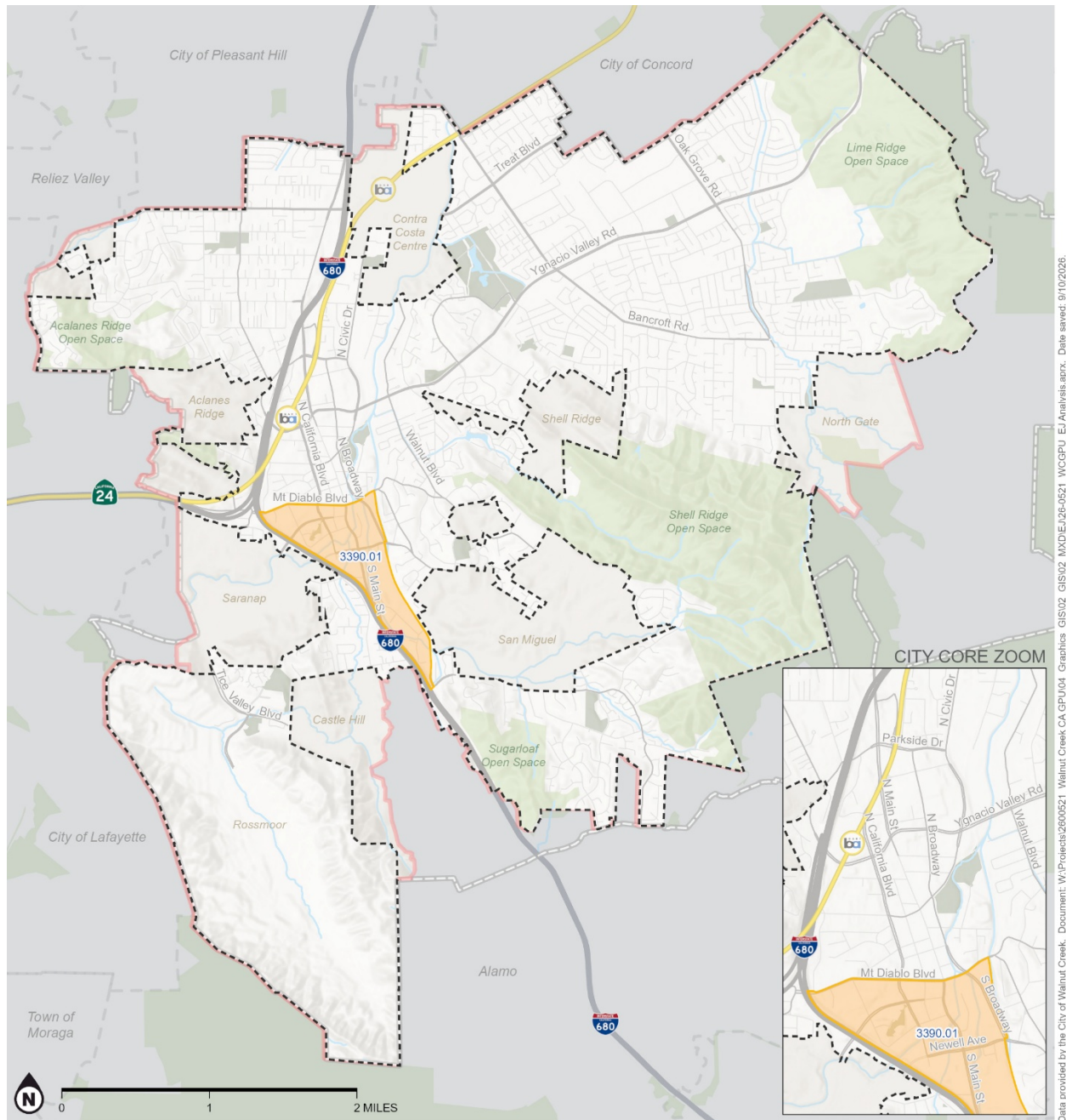
Key opportunities. The City has many strengths that can be leveraged to improve community health and enhance quality of life for all residents.

- **Public facilities, services, and community amenities.** Walnut Creek offers a wide range of facilities, services, and amenities, including schools, parks, open spaces, trails, and recreational programs.
 - Four school districts collectively serve 16 public schools within the city, alongside 14 private schools. Access to quality education is an important opportunity that can provide long-term benefits for children and their families.
 - Outdoor spaces for both active and passive recreation, along with city activities and programming, provide opportunities for residents to care for their physical and mental well-being through exercise, time spent outdoors, and community involvement. The City has 20 parks, 4 special use areas, and 2,726 acres of open space accessible to residents.
- **Social services and support.** The City provides a variety of services for older adults, unhoused individuals, and other community members who may benefit from additional support. These resources include legal services, meal programs, fair housing services, and independent living instruction.
- **Public health partnerships.** The City partners with groups such as Contra Costa Health and the Contra Costa Crisis Center, providing a foundation for continued collaboration and coordination on public health initiatives.
- **Civic involvement and community engagement.** Walnut Creek residents demonstrate strong civic involvement through high voter participation, active engagement in civic affairs, and documented advocacy for environmental sustainability, the arts, and other community priorities. These levels of civic participation provide a foundation for continued community engagement in City planning and decision-making processes.

Recommended Healthy Community Priority Areas. The recommended Healthy Community Priority Areas (HCPAs) in Walnut Creek are geographic areas identified through the SB 1000 screening process based on indicators of cumulative environmental conditions and potential

community vulnerability. For the General Plan update, the City uses the term HCPAs to refer to these areas. The identified HCPAs will be considered during the development of General Plan goals, policies, and implementation measures. **Figure 1** highlights the areas identified through the SB 1000 screening process.

Figure 1. Identified Healthy Community Priority Areas



IDENTIFIED HCPAS

Healthy Community Priority Areas

CITY OF WALNUT CREEK
GENERAL PLAN UPDATE



FEATURES + BOUNDARIES

- City Boundary
- Sphere of Influence
- Planning Area
- Parks
- Open Space
- Waterbodies
- Freeways
- BART Stations

Regulatory Framework

Senate Bill 1000

Senate Bill (SB) 1000 (2016), otherwise known as the Planning for Healthy Communities Act, amended Gov. Code § 65302 to require the inclusion of environmental justice in general plans if (1) a jurisdiction has a disadvantaged community; and (2) a jurisdiction adopts or revises two or more General Plan elements concurrently.

If a city or county identifies one or more disadvantaged communities within its jurisdiction, it can fulfill the state’s environmental justice requirements by either creating a standalone element or by integrating environmental justice goals and policies throughout the general plan. Goals and policies must aim to identify and reduce specific health and environmental risks in communities more likely to be affected by higher levels of pollution, environmental hazards, and other vulnerabilities.¹¹ The intent of SB 1000 is to address the unique and compounded health risks in disadvantaged communities by:¹²

- **Reducing pollution exposure**, including improvements in air, soil, and water quality;
- **Increasing community asset and infrastructure access**, including the promotion and equitable distribution of public facilities and services;¹³
- **Promoting food access**, such as expanding the number of accessible grocery stores, farmers’ markets, and community gardens;
- **Promoting safe and sanitary homes**, such as improving home air filtration, removing toxic building materials (such as asbestos, mold, and lead-based paints), and promoting housing affordability;
- **Promoting physical activity**, such as improving street walkability and bikeability;
- **Promoting meaningful community engagement** in public decision-making processes; and
- **Prioritizing improvements and programs** that meet the needs of disadvantaged communities.

¹¹ State of California Department of Justice, Office of the Attorney General. Environmental Justice in Local Land Use Planning. <https://oag.ca.gov/environment/sb1000>.

¹² State of California Department of Justice, Office of the Attorney General. Best Practices for Implementing SB 1000. <https://oag.ca.gov/system/files/media/sb-1000-best-practices-en.pdf>.

¹³ Note: “Public facilities” include public improvements, public services, and community amenities, as defined in subdivision (d) of Section 66000 (Gov. Code § 65302(h)(4)(B)).

A disadvantaged community designation may provide access to enhanced protections, targeted interventions, priority funding, and other resources to address infrastructure needs, environmental issues, and public health concerns in areas disproportionately burdened by environmental pollution and other hazards.

The term “disadvantaged community” describes a specific condition of a community, area, or census tract per California law. Under SB 1000, a disadvantaged community (or DAC) is defined as (1) “an area identified by the California Environmental Protection Agency (CalEPA) pursuant to Section 39711 of the Health and Safety Code;” or (2) “an area that is a low-income area¹⁴ that is disproportionately affected by environmental pollution and other hazards that can lead to negative health effects, exposure, or environmental degradation” (Gov. Code § 65302(h)(4)(A)).

In this process of identifying disadvantaged communities in accordance with State law, it is important to note that terms such as “disadvantaged” or “vulnerable” may appear to carry negative connotations and can overlook a community's assets and strengths. These assets can include vibrant local cultures, strong neighborhood networks, and a sense of resilience that persists despite challenges and disparities. For these reasons, this report and project will use the term **Healthy Community Priority Areas (HCPAs)** when referring to disadvantaged communities (DACs). This terminology recognizes that these communities may experience higher cumulative impacts while also highlighting their strengths and potential for positive change.

Figure 2. Healthy Community Priority Area Identification



Additional State Statutory Framework

This section provides a summary of California legislation that must be considered when defining disadvantaged communities (i.e., Healthy Community Priority Areas) and developing recommendations for healthy communities in Walnut Creek.

Senate Bill 535. SB 535 (2012) directs funding from California’s Cap-and-Trade Program to communities disproportionately affected by pollution and climate change. These investments aim to enhance public health, quality of life, and economic opportunity, while also reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. Additionally, SB 535 directs CalEPA to establish the criteria for identifying “disadvantaged communities” that would be eligible for certain percentages of the State’s Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund (GGRF).

Assembly Bill 1628. AB 1628 (2019) amended the State’s definition of environmental justice (EJ) to define it as “the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of people of all races, cultures, incomes, and national origins, with respect to the development, adoption, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies” (Gov. Code § 65040.12(e)(1)). The law further defines how to advance fair treatment and meaningful involvement in accordance with this definition of EJ.

Multi-State Guidance on Affirming the Importance and Legality of Environmental Justice Initiatives. In 2025, a coalition of 12 state Attorneys General issued guidance affirming the legal foundation and commitment to addressing ongoing environmental and public health disparities. The guidance retains each state’s intent and authority to pursue policies that protect communities, particularly those historically overburdened by pollution and environmental harm. These initiatives remain essential to ensuring fair and equitable access to clean air, water, and a healthy environment for all people.

Senate Bill 379. SB 379 (2016) requires local jurisdictions to incorporate climate adaptation and resiliency goals, along with supporting data, into their general plans. This process includes the identification of “vulnerable communities” and mandates periodic updates to the safety element to reflect these climate-related data, goals, and strategies.

California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). CEQA consists of statutory requirements established in California Public Resources Code and the CEQA Guidelines, codified in Title 14 of the California Code of Regulations, Division 6, Chapter 3, Sections 15000 et seq. The primary aims of environmental review under CEQA are public disclosure, impact prevention, and public participation, allowing decision-makers and the public to be informed of the potential environmental effects of proposed plans and projects. For example, CEQA requires that public agencies consider feasible alternatives and mitigation measures that would “avoid or substantially lessen the significant environmental effects of the project” (Pub. Res. Code § 21002) and to mitigate or avoid significant environmental effects or damage whenever feasible (Pub. Res. Code § 21002.1(b)).

Senate Bill 18. SB 18 (2004) requires cities and counties in California to consult with Native American tribes before adopting or amending general plans or specific plans or making open-space designations. The intent of the law is to involve tribes early in the land use planning

process, ensuring that “traditional tribal cultural places” are identified and considered before development decisions are finalized. Indigenous people and tribal governments possess unique knowledge of cultural, historical, natural, and sacred resources. This consultation process is mandated to be a meaningful, government-to-government dialogue, intended to mitigate potential impacts and preserve important places and cultural resources.

Additional Local and Regional Plans

This section provides a summary of additional local and regional plans related to healthy communities.

- **Walnut Creek Sustainability Action Plan.** The Sustainability Action Plan is a comprehensive plan to reduce GHG emissions by 40% by 2030 and achieve net-zero emissions by 2045. It addresses energy supply, transportation, land use, waste, air quality, resiliency to climate hazards, and social equity.
- **Contra Costa Asthma Initiative.** This initiative is a comprehensive program focused on improving asthma outcomes for residents in Contra Costa County by addressing environmental triggers and social determinants of health (SDOH). It provides information on environmental triggers and SDOH in the county, which has a disproportionately high prevalence of asthma.
- **2025 Community Health Needs Assessment (Kaiser Permanente Walnut Creek Medical Center).** This assessment identifies and prioritizes needs specific to the service area using community-level quantitative data and community input. Identified needs include mental and behavioral health, housing, access to care, income and employment, and community safety. The assessment provides information on community needs related to housing, health, and safety.
- **Walnut Creek Local Hazard Mitigation Plan (for Contra Costa County).** This plan covers hazards and mitigation actions as well as underserved populations and the Social Vulnerability Index (SVI). It provides information on underserved populations and the SVI that can inform the development of Healthy Communities policies.
- **Walnut Creek General Plan Safety Element.** The Safety Element identifies natural and human-caused hazards that may affect the community and establishes policies to reduce risks, enhance emergency preparedness, and strengthen community resilience. It addresses hazards such as wildfire, flooding, seismic events, and climate-related impacts, while considering the needs of vulnerable populations and promoting equitable protection from environmental risks.

Existing Conditions

Demographic and Socioeconomic Context

This section provides an overview of demographic and socioeconomic population characteristics using the American Community Survey's (ACS) 5-year estimates for the five-year period between 2020 and 2024. All data in this section, unless otherwise noted, comes from this source.

Sensitive Populations

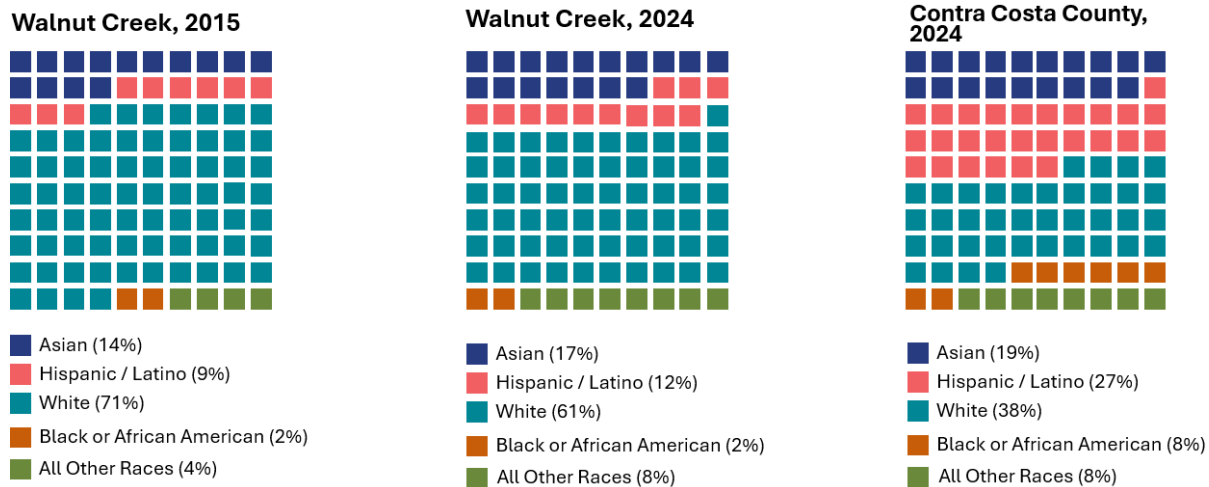
Identifying population groups most likely to experience community health or socioeconomic vulnerabilities relevant to SB 1000 is important for understanding the unique or compounded health risks and pollution exposures affecting different communities throughout the city. Studies show that demographic and socioeconomic factors, such as race/ethnicity, income, age, and employment status, can have a large influence on a person's health and overall quality of life.¹⁵

People of Color

The term “people of color” refers to all racial and ethnic groups other than White, including American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Black or African American, Hispanic or Latino, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, and individuals who are Multiracial or identify as “Other.” These racial and ethnic groups are distinguished for Census purposes.

Since 2015, Walnut Creek has become increasingly racially and ethnically diverse, with a decreasing share of White residents and growing populations of Asian and Hispanic/Latino communities. These demographic shifts point to growing diversity and vibrant communities within Walnut Creek. Contra Costa County has followed a similar demographic trend since 2015.

¹⁵ U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Social Determinants of Health. <https://www.cdc.gov/health-disparities-hiv-std-tb-hepatitis/about/social-determinants-of-health.html>.

Figure 3. Race and Ethnicity in Walnut Creek and Contra Costa County

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2015 and 2024 five-year sample period, Table B03002.

Youth, Families, and Older Adults

Children (under five years old) and youth (ages 5 to 17) have physical, emotional, and mental development needs that differ from other age groups. These characteristics, when combined with other factors, make children and youth more susceptible to environmental risks.¹⁶ Just under 16% of the Walnut Creek population is under the age of 18. This number has declined over the past decade and is less than the Contra Costa County overall (22% of the total population).¹⁷

Older adults also encounter unique challenges associated with aging, such as greater rates of chronic health conditions, limited mobility, and weakened immune systems. Consequently, they may require greater levels of physical, mental, and/or emotional health support than others. These factors increase their risk of experiencing adverse health effects when exposed to pollution or other environmental hazards, climate change impacts, and severe weather events such as extreme heat.¹⁸

The proportion of the population aged 65 and over in Walnut Creek has grown since 2015. Older adults (65 and over) make up a much greater proportion of the city than the state (15.7% of the total population) or the county (17.1% of the total population), with almost

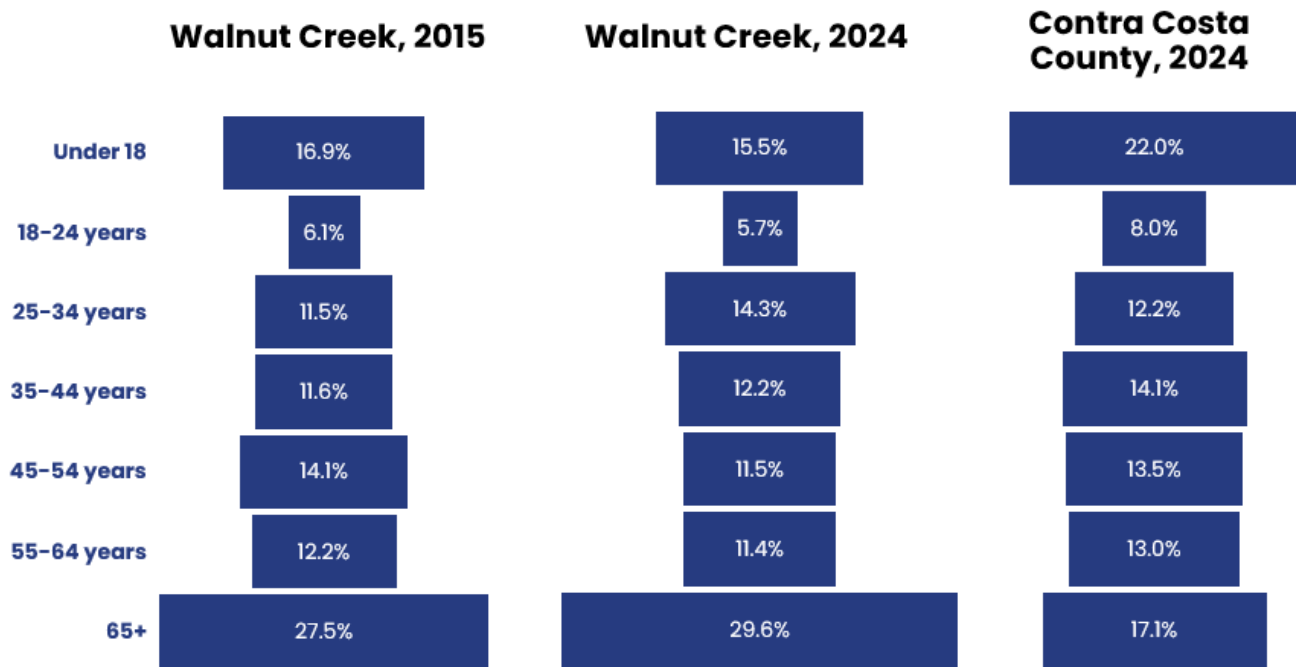
¹⁶ U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Children's Unique Vulnerabilities to Environmental Hazards. <https://www.epa.gov/children/childrens-unique-vulnerabilities-environmental-hazards>.

¹⁷ U.S. Census Bureau. American Community Survey, 2015 and 2024, Five-Year Estimates, Table S101.

¹⁸ Cornell Initiative for Research on Climate and Aging. <https://climateaging.bctr.cornell.edu/learn/climate-change-and-aging>.

30% of Walnut Creek’s residents being 65 and older. Of this group, about 43% are between the ages of 65 and 74, while about one in six is aged 85 or older.¹⁹

Figure 4. Population by Age



Source: American Community Survey 2015 and 2024 Five-Year Estimates Table S101.

People with Disabilities, Access, and Functional Needs

According to the 2024 ACS 5-year supplemental data, more than 12% of Walnut Creek’s population has at least one disability, with ambulatory and independent living difficulties being the most common. Other common disabilities include hearing, vision, cognitive, and self-care difficulties. Less than 4% of children (people under the age of 18) have a disability, and about 6% of residents aged 18 to 64 have a disability. On the opposite side of the age distribution, over 30% of older adults living in Walnut Creek have a disability, with over half of those individuals having more than one.²⁰ This disability prevalence can be tied to an aging population and a rise in chronic diseases such as heart disease, asthma, and other noncommunicable diseases.²¹

¹⁹ U.S. Census Bureau. American Community Survey, 2015 and 2024. Five-Year Estimates, Table S101: Age and Sex.

²⁰ U.S. Census Bureau. American Community Survey, 2020–2024, Five-Year Estimates, Table S1810: Disability Characteristics.

²¹ Legislative Analyst Office. 2016. “A Long-Term Outlook: Disability Among California’s Seniors.” <https://lao.ca.gov/Publications/Report/3509>.

Generally, people with disabilities, access, or functional needs often have additional social, economic, or health vulnerabilities related to additional population and healthy community characteristics described in this report. For example, poverty, low educational attainment, unemployment, and poor living conditions can compound health risks and lead to unmet healthcare needs among persons with disabilities.²²

Economic Vitality

Household Income

The median household income in Walnut Creek is approximately \$130,432, compared to \$127,229 in Contra Costa County and \$99,122 statewide.²³ However, median household income varies based on race and ethnicity. White and Asian households in Walnut Creek have estimated median household incomes that exceed the overall median household incomes for both Contra Costa County and California.^{24, 25}

- **Asian** householders have the highest average median income at \$159,476;
- **Two or more race** households had an average median income of \$113,864;
- **White alone** (not Hispanic or Latino) households have an average median income of \$135,182; and
- **Hispanic or Latino** (of any race) households have a median income of \$97,606 and **Black or African American** households have an average median income of \$92,767, both of which are lower than the state and county median incomes.
- **American Indian and Alaska Native** households have the lowest median household income by race or ethnicity at \$72,708.

To define low-income communities, the following **Method 2** analysis uses ACS 5-year estimates to identify areas where household income is at or below 80% of Contra Costa County's median household income. For Walnut Creek, the low-income threshold has been established at \$101,777, compared to \$80,119 for the statewide threshold using the same methodology. Using this locally relevant definition, six Census tracts and three additional block groups in Walnut Creek have been identified as low-income.

²² Krahn, Gloria L.; Walker, Deborah Klein; & Correa-De-Araujo, Rosaly. *Persons with Disabilities as an Unrecognized Health Disparity Population*, Am. J. Public Health 105 Suppl 2 (Apr. 2015): S198–S206, PMC4355692, PMID 25689212.

²³ Note: Median Household Income is computed based on a standard distribution used by the U.S. Census Bureau.

²⁴ U.S. Census Bureau. 2024. Median Household Income in the Past 12 Months (in 2024 inflation-adjusted dollars). American Community Survey, 2020-2024, 5-Year Estimates, Detailed Table B19013.

²⁵ Note: There was insufficient data for Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander households.

People in Poverty

In addition to low-income households, another measure of economic vulnerability is the percentage of people living in poverty. This statistic is based on a set of income thresholds that vary depending on family size and composition. For 2024, the U.S. Census Bureau's poverty threshold for a family of two adults and one child was \$25,249.²⁶ This is the official measurement of poverty used by the federal government, and the measure used for most poverty-based data presented on State Health Facts. Just over 1% of Walnut Creek's population lives below the poverty threshold, and just over 2% live at 200% of this threshold.

Housing Tenure

Of the city's 33,072 occupied housing units, 64% are owner-occupied, and 36% are renter-occupied. This percentage of homeownership is slightly below the county percentage of 68%, but notably higher than the state percentage of just under 56%.²⁷ **Figure 5** shows the distribution of owner- and renter-occupied households experiencing housing cost burden (i.e., spending over 30% of household income on housing) and severe housing cost burden (i.e., spending over 50% of household income on housing) in the City of Walnut Creek. Statewide, renters are more likely than homeowners to experience housing cost burden.²⁸ According to data from the California Department of Public Health, housing cost burden is linked to poor health outcomes, preventable deaths, and housing instability or homelessness.²⁹

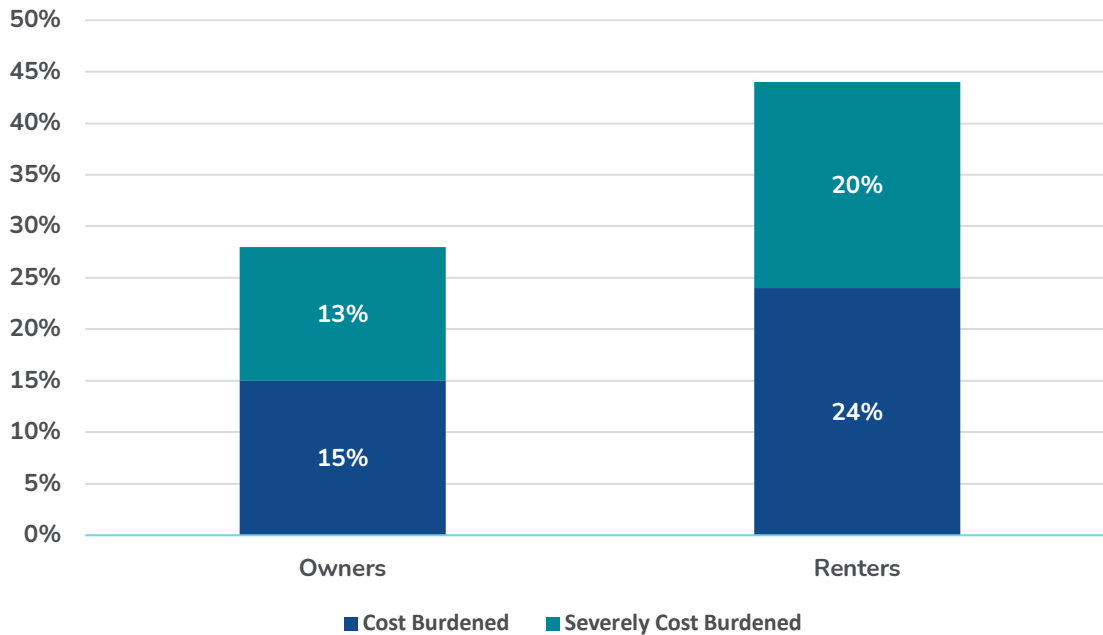
²⁶ U.S. Census Bureau. 2024. Poverty Thresholds by Size of Family and Number of Children.

<https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/income-poverty/historical-poverty-thresholds.html>.

²⁷ U.S. Census Bureau. 2024. Housing Tenure. American Community Survey, 2020-2024, 5-Year Estimates, Detailed Table B25003. <https://data.census.gov/table/ACSDT5Y2024.B25003>.

²⁸ Martinez, M. & Mather, M. 2022. "U.S. Housing Cost Burden Declines Among Homeowners but Remains High for Renters." Population Reference Bureau, April 15, 2022. <https://www.prb.org/articles/u-s-housing-cost-burden-declines-among-homeowners-but-remains-high-for-renters/>.

²⁹ Let's Get Healthy California. Reducing Housing Cost Burden. <https://letsgethealthy.ca.gov/goals/creating-healthy-communities/reducing-housing-cost-burden/>.

Figure 5. Owner- and Renter-Occupied Housing and Cost Burden

Source: HUD 2018-2022 Comprehensive Housing Affordability Strategy (CHAS)

People Experiencing Homelessness

According to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, California saw a 2.8% decrease in unhoused individuals between 2024 and 2025—the first decrease since 2016—compared to a 3.3% drop nationwide. A total of 181,934 unhoused Californians were identified in 2025, comprising about 40% of the national unhoused population.³⁰ Many individuals and families continue to struggle to keep pace with rising housing costs, while cities and counties grapple with how to provide appropriate housing and social services to meet community needs and prevent homelessness. Living unsheltered in a community increases one’s exposure to environmental pollution, health threats, climate-related disasters, and extreme weather events, both over extended periods and during acute events.³¹

According to Contra Costa Health’s Point in Time Census,³² homelessness in Walnut Creek has decreased over the past few years. In 2024, there were 64 recorded unhoused individuals without shelter. This number decreased to 50 in 2025 and to fewer than five in 2026.

³⁰ CalMatters. “Point-in-Time Homelessness Report.” May 2026.

<https://calmatters.org/housing/homelessness/2026/05/point-in-time-homelessness-report/>.

³¹ California Department of Public Health. Climate Change and Health Equity.

<https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/OHE/Pages/Climate-Health-Equity/Health-Impacts.aspx>.

³² Contra Costa Health. 2025. *Point-in-Time Count Report*, Contra Costa Continuum of Care. Accessed July 28, 2026.

<https://www.cchealth.org/home/showpublisheddocument/33090>.

Countywide, there has been a 21% decrease in people experiencing homelessness since 2024. The 2026 assessment also found that:

- 54% of respondents were identified as chronically homeless.
- 85% of households reported at least one disabling condition.
- 75% of respondents reported living in Contra Costa County for more than 10 years.
- Adults aged 25 to 54 represented the largest age group.

The decrease in people experiencing homelessness in Walnut Creek may be due, in part, to numerous programs the City and the County have employed to assist people and families facing homelessness.

Identifying Healthy Community Priority Areas

SB 1000 requires cities and counties to identify disadvantaged communities based on the following definitions:

- **Definition #1:** An area that has been identified by the California Environmental Protection Agency pursuant to Health & Safety Code Section 39711 as being disadvantaged based on geographic, socioeconomic, public health, and environmental hazard criteria; or
- **Definition #2:** An area that is “a low-income area³³ and is disproportionately affected by environmental pollution and other hazards that can lead to negative health effects, exposure, or environmental degradation” (Gov. Code, § 65302, subd. (h)(4)(A)).

The following sections explain the three-step methodology used to identify potential DACs, or Healthy Community Priority Areas (HCPAs), and healthy community issues for the City of Walnut Creek.

Method 1: SB 535

In accordance with the first definition of a DAC recognized under SB 1000, Healthy Community Priority Areas are identified in DAC screening Method 1 if a Census tract meets at

³³ Note: Under SB 1000, a low-income area is defined as “an area with household incomes at or below 80% of the statewide median income or with household incomes at or below the threshold designated as low income by the Department of Housing and Community Development’s list of state income limits adopted pursuant to Section 50093.” (Gov. Code § 65302, subd. (h)(4)(C)).

least one of the following criteria for defining disadvantaged communities, as established under SB 535. This method uses the State's CalEnviroScreen 4.0 cumulative impact screening tool and other federal data:

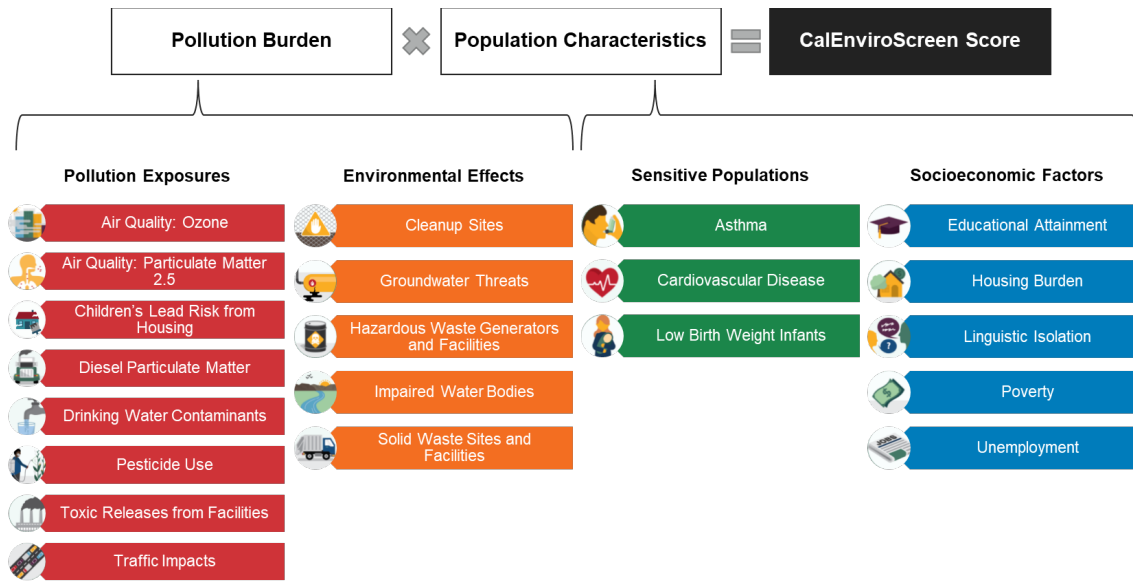
- Census tracts with an overall CalEnviroScreen score in the top 25% statewide (i.e., at or above the 75th percentile).
- Census tracts that lack sufficient data and therefore do not have an overall CES score but maintain overall CalEnviroScreen pollution burden scores in the top five percent (i.e., at or above the 95th percentile).
- Census tracts previously identified as disadvantaged according to the 2017 SB 535 DAC designation, regardless of current scores.
- Lands under the control of federally recognized Tribes (Tribes may also request consultation with CalEPA to confirm that specific lands qualify as disadvantaged, even if not shown on the official map).³⁴

CalEnviroScreen 4.0 (CES 4.0) is a statewide mapping tool created by the California Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment (OEHHA) in collaboration with CalEPA to identify cumulative pollution burdens and related health vulnerabilities for each community across the State. Currently in its fourth iteration (4.0 version) as of October 2021, it is the primary method used to designate SB 535 disadvantaged communities.³⁵ CES 4.0 advances environmental justice by calculating an overall percentile score for every Census tract in California, ordering them from highest to lowest. A total of 21 pollution burden and population characteristics indicators are evaluated to make up the overall percentile score for each Census tract in CES 4.0, as shown in **Figure 6**.

³⁴ California Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment (OEHHA). 2021. *CalEnviroScreen 4.0*.

³⁵ Note: The final CalEnviroScreen 5.0 was released on July 1, 2026; however, CalEnviroScreen 4.0 was the authoritative source at the time this analysis was conducted. A cross-check has been done to ensure the update to the tool did not result in any changes that would alter the resulting HCPAs.

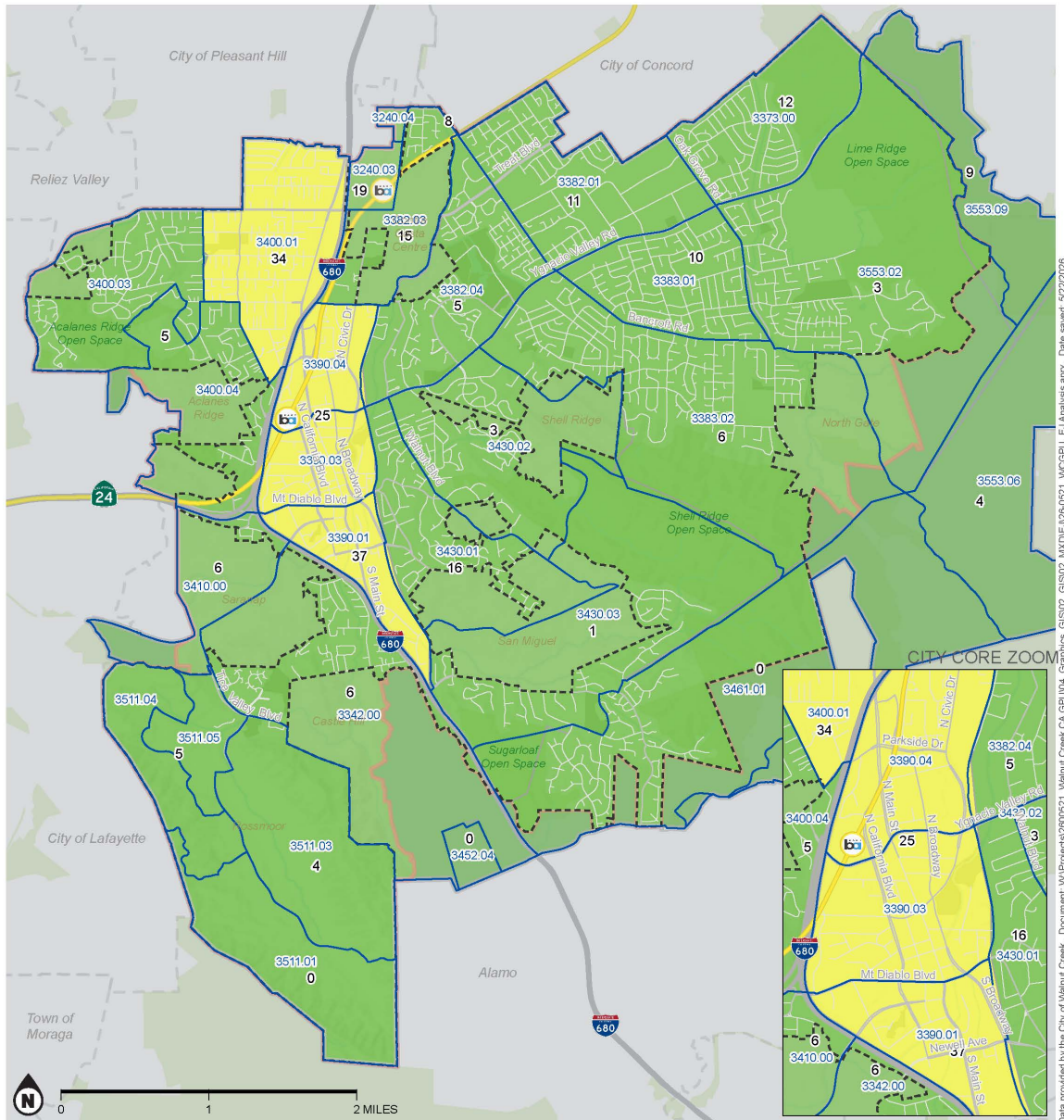
Figure 6. CalEnviroScreen 4.0 Indicators



Sources: Raimi + Associates. Graphic Elements adapted from California Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment CalEnviroScreen 4.0 Webpage and Report.

Based on this Method 1 DAC analysis, **no Census tracts in the City of Walnut Creek meet the definition of an HCPA according to Method 1, as shown in Figure 7.**

Figure 7. CalEnviroScreen 4.0 Composite Score (Percentile) by Census Tract



Note: Census tracts are labeled in blue. CalEnviroScreen 4.0 percentiles are labeled in black.

CES 4.0 COMPOSITE SCORE (PERCENTILE)

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CONTENTS

- Census Tracts
- CalEnviroScreen 4.0 Composite Score
 - <= 25th Percentile
 - 25th - 50th Percentile
 - 50th - 75th Percentile
 - >75th Percentile

FEATURES + BOUNDARIES

- City Boundary
- Sphere of Influence
- Planning Area
- Parks
- Open Space
- Waterbodies
- Freeways
- BART Stations

Method 2: Environmental Burden and Income

DAC screening Method 2 addresses the second definition of a DAC recognized under SB 1000 by identifying areas that are both disproportionately affected by environmental pollution and other hazards (indicated by scoring at or above the 75th percentile for any individual pollution exposure or environmental effects indicator) and can qualify as low-income. Process steps include:

1. Mapping Census tracts with pollution exposure or environmental effects indicators that are ranked at or above the 75th percentile (or top 25%) statewide—see **Figures 8 through 14**;
2. Mapping Census tracts and low-income block groups, defined as those with household incomes at or below 80% of the County median income (\$101,777),³⁶ as shown in **Figure 15**;
3. Overlaying low-income and pollution-burdened geographies to create a Healthy Communities Priority Area map for Method 2 results, as shown in **Figure 16**.

There are 31 Census tracts and 80 Census block groups that cover the Plan Area. Based on Method 2, Walnut Creek contains two Census tracts and three Census block groups that are both low-income and pollution-burdened. However, upon further analysis, some of these tracts were screened out because they fall largely outside city limits and instead lie within the sphere of influence or the broader planning area, where the City has less influence. Additionally, another area was screened out because its current environmental exposures were found to be insignificant. These instances are described in further detail toward the end of this section, and the resulting refined HCPAs are shown in **Figure 17**.

This Method 2 analysis uses the 4.0 version of CalEnviroScreen to identify potential HCPAs. While the 5.0 version of CalEnviroScreen was released in July 2026, CES 4.0 was the authoritative source when this analysis was conducted, and additional analysis confirmed that updating to CES 5.0 would not change the overall HCPA screening results. At the same time, additional data on “small air toxic sites”—a new indicator introduced in the 5.0 version of CalEnviroScreen—was added to DAC screening Method 2 to provide a more comprehensive picture of communities’ exposure to environmental effects in Walnut Creek.

³⁶ Note: As previously stated in the **Housing Income** subsection under the **Sensitive Populations** section, a “low-income area” is defined as an area where the median household income is at or below 80% of the Contra Costa County median household income.

Key Pollution Burdens

Several Walnut Creek Census tracts received scores in the top 25% (75th percentile and above) statewide for the following individual CES 4.0 Exposures and Environmental Effects indicators. Exposure indicators focus on the measurements of different types of pollution that people may come into direct contact with, while the Environmental Effects indicators represent the likely presence of toxic chemicals in or near communities based on the location of toxic chemicals. Because Environmental Effects indicators capture a wide spectrum of potential adverse environmental impacts that affect public health less immediately or to varying degrees, they are weighted half as much as Exposure scores.³⁷

Key Exposures

Diesel Particulate Matter

Diesel particulate matter (diesel PM) is the particle phase of exhaust emitted from diesel engines commonly used to power trucks, buses, cars, trains, and heavy-duty equipment. This indicator shows the spatial distribution of gridded diesel PM emissions from on-road and non-road sources as of 2016 (tons per year). Interstate 680 (I-680) runs through Walnut Creek. This highway, which is part of the California Truck Network, connects Santa Clara, Alameda, Contra Costa, and Solano counties and sees frequent traffic related to heavy industrial and agricultural goods. Exposure to diesel particulate matter has been known to have both short-term and long-term effects. Immediate symptoms can include lung irritation, headaches, and nausea.³⁸ As a known human carcinogen, long-term exposure to diesel PM has also been tied to asthma, cardiovascular disease, and chronic lung conditions.³⁹ **Figure 8** identifies the areas in Walnut Creek most impacted by diesel PM.

Traffic Impacts

Traffic impacts measure the number of vehicles on the roads in an area. Vehicle exhaust fumes contain toxic chemicals such as nitrogen oxides, carbon monoxide, and benzene that can damage DNA, cause cancer, increase asthma rates in children, and lead to low-birth-weight infants and premature births.⁴⁰ Interstate 680, State Route 24 (SR-24), and major corridors within the city all facilitate transportation of people and goods within the city,

³⁷ California Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment (OEHHA). (2021). CalEnviroScreen 4.0.

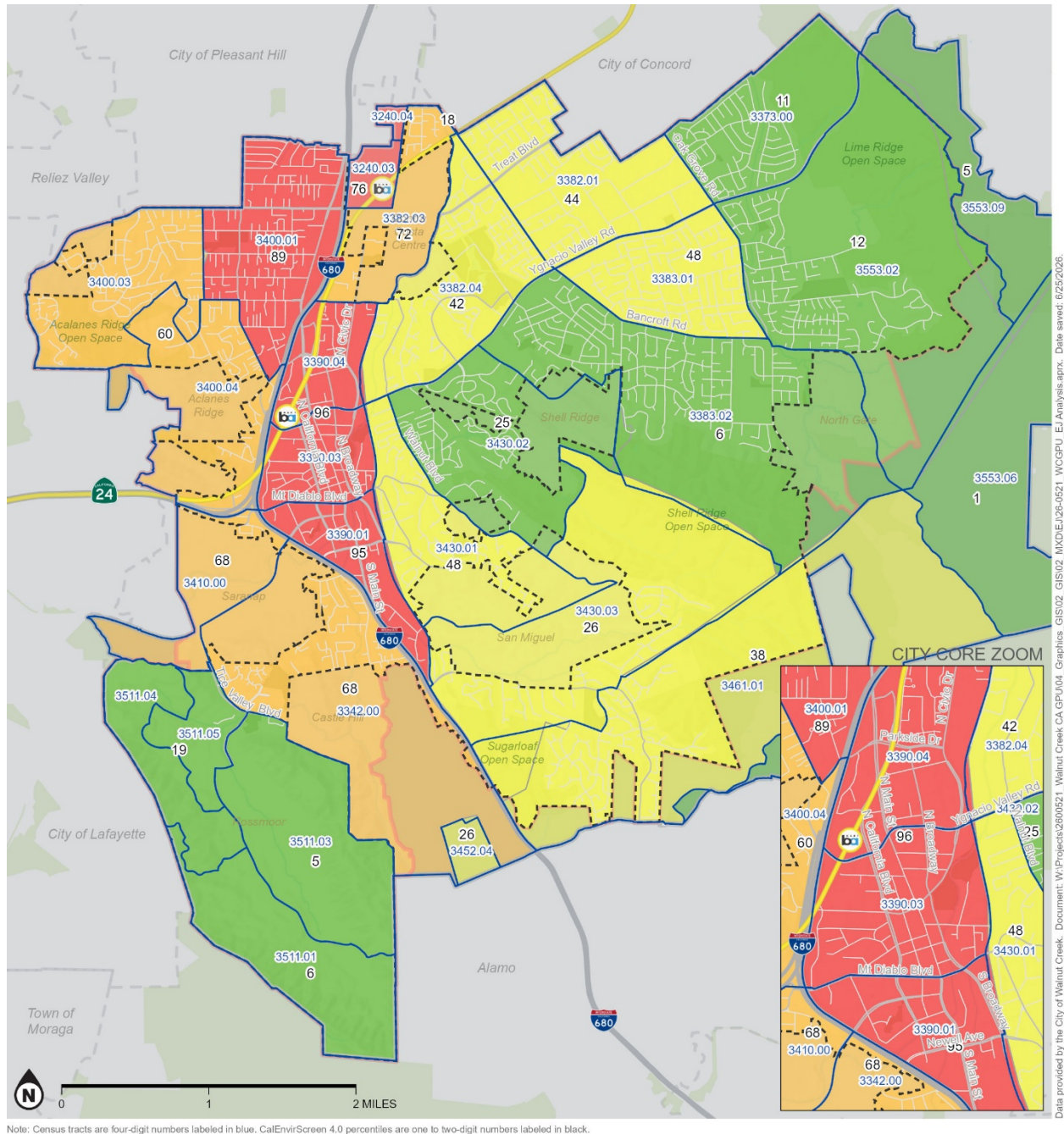
³⁸ California Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment (OEHHA). Diesel Particulate Matter. <https://oehha.ca.gov/calenviroscreen/fact-sheet/diesel-particulate-matter>.

³⁹ California Air Resources Board (CARB). Summary of Diesel Particulate Matter Health Impacts. <https://oehha.ca.gov/calenviroscreen/fact-sheet/diesel-particulate-matter>.

⁴⁰ California Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment (OEHHA). Traffic Impacts. <https://oehha.ca.gov/calenviroscreen/fact-sheet/traffic-impacts>.

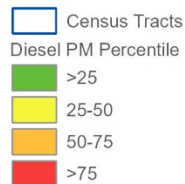
county, and region and increase quantities of these air pollutants. **Figure 9** identifies areas in Walnut Creek most impacted by traffic.

Figure 8. Diesel Particulate Matter



DIESEL PARTICULATE MATTER PERCENTILE

CITY OF WALNUT CREEK
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FEATURES + BOUNDARIES

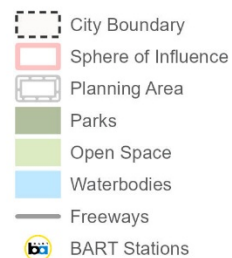
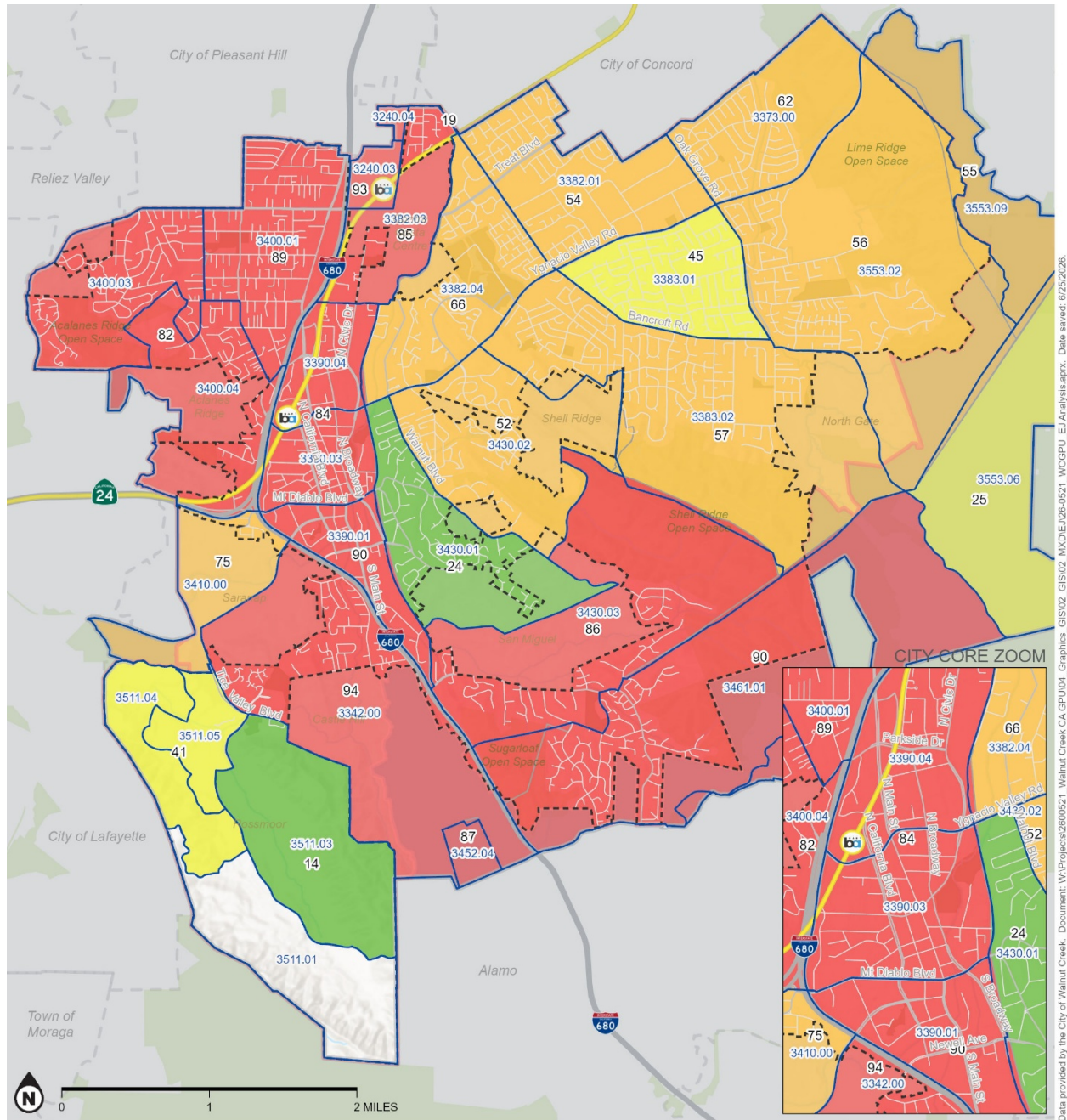


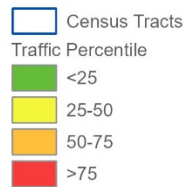
Figure 9. Traffic Impacts



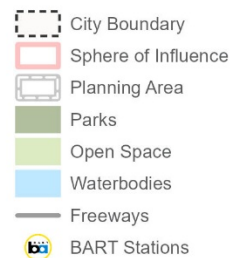
Note: Census tracts are four-digit numbers labeled in blue. CalEnviroScreen 4.0 percentiles are one to two-digit numbers labeled in black.

TRAFFIC IMPACTS PERCENTILE

CITY OF WALNUT CREEK
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FEATURES + BOUNDARIES



Key Environmental Effects

Groundwater Threats

Groundwater threats refer to the potential for groundwater contamination from various pollution sources, such as leaking underground storage tanks (or LUST cleanup sites), cleanup and land disposal sites, produced water ponds, industrial sites, dairies, dry cleaners, and publicly owned sewage treatment plants. This indicator measures the weighted sum of sites within a Census tract; the results are shown in **Figure 10**.

This analysis uses the California State Water Resources Control Board's (SWRCB's) GeoTracker database to track open cleanup sites, LUST sites, U.S. EPA Superfund sites, and facilities linked to impaired water bodies. Six LUST cleanup sites and six cleanup program sites were identified in Walnut Creek. The main risk of groundwater threats is bacterial and chemical contamination of soil and groundwater supply, which can lead to cumulative exposures to toxic substances and potentially severe, long-term health issues such as cancer.⁴¹

Hazardous Waste Generators and Facilities

Waste from commercial and industrial activities often contains chemicals that can be harmful to human health. This indicator calculates the sum of weighted permitted hazardous waste facilities, hazardous waste generators, and chrome plating facilities within each Census tract. The results are shown in **Figure 11**.

The California Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC) also maintains a Hazardous Waste Tracking System. There are 19 hazardous waste generators identified within Walnut Creek, most of which are either medical facilities or pharmacies and drug stores. This indicator also includes East Bay Municipal Utilities District's (EBMUD) Walnut Creek Water Treatment Plant, located at 2201 Larkey Lane.

Similarly to groundwater threats, long-term or cumulative exposure to various types of hazardous waste can lead to lasting health impacts such as cancer.⁴²

Small Air Toxic Sites (from CalEnviroScreen 5.0)

Small air toxic sites, or SmATS, are local sources that emit toxic air contaminants into nearby communities. These sites include common facilities such as gas stations, auto body shops,

⁴¹ California Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment (OEHHA). Groundwater Threats. <https://oehha.ca.gov/calenviroscreen/fact-sheet/groundwater-threats>.

⁴² California Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment (OEHHA). Hazardous Waste Generators and Facilities. <https://oehha.ca.gov/calenviroscreen/fact-sheet/hazardous-waste-generators-and-facilities>.

and oil and gas wells, as well as larger operations like food processing plants and refineries. Walnut Creek does not contain oil or natural gas wells; however, there are over 40 other SmATS within the city. The areas of Walnut Creek most impacted by these types of facilities are identified in **Figure 12**.

Although emissions from individual sites, such as gas stations and small-scale industrial facilities may be relatively minor, the cumulative impacts from many nearby sites can degrade air quality and pose health risks. Communities are often exposed to a unique mix of pollutants based on the types and number of sites located in or near their neighborhoods.⁴³ Even regulated sites can negatively impact environmental quality and human health, as chronic exposure to VOCs and combustion by-products can worsen asthma, respiratory diseases, and heart conditions.⁴⁴

Cleanup Sites

Cleanup sites are areas contaminated with hazardous chemicals that require remediation by property owners or government agencies. These chemicals can spread through the air or leach into groundwater.⁴⁵ This indicator measures the weighted sum of sites within a Census tract; the results are shown in **Figure 13**.

This analysis used data from DTSC's EnviroStor database, which tracks regular cleanup sites, as well as the EPA's National Priorities List (NPL) of Superfund Sites, which are the most highly contaminated locations.

While there are no NPL Superfund Sites in Walnut Creek, there are nine total regular cleanup sites within the city, including construction sites, corporate yards, laboratories, and businesses such as muffler services, pest control companies, and dry cleaners.

Solid Waste Sites and Facilities

Solid waste facilities are sites where household trash and other materials are gathered, managed, or stored. Disposal sites can release gases like methane and carbon dioxide for decades after closure and may contain contaminated landfill soil if not properly maintained

⁴³ California Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment (OEHHA). Small Air Toxic Sites. <https://oehha.ca.gov/calenviroscreen/fact-sheet/small-air-toxic-sites>.

⁴⁴ American Lung Association. Volatile Organic Compounds in the Home. <https://www.lung.org/blog/volatile-organic-compounds-at-home>.

⁴⁵ California Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment (OEHHA). Cleanup Sites. <https://oehha.ca.gov/calenviroscreen/fact-sheet/cleanup-sites>.

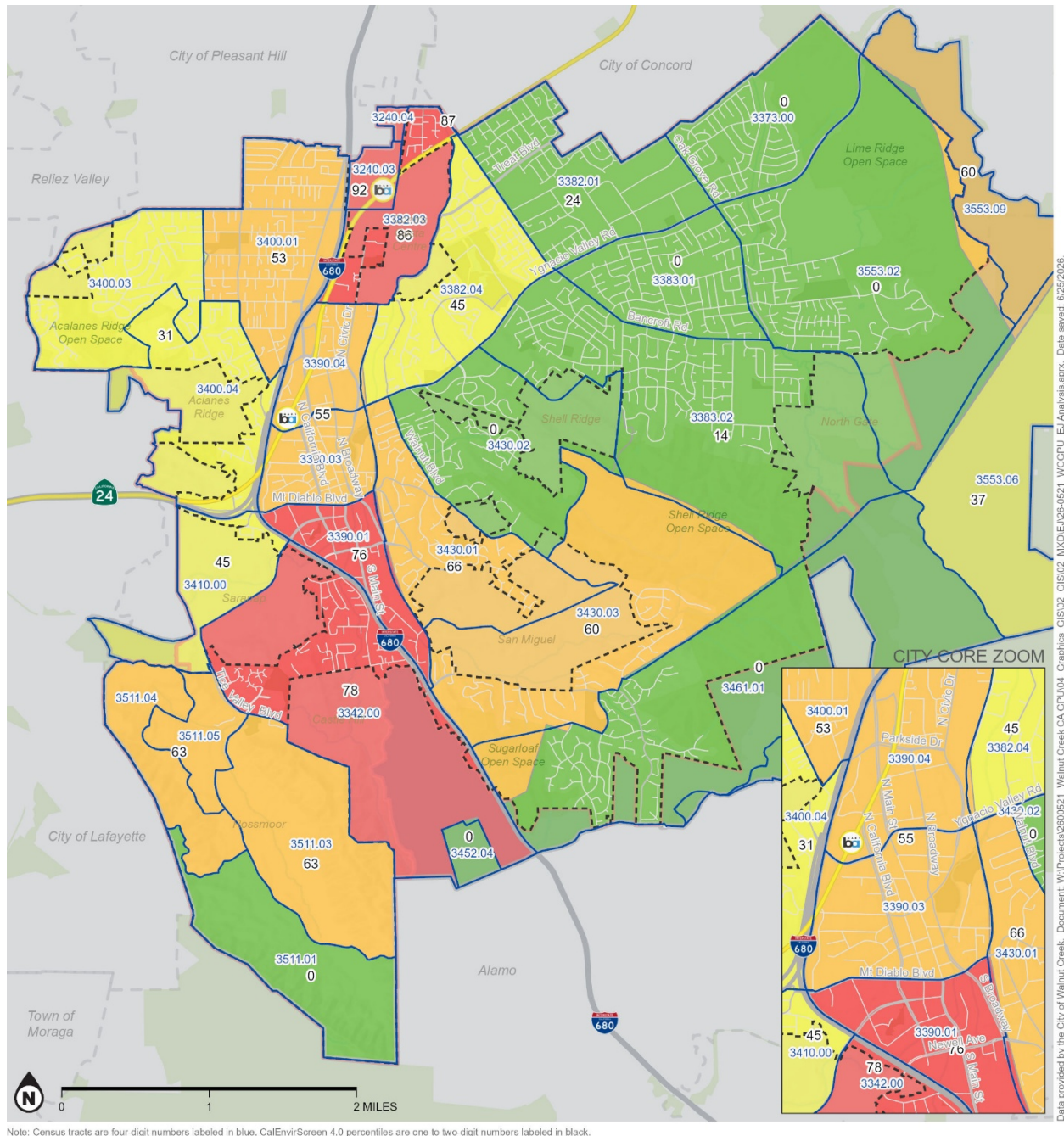
and regulated.⁴⁶ This indicator measures the weighted sum of sites within a Census tract; the results are shown in **Figure 14**.

There is only one solid waste site located within Walnut Creek according to CalEnviroScreen 4.0: the Mount Diablo State Park Disposal Site. This historic site is no longer in operation and was closed before it was acquired by the California State Park system in 1980.⁴⁷ Potential concerns would be related to remaining solid waste requiring remediation. However, further research confirmed that remediation was completed over 20 years ago and that the site is not expected to have a significant impact on public health. For more information, refer to the site's description under the discussion of block group 3430.01.3.

⁴⁶ California Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment (OEHHA). Solid Waste Sites and Facilities. <https://oehha.ca.gov/calenviroscreen/fact-sheet/solid-waste-sites-and-facilities>.

⁴⁷ SFGATE. "\$50,000 Grant to Clear Dump on Mt. Diablo." <https://www.sfgate.com/bayarea/article/50-000-grant-to-clear-dump-on-mt-diablo-2940031.php>.

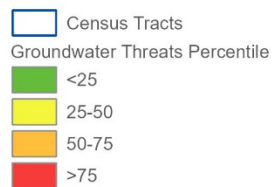
Figure 10. Groundwater Threats



Note: Census tracts are four-digit numbers labeled in blue. CalEnvrScreen 4.0 percentiles are one to two-digit numbers labeled in black.

GROUNDWATER THREATS PERCENTILE

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FEATURES + BOUNDARIES

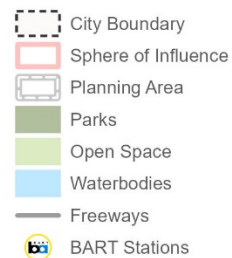
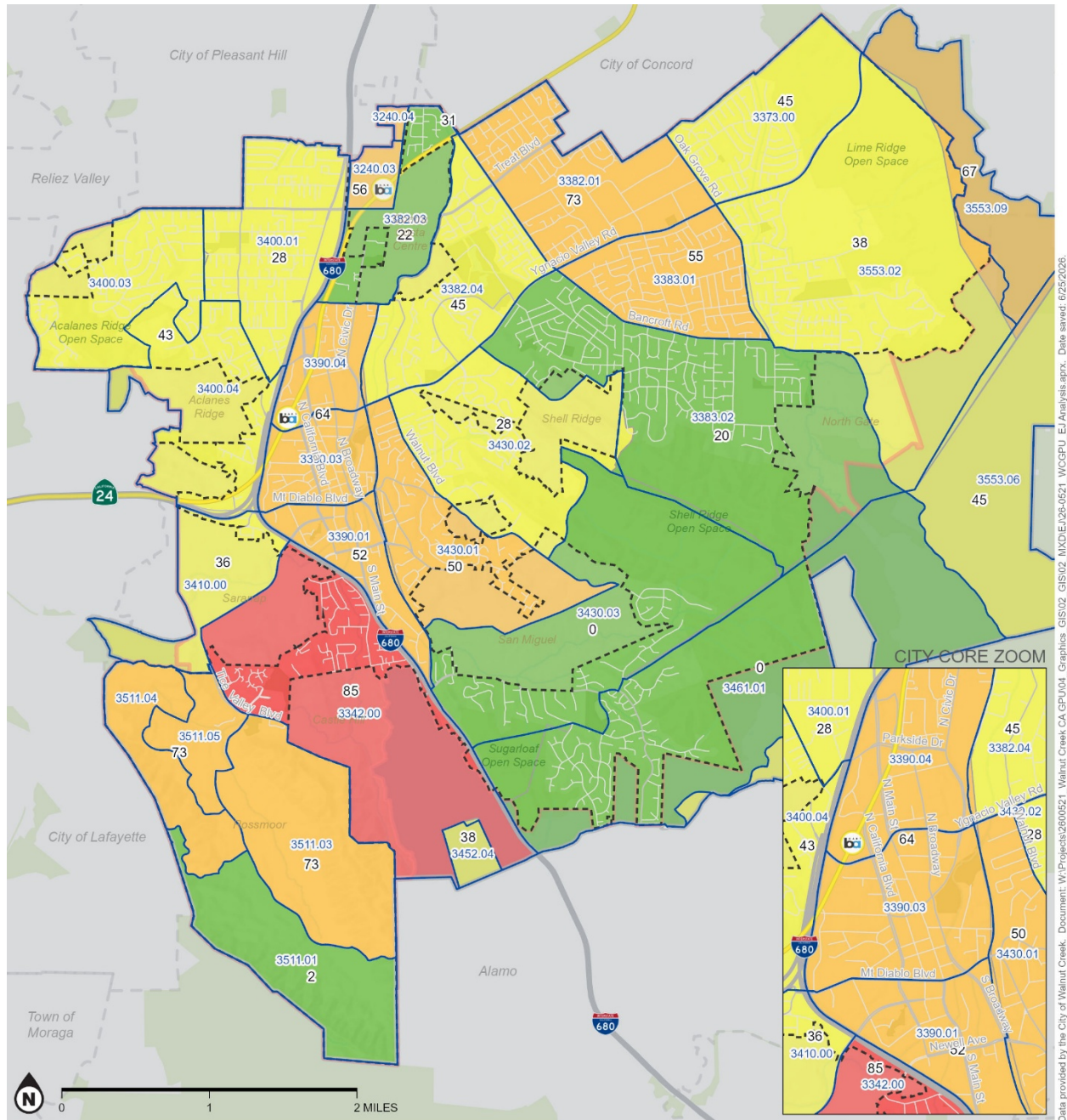


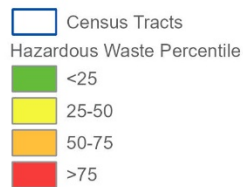
Figure 11. Hazardous Waste Generators and Facilities



Note: Census tracts are four-digit numbers labeled in blue. CalEnvrScreen 4.0 percentiles are one to two-digit numbers labeled in black.

HAZARDOUS WASTE PERCENTILE

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FEATURES + BOUNDARIES

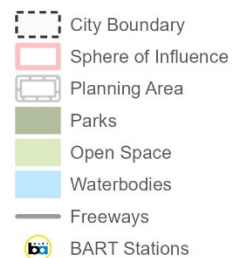
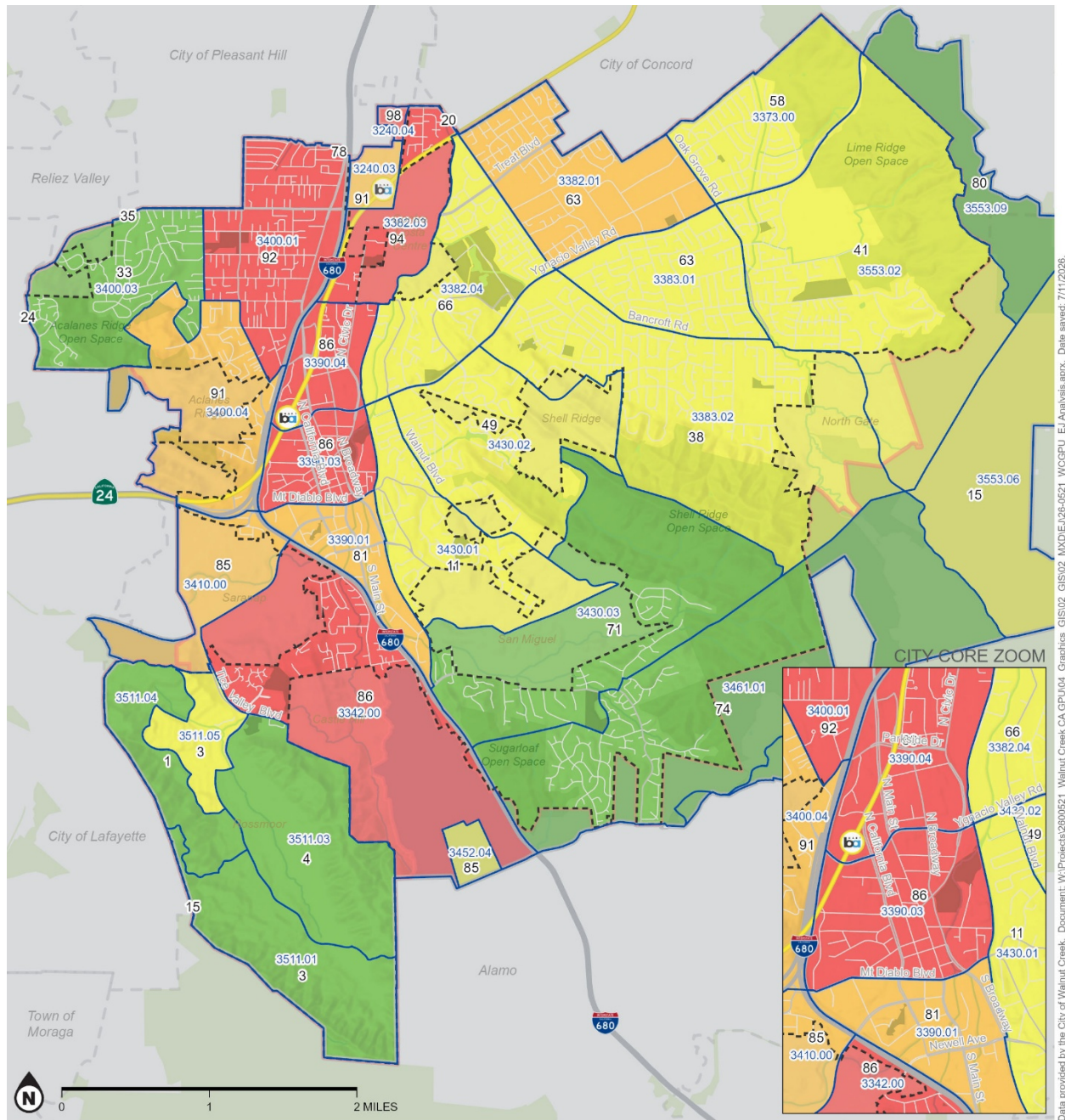


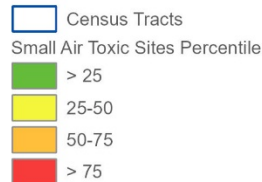
Figure 12. Small Air Toxic Sites



Note: Census tracts are four-digit numbers labeled in blue. CalEnviroScreen 4.0 percentiles are one to two-digit numbers labeled in black.

SMALL AIR TOXIC SITES PERCENTILE

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FEATURES + BOUNDARIES

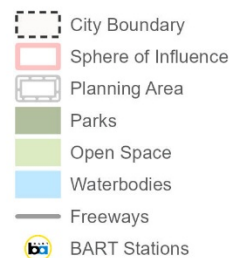
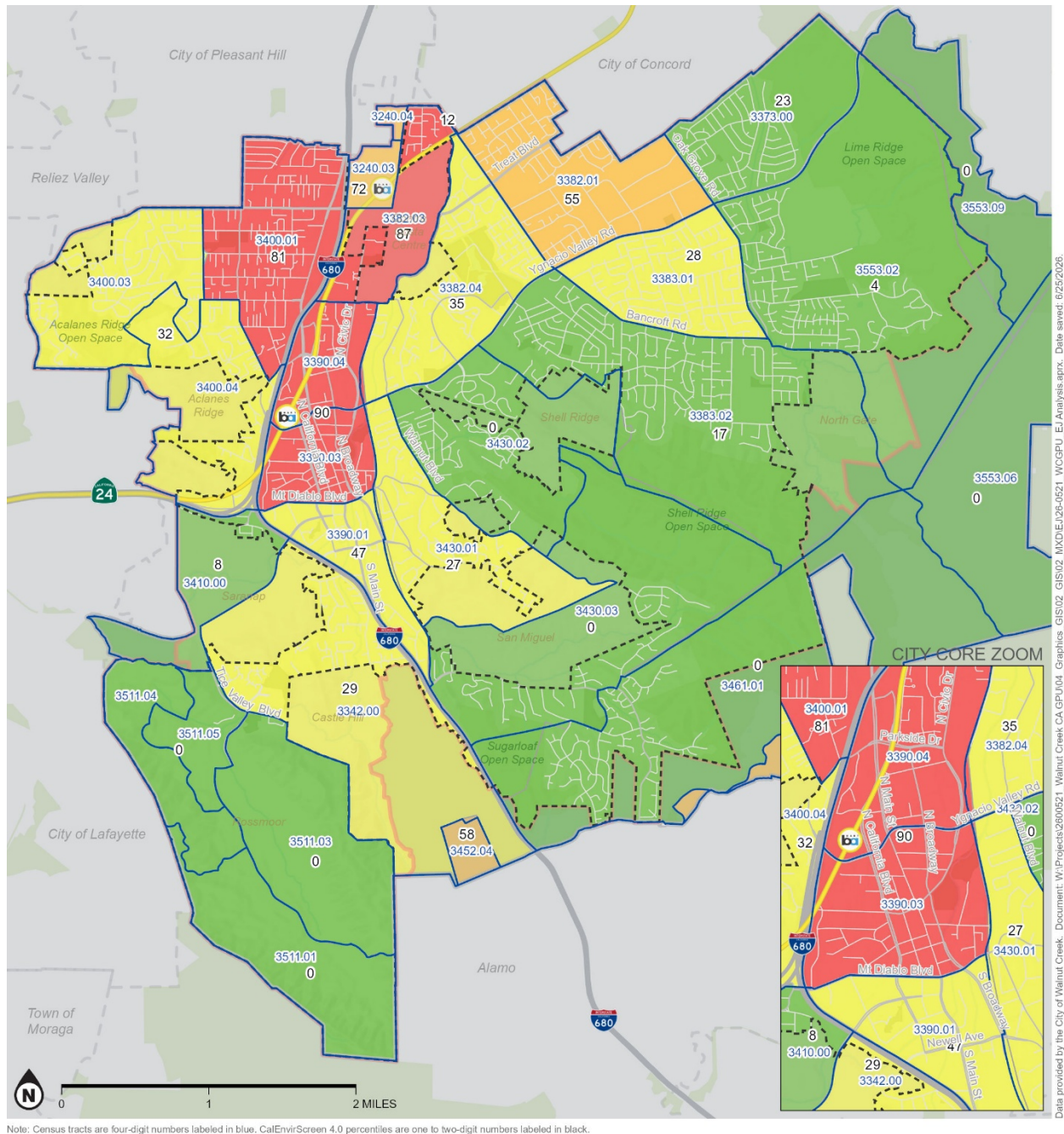


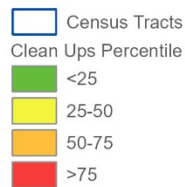
Figure 13. Cleanup Sites



Note: Census tracts are four-digit numbers labeled in blue. CalEnvrScreen 4.0 percentiles are one to two-digit numbers labeled in black.

CLEAN UP SITES PERCENTILE

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FEATURES + BOUNDARIES

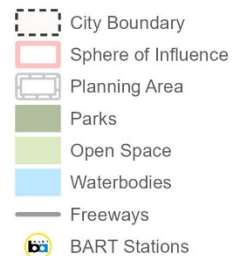
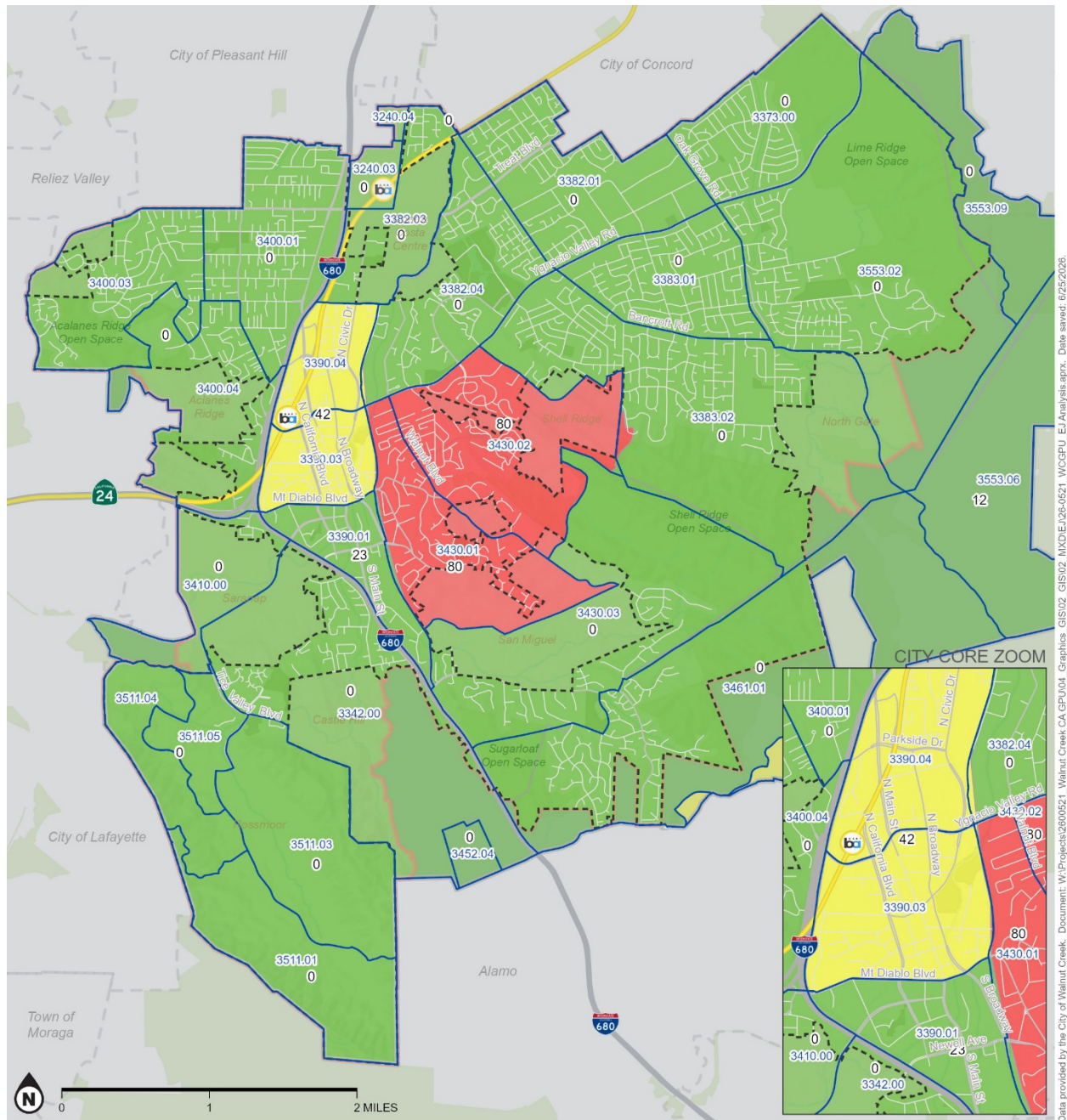


Figure 14. Solid Waste Sites and Facilities



Note: Census tracts are four-digit numbers labeled in blue. CalEnvrScreen 4.0 percentiles are one to two-digit numbers labeled in black.

SOLID WASTE PERCENTILE

CITY OF WALNUT CREEK
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- Census Tracts
- Solid Waste Percentile
 - <25
 - 25-50
 - 50-75
 - >75

FEATURES + BOUNDARIES

- City Boundary
- Sphere of Influence
- Planning Area
- Parks
- Open Space
- Waterbodies
- Freeways
- BART Stations

Low-Income Analysis

To determine the Method 2 Healthy Community Priority Areas, Census tracts that have one or more individual pollution indicators at or above the 75th percentile were overlaid with low-income tracts. The resulting overlap identifies the initial HCPAs. **Figure 15** illustrates the low-income areas within the city, identified as Census tracts with an Area Median Income (AMI) at or below 80% of the county median. The low-income threshold for Walnut Creek is \$101,777. However, this designation does not always reflect on-the-ground socioeconomic conditions. For example, the Rossmoor community was identified as low-income through this screening process, despite having relatively high property values and homeowners' association (HOA) fees. This designation may be attributable to the area's large retiree population, whose financial resources may include income sources that are not fully captured by Census data, as pensions and retirement account incomes have been found by the U.S. Census Bureau to be severely underreported.⁴⁸ Such discrepancies were considered during the refinement of the Method 2 HCPAs for Walnut Creek.

Identifying Method 2 HCPAs

Figure 16 shows the initial Method 2 HCPAs, which include Census tracts 3240.03 and 3390.01 and Census block groups 3240.04.3, 3342.00.3, and 3430.01.3. However, upon further investigation, some of these areas were screened out of the HCPA identification process for the various reasons discussed below.

The portions of Census tract 3240.03 and block group 3240.04.3 that were identified through the Method 2 analysis fall entirely within the unincorporated community of Contra Costa Centre. The City does not have influence over policy there, as it is an unincorporated county area, so these tracts were excluded from the final list of HCPAs.

While block group 3342.00.3 is partially located within the city limits, Method 2's income-based screening analysis may not fully reflect this area's socioeconomic characteristics. Similar to the Rossmoor community, approximately 70% of households in this block group receive retirement income, which may not be adequately captured in the median household income estimates, as noted in the **Low-Income Analysis** section above. After consultation with City staff, block group 3342.00.3 was removed from the final list of HCPAs.

Block group 3430.01.3 contains just one individual pollution indicator at or above the 75th percentile in CES 4.0: it scored in the 80th percentile for the Solid Waste Sites and Facilities environmental effects indicator. There is only one site within Census Tract 3430.01, identified

⁴⁸ U.S. Census Bureau. Is Retirement More Unequal Than We Think?
<https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/working-papers/2022/demo/retirement-inequality.pdf>.

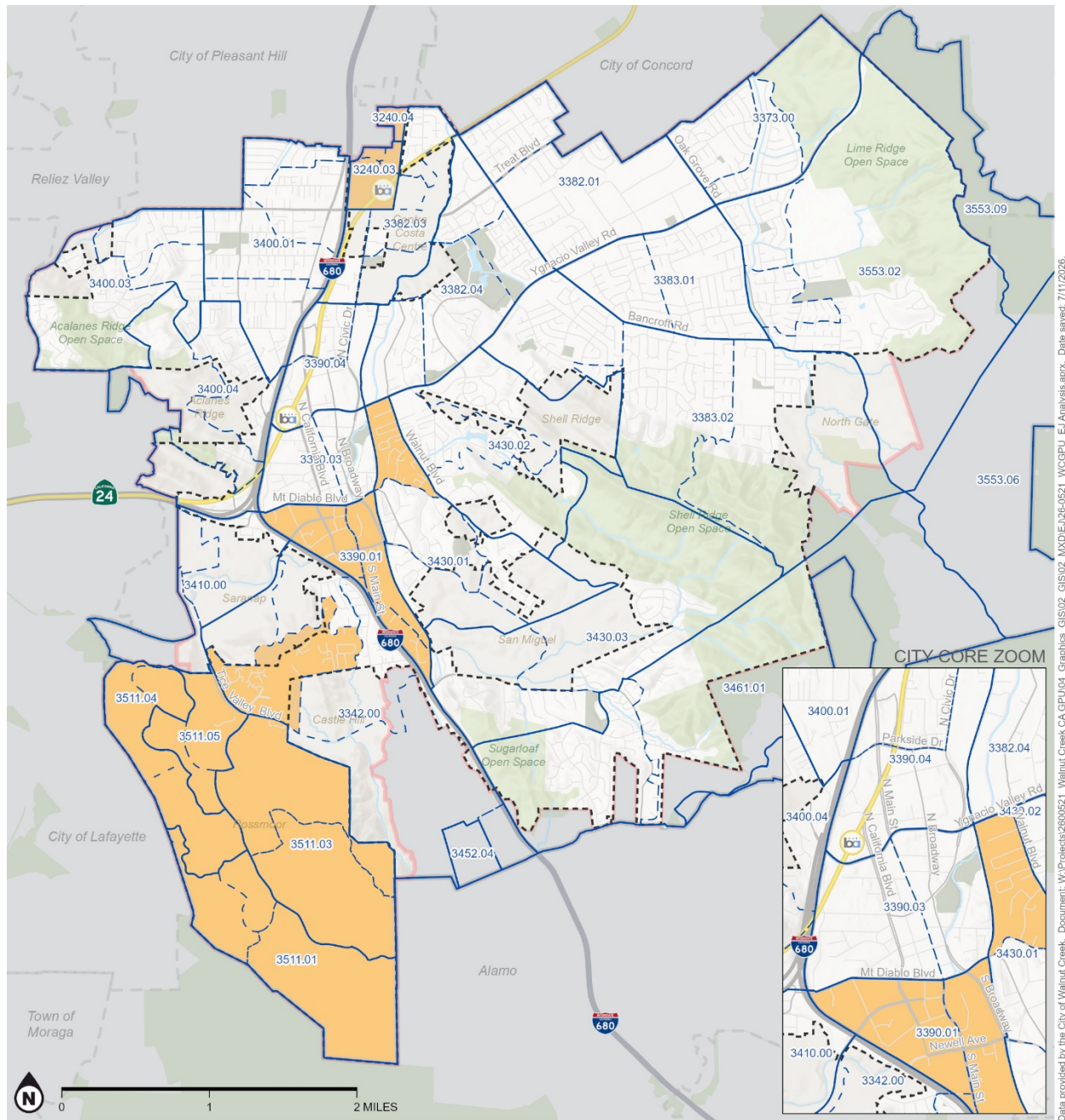
as the Mt. Diablo State Park Disposal Site. The site is listed in CalRecycle's Closed, Illegal, and Abandoned Sites Program and is specifically designated as closed. It likely represents a historic "burn dump," one of many sites used for waste disposal during the 19th and 20th centuries before modern landfill regulations were established. When the State parks system acquired the land in the 1980s, approximately 700 cubic yards of trash remained in the old ranch dump. The site was remediated using funds from the California Integrated Waste Management Board.⁴⁹ In addition to the area being fully remediated, the location of the CalEnviroScreen data point likely marks the access point to the broader historic dumping ground rather than the dump site itself. Based on the documented remediation and closure of the site, the site was not considered to represent a significant current environmental concern for purposes of the HCPA screening.

Since this was the only environmental indicator for this block group, 3430.01.3 was also screened out of the final list of HCPAs.

As a result, Census tract 3390.01 was identified as the only Healthy Community Priority Area (HCPA) in Walnut Creek using this additional, refined analysis as shown in **Figure 17**. This tract qualifies as low-income and scored in the 75th percentile or higher for diesel particulate matter, traffic impacts, and groundwater threats. It is located adjacent to I-680 and covers a portion of the city's downtown, which contains some low-income housing and is located near transit.

⁴⁹ SFGATE. "\$50,000 Grant to Clear Dump on Mt. Diablo." March 25, 1999. <https://www.sfgate.com/bayarea/article/50-000-grant-to-clear-dump-on-mt-diablo-2940031.php>.

Figure 15. Low-Income Areas



Note: Census tracts are four-digit numbers labeled in blue, CalEnviroScreen 4.0 percentiles are one to two-digit numbers labeled in black.

LOW INCOME AREAS

- Census Tracts
- Low Income Areas (MHI < \$101.8k)

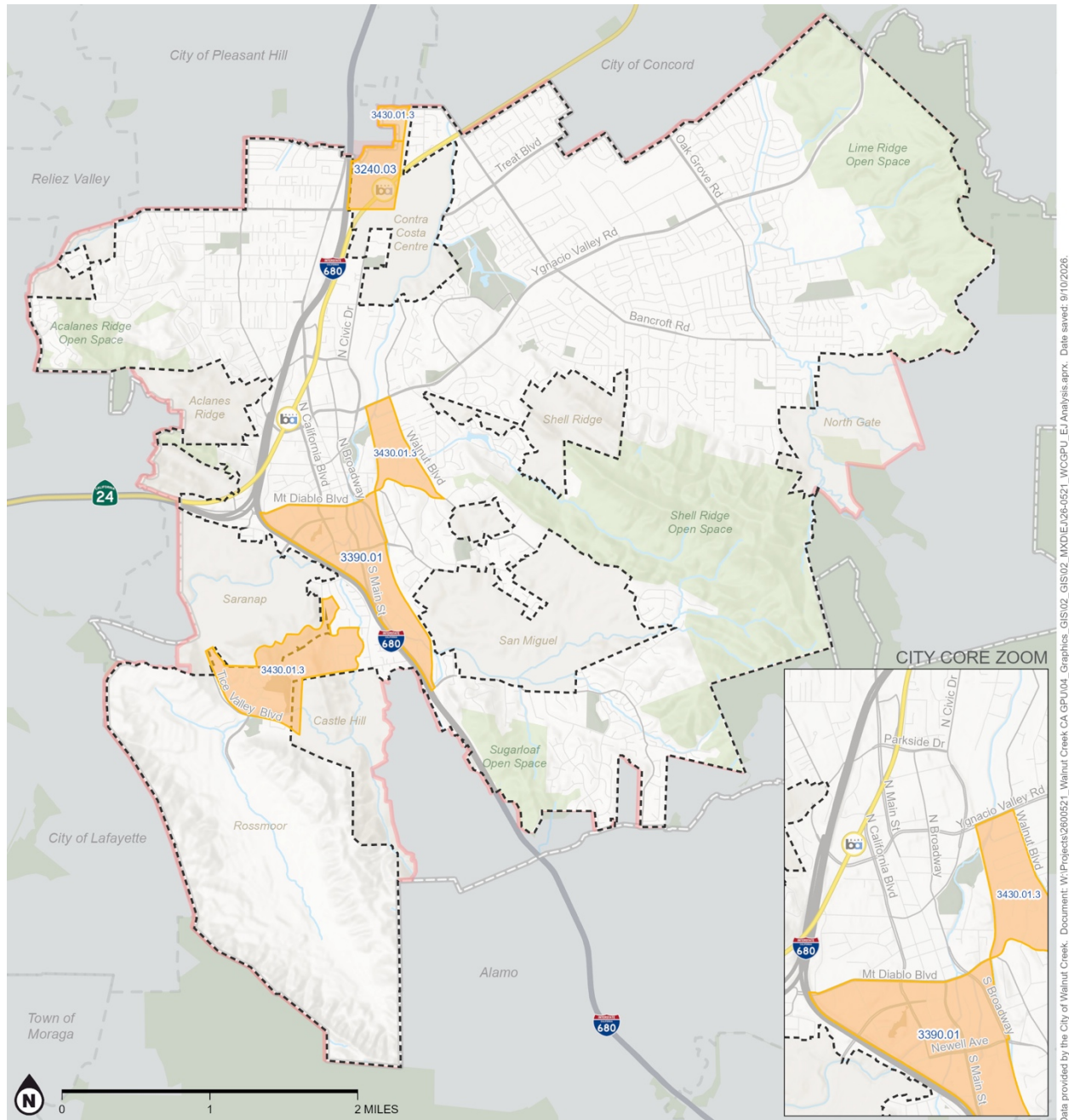
FEATURES + BOUNDARIES

- City Boundary
- Sphere of Influence
- Planning Area
- Parks
- Open Space
- Waterbodies
- Freeways
- BART Stations

CITY OF WALNUT CREEK
GENERAL PLAN UPDATE



Figure 16. Initial Method 2 Healthy Community Priority Areas



INITIAL METHOD 2 HCPAS

CITY OF WALNUT CREEK
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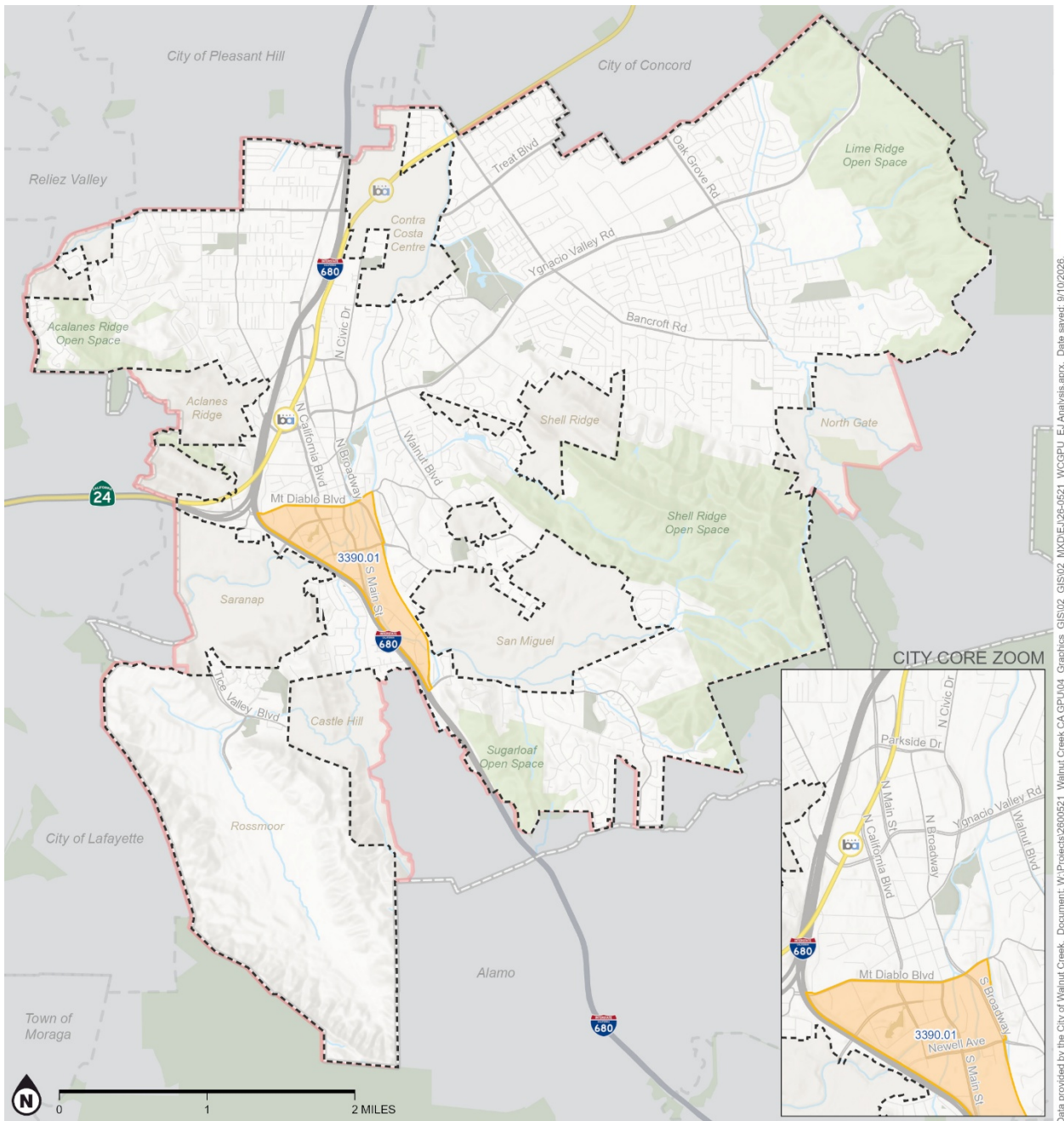


Healthy Community Priority Areas

FEATURES + BOUNDARIES

- City Boundary
- Sphere of Influence
- Planning Area
- Parks
- Open Space
- Waterbodies
- Freeways
- BART Stations

Figure 17. Refined Method 2 Healthy Community Priority Areas



REFINED METHOD 2 HCPAS

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Healthy Community Priority Areas

FEATURES + BOUNDARIES

- City Boundary
- Sphere of Influence
- Planning Area
- Parks
- Open Space
- Waterbodies
- Freeways
- BART Stations

Method 3: Unique and Compounding Risks

A key objective of SB 1000 is to identify communities that experience high environmental burdens and associated health risks by evaluating the cumulative effects of multiple environmental, socioeconomic, and health-related stressors. Analyzing cumulative community burdens helps ensure a fair allocation of protections and resources to the neighborhoods that need them most and provides residents with greater resources and information to make informed decisions and meaningfully participate in government decision-making.

Screening Method 3 provides additional context and analysis to investigate the unique and compounding health risks impacting populations in Walnut Creek using community-specific data that may indicate differing health outcomes or environmental degradation. This methodology considers an expanded set of indicators related to the required SB 1000 topic areas to understand the different types of burdens felt by HCPAs, to assist in the creation of General Plan goals, policies, and implementation actions to address those issues.

Healthcare and Health Conditions

Healthcare Access and Outcomes

While Walnut Creek generally has favorable community health conditions compared to other California cities, some neighborhoods may have greater potential for improved health outcomes than others. Healthcare affordability, longer travel times to clinics and hospitals, and limited transportation options can pose barriers to accessing healthcare, particularly for older adults and residents currently living at or below the poverty line.

A community's ability to access comprehensive, quality, and affordable healthcare services is vital to promoting health, preventing disease, and improving overall quality of life. The rate of health insurance coverage in Walnut Creek is slightly higher than that of Contra Costa County, with over 97% of residents insured in the city compared to about 95% countywide. According to the 2024 American Community Survey 5-year estimates, almost 82% of Walnut Creek residents have private insurance and over 36% have public coverage (since some individuals are enrolled in both private and public insurance programs, these categories are

not mutually exclusive). In contrast, Contra Costa County has lower rates of private insurance at 73% and public insurance at 34%.⁵⁰

Asthma

This analysis found that no Census tracts within Walnut Creek are considered “burdened” for this variable, meaning that no tracts have values at or above the 75th percentile (i.e., within the top 25%) of statewide results in CES 4.0. Furthermore, no tracts exceed the 44th percentile for this indicator.⁵¹

This CalEnviroScreen indicator identifies the number of emergency department visits for asthma per 10,000 people between 2015 and 2017.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the American Lung Association (ALA) both recognize asthma as one of the most common chronic diseases in the country. In 2022, the ALA gave Contra Costa County an “F” grade on ozone levels and particle pollution days and reported that over 100,000 individuals with asthma are at special risk from low air quality.⁵² High asthma rates can place substantial burdens on healthcare systems, disrupt daily life, and disproportionately affect sensitive populations such as youth, people of color, and low-income residents.⁵³

Outdoor air pollution, particularly ozone and particulate matter 2.5 (PM 2.5), can trigger asthma attacks, make asthma worse, and can lead to increased hospitalizations.⁵⁴ People with asthma are also more vulnerable to pneumonia, flu, and other respiratory illnesses.

Heart Disease

For Walnut Creek, no Census tracts within the city ranked in the top 25% (75th percentile and above) statewide for emergency department visits for heart attacks. Individuals with preexisting heart disease or a history of heart attacks may be more sensitive to the effects of pollution than those without such conditions. Both short- and long-term exposure to outdoor air pollution have been linked to increased risk of premature death in individuals who have

⁵⁰ U.S. Census Bureau. 2024. Insurance Coverage. American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates, 2020-2024, Detailed Tables S2703 and S2704.

⁵¹ California Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment (OEHHA). Asthma. <https://oehha.ca.gov/calenviroscreen/indicator/asthma>.

⁵² Contra Costa County Community Services Bureau. 2023-2025. Community Assessment. https://ehsd.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Attachment-A_2023-2025-Community-Assessment.pdf.

⁵³ Perez M.F., and Coutinho M.T. An Overview of Health Disparities in Asthma. *Yale J Biol Med*. 2021 Sep 30;94(3):497-507. PMID: 34602887; PMCID: PMC8461584.

⁵⁴ American Lung Association. Understanding the Strong Link Between Asthma and Air Pollution. <https://www.lung.org/blog/asthma-and-air-pollution>.

previously experienced a heart attack. These risks may be especially pronounced among older adults and those with other preexisting health conditions.⁵⁵

Low-Birth-Weight Infants

No Census tracts within Walnut Creek were identified at or above the 75th percentile (i.e., within the top 25%) of statewide results in CES 4.0 for this infant-related health condition.

Risk factors for low birth weight include poor nutrition, limited prenatal care, high stress, and maternal smoking. Environmental and social conditions—such as neighborhood violence, poverty, lack of access to healthcare or healthy food, and exposure to traffic, industrial or agricultural pollution—can also contribute to low birth weight. Babies born with low birth weight face an increased risk of infant mortality and are more likely to develop chronic conditions, like asthma, later in life.⁵⁶

The “low-birth-weight infants” indicator refers to babies weighing less than 5.5 pounds (2,500 grams) at birth.

Housing

Housing can greatly impact a person’s health due to various physical and environmental factors, including exposure to lead, moisture, volatile organic compounds (VOCs), pesticides, poor drinking water quality, allergens, fall hazards, and exposure to secondhand smoke. Indoor air quality can be worse than outdoor air quality, which can lead to increased exposure to toxins and pollutants, especially during times of prolonged indoor stays.⁵⁷ These factors can lead to various health impacts like asthma attacks, difficulty sleeping, behavioral problems, and other respiratory diseases.

Housing instability (characterized by difficulty paying rent, living in overcrowded conditions, moving frequently, spending most of the household income on housing costs, or experiencing poor housing quality) can also exacerbate negative health outcomes. The trade-offs from high housing costs can lead to increased financial strain, leaving fewer resources to address health.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Air Pollution and Cardiovascular Disease Basics. <https://www.epa.gov/air-research/air-pollution-and-cardiovascular-disease-basics>.

⁵⁶ California Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment (OEHHA). Low-Birth-Weight Infants. <https://oehha.ca.gov/calenviroscreen/fact-sheet/low-birth-weight-infants>.

⁵⁷ California Air Resources Board. (n.d.). Indoor Air. <https://ww2.arb.ca.gov/resources/fact-sheets/reducing-your-exposure-indoor-air-pollution>.

⁵⁸ Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. Housing Instability. <https://odphp.health.gov/healthypeople/priority-areas/social-determinants-health/literature-summaries/housing-instability>.

To support residents, the City offers many programs to increase resources and support housing for families and individuals, including fair housing services, tenant-landlord counseling services, critical safety net resources, and housing rehabilitation loans and grants.⁵⁹

Overcrowded Households

In Walnut Creek, just under 4% of households experience overcrowding,⁶⁰ compared to 4.7% of households in Contra Costa County. Less than 1% of owner-occupied households in Walnut Creek experience overcrowding, compared to more than 10% of renter-occupied households. Furthermore, approximately 6% of renter-occupied households are considered severely overcrowded in the city.

Households are classified as “overcrowded” when occupancy exceeds one person per room, with “severe overcrowding” defined as 1.5 or more persons per room. Such conditions are associated with a range of health outcomes, including increased susceptibility to infectious diseases and heightened risk of mental health disorders. Older adult immigrants, recent immigrant communities, low-income families, and renter-occupied households are more likely to experience household crowding—a situation worsened by the ongoing housing crisis.⁶¹ Among children, overcrowding is correlated with lower levels of educational attainment, greater incidence of behavioral challenges, and elevated rates of both physical and mental health concerns. At the neighborhood level, overcrowded housing places additional demands on community resources and serves as an indicator of structural disparities between household income and housing affordability.⁶²

Housing Cost Burden

The cost of housing is a serious challenge for many in California, as housing often represents the single largest expense for households. Families that allocate more than 30% of their income toward housing costs are considered “cost-burdened”, while households that spend more than 50% of their income on housing are “severely cost-burdened”. Homeowners tend to be less cost-burdened in Walnut Creek, while renters are more likely to be cost-burdened,

⁵⁹ City of Walnut Creek. Current Community Development Block Grant Funded Programs.

<https://www.walnutcreekca.gov/government/departments/housing-programs/housing-and-community-service-grants/community-development-block-grants/current-community-development-block-grant-funded-programs>.

⁶⁰ U.S. Census Bureau. American Community Survey, 2020-2024, 5-Year Estimates, Table B25014: Tenure by Occupants per Room.

⁶¹ California Department of Public Health. 2017. Healthy Communities Data and Indicators Project, Household Crowding. <https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/OHE/Pages/HCI-Search.aspx>.

⁶² Neighborhood Data for Social Change. 2023. Overcrowding. <https://la.myneighborhooddata.org/2021/06/overcrowding/>.

as shown in **Figure 5**. These trends are consistent with data statewide.⁶³ Financial strain is associated with several adverse health outcomes, as cost-burdened households may delay or forego routine medical care and other necessary health-related expenditures.

Civic Engagement

Civic engagement, or civic participation, encompasses a wide range of formal and informal activities related to place-based community engagement and social cohesion. Civic participation is considered a social determinant of health due to its “direct benefit to the community” and “secondary health benefits for participants.”⁶⁴ Activities such as voting, volunteering, participating in organized groups, completing surveys, tending to community gardens, or planning community meetings all beneficially increase an individual’s social support network—and can also lead to benefits such as increased self-esteem, confidence, and greater sense of agency. When scaled across the community, civic engagement fosters coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit and creates a sense of belonging.

Voter Participation Rates

Though not an inclusive indicator for all population groups, voter participation is widely accepted as a proxy for understanding broader dynamics of civic engagement. In Walnut Creek, 83% of registered voters voted in the 2020 General Election. This is about equivalent to the participation rate of Contra Costa County (84%) and higher than that of California (79%) for the same election year.⁶⁵ However, many Census tracts in Walnut Creek reported voter participation lower than the County average, and five tracts were below the 75th percentile for participation statewide (Census tract 3240.04 had 73.5% participation; 3240.03 had 73.1%; 3390.04 had 75.3%; 3390.03 had 75.3%; and 3390.01 had 69.6%).

Linguistic Isolation

Linguistic isolation, characterized as the percentage of the population age five and older who speak English “less than very well,” can impact residents’ ability to participate in community outreach activities and meetings, access healthcare, and connect to other important social and health resources. Over 7% of the total population speaks Spanish at home, and just under 2%

⁶³ Public Policy Institute of California. Californians and the Housing Crisis. <https://www.ppic.org/interactive/californians-and-the-housing-crisis/>.

⁶⁴ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. 2019. Social Determinants of Health: Interventions and Resources: Civic Participation. <https://www.healthypeople.gov/2020/topics-objectives/topic/social-determinants-health/interventions-resources/civic-participation#1>.

⁶⁵ Healthy Places Index. 2022. California Healthy Places Index: Social. <https://www.healthypacesindex.org/>.

of the population speaks Spanish with limited English proficiency.⁶⁶ Other relatively common languages spoken in Walnut Creek include Slavic, Indo-European, and Chinese languages.

Conclusion

This report evaluates the baseline pollution and environmental health conditions that may produce the greatest impacts on the Walnut Creek community, as well as the populations and neighborhoods most vulnerable to these impacts, providing a comprehensive understanding of the city's existing conditions related to community health.

The Healthy Communities analysis identifies conditions related to air quality and pollution exposure (including diesel particulate matter and traffic impacts) and environmental effects (such as groundwater threats, hazardous waste generators and facilities, small toxic air sites, and cleanup sites) within the city. Key sensitive populations within Walnut Creek that may be at higher risk of being affected by these environmental issues include, but are not limited to, children and older adults, renters, individuals experiencing homelessness, and those living with a disability. Access to affordable housing is another key consideration, given the potential health impacts associated with housing cost burdens and overcrowding.

The existing conditions and trends documented in this report provide the foundation for the goals, policies, and implementation actions of the General Plan Update. They establish a shared, data-informed starting point for shaping a healthier, safer, and more vibrant Walnut Creek through 2050.

⁶⁶ U.S. Census Bureau. American Community Survey, 2020-2024, 5-Year Estimates, Table C16001: Language Spoken at Home.

Appendix A. Terms and Definitions

Environmental Justice

Environmental justice (EJ) is the principle that all people have meaningful access to a healthy and safe environment and environmental protections, regardless of their background or where they live. The concept recognizes that environmental conditions and access to resources can vary among communities, and that some communities have historically experienced greater exposure to pollution and environmental hazards or had less access to resources such as healthy and affordable food, clean water, and other environmental benefits.

The environmental justice movement gained momentum in the early 1980s and grew from the Civil Rights and Environmental movements of the 1960s and 1970s. The movement brought attention to differences in the distribution of environmental burdens and benefits, particularly in communities that had historically experienced greater exposure to polluting land uses or limited access to environmental resources. Today, environmental justice provides a framework for considering how environmental conditions, community resources, and land use and transportation decisions affect different communities and for ensuring that environmental protections and opportunities are accessible to all.

Health Equity

Health equity is defined as the ongoing effort to ensure that all people have full and equal access to opportunities that enable them to lead healthy lives.⁶⁷ The concept of equity prioritizes tailored resources and support systems to ensure that everyone has a fair and meaningful opportunity to succeed. Determinants of health equity include social, economic, geographic, political, and physical environmental conditions that can lead to the creation of a fair, just, and healthy society.⁶⁸

Healthy Communities

Healthy communities are places that foster positive health outcomes for all who live, work, pray, or play in them. This is achieved through policy, program, and design interventions in the physical environment. Research has shown that a community's physical environment is one of the social determinants of health that can greatly shape individual and community well-being. While this analysis investigates several key issues that influence health outcomes

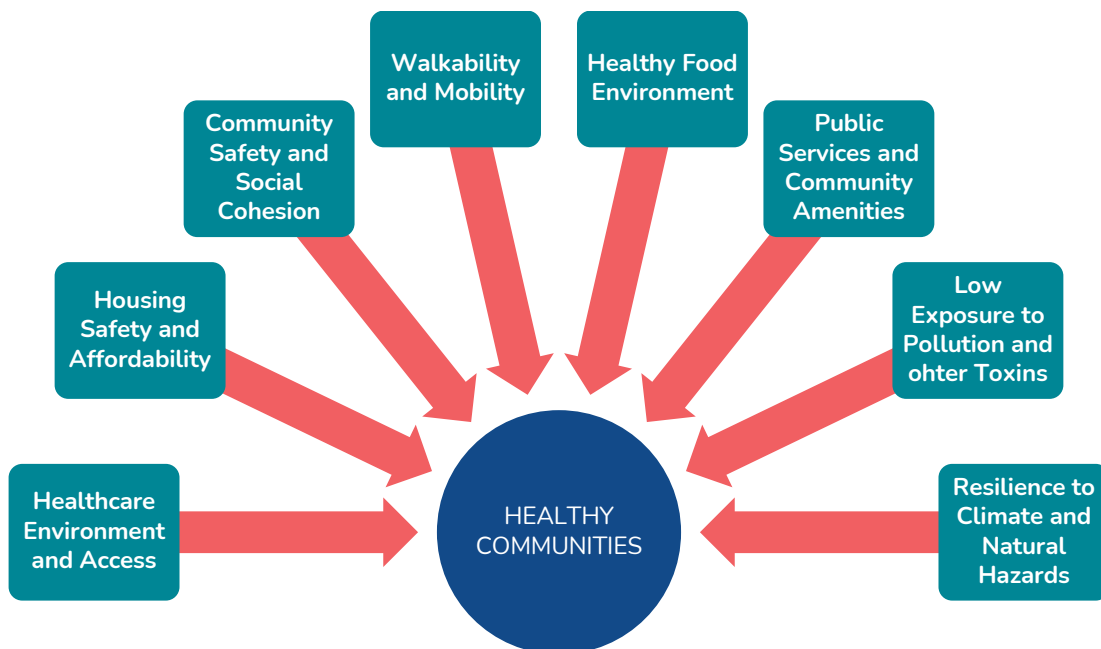
⁶⁷ California Health and Safety Code, Section 131019.5

⁶⁸ California Health and Safety Code, Section 131019.5(a)(1)

in the City of Walnut Creek, other social and economic determinants of health may fall partially or entirely outside of the scope of the Walnut Creek General Plan—including individual behaviors, social support, social norms and attitudes, language or literacy, quality of education, job training, or the socioeconomic status of the population.

The following eight “healthy communities” components (see **Figure 18**) are supported by available data that can be analyzed historically and/or spatially. Their distribution and concentration can be analyzed by population and demographic characteristics. Each component has a documented relationship with the physical environment and health outcomes.

Figure 18. Healthy Communities Components



- **Healthcare Environment and Access.** Access to quality healthcare, including physical access to service providers, institutions, and insurance coverage and usage, strengthens the social safety net and helps people stay healthy year-round.
- **Housing Safety and Affordability.** Housing stability, which is often connected to affordability and employment opportunities, can improve health outcomes. When housing is safe from environmental threats or poor habitability conditions, it can also reduce mental and physical health costs by reducing stress.
- **Community Safety and Social Cohesion.** It is commonly accepted that feeling safe and experiencing low crime rates in a community can increase people’s use of public spaces and support social cohesion, leading to reduced stress and other positive health impacts. Conversely, feeling unsafe in one’s neighborhood may result in higher stress

levels. This relationship is even more complicated for systemically marginalized groups, who are more likely to experience biased treatment from institutions that perceive them as threats to public safety, regardless of their relationships or tenure in the community.⁶⁹

- **Walkability and Mobility.** An effective, efficient transportation network can support increased physical activity, which offers both physical and mental health benefits. It can also improve pedestrian and vehicular safety, expand access to basic services that enhance health, and reduce greenhouse gas emissions, improving community health and promoting resilience to climate change.
- **Healthy Food Environment.** Access to healthy food promotes nutritious diets, lowers risk for chronic diseases, and addresses food insecurity for vulnerable populations. Sources of culturally relevant foods can also play a role, as traditional foods native to people's cultures can promote physical and mental health as well as spiritual well-being.
- **Public Services and Community Amenities.** Access to high-quality parks, schools, childcare, and other community amenities supports healthy lifestyles and enhances overall wellness by creating opportunities for social interaction, recreation, physical activity, and trust-building.
- **Low Exposure to Pollution and Other Toxins.** Exposure to pollution—whether at home, in the workplace, from stationary sources like industrial facilities, or from mobile sources like high-traffic roadways—impacts people's health across all age groups. In some cases, exposure to pollution and other toxins can even cancel out the benefits of healthy behaviors and activities.
- **Resilience to Climate Disasters and Natural Hazards.** Identifying climate risks can help local governments implement equitable strategies for community preparedness. A community's resilience to climate and natural hazards depends on its ability to maintain health and economic well-being in the face of long-term environmental changes.

⁶⁹ He, Qian. 2025. "Contextualizing Crime as an Environmental Stressor on Mental Health in Urban Communities: A Scoping Review." *Social Sciences & Humanities Open*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssaho.2025.101765>.