

HOFFMAN-VIA MONTE

COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT

A report prepared by graduate students in the Urban and Regional Planning Department at San Jose State University
December 2013

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(Back row, from left): Kevin Schroder, Aliza Paz, George Casey, Matt Huerta (NHSSV), Councilmember Johnny Khamis, Pranjali Deokule, Marco Arguelles, Binh Nguyen, Chris Adams, Joanna Huitt, Michael Allen, Professor Richard Kos.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This planning report synthesizes the assessment conducted by a graduate student team in San José State University's (SJSU) Department of Urban and Regional Planning. Students completed a community assessment to help inform future planning activities in the Hoffman-Via Monte (HVM) neighborhood located six miles south of Downtown San Jose. The need for this assessment stems from concerns raised by Neighborhood Housing Services Silicon Valley (NHSSV) on behalf of the Responsible Landlord Engagement Initiative (RLEI). This initiative is composed of community members, property owners, residents, city officials, and community leaders. The graduate students documented and assessed the existing conditions in HVM by collecting quantitative and qualitative data.

The assessment work was divided into three teams: community design and policy analysis, stakeholder interviews, and map production. The design team was assigned to study the physical conditions in the neighborhood and document the quantitative data for the neighborhood. The mapping team prepared maps to represent the demographic data, as well as the quantitative data collected by the design team. The stakeholder team was assigned with the task of studying the social conditions in the neighborhood by conducting formal and informal interviews of persons having vested interest in HVM.

In addition to the interviews conducted by the stakeholder team, two events were organized to involve the HVM community. The first event was organized to conduct the NeighborWorks surveys, a standardized national survey on residents' experiences and perceptions of their neighborhood. The San Jose State University students, YMCA volunteers, representatives from the police department, and District 10 Council Member Khamis participated in the event. It

was promoted as a block party for HVM with food for participants and raffle prizes for neighborhood children. The following event was a community conversation, which was held in the HVM neighborhood at Cornerstone Community Church. The community conversation presented a good opportunity for social interaction with residents and other stakeholders.

As a result of the assessment, a number of assets and challenges were observed in the Hoffman-Via Monte neighborhood. Notable assets include the presence of trees, well-landscaped front yards, and access to neighborhood shopping centers. Whole Foods, Pioneer High School, and two churches are other community anchors. The vacant site for the proposed community center is also a potential asset for the community. Notable challenges include the lack of access controls, lack of surveillance opportunities, poor alleyway conditions, and other problems such as graffiti and blight. The demographic data suggests that the neighborhood has a higher percentage of renters, much larger household sizes, and a younger population compared to the City of San Jose. While the unemployment rate is similar for HVM and San Jose, the median household income in HVM is also much lower than that of the City of San Jose.

Despite the challenges noted in HVM, there are many opportunities for improvement. The utilization of shared spaces for community activities, improvements to access control, and improved surveillance opportunities can help reduce criminal activity and enhance the living conditions in HVM. In summary, the results of the assessment reveal the need for improvement to the physical conditions of the HVM neighborhood. This requirement can be fulfilled with the support and cooperation of property owners in the neighborhood.

BACKGROUND

This is Hoffman-Via Monte

This section of the report introduces the Hoffman-Via Monte neighborhood, the clients, and stakeholders interested in the neighborhood. In addition, it summarizes past planning efforts, discusses the need for assessment, and states the goals and objectives of the study.

1.1 LOCATION OVERVIEW: WHERE IS HOFFMAN-VIA MONTE?

The Hoffman-Via Monte (HVM) neighborhood (Figure 1) is approximately six miles south of Downtown San Jose in Council District 10. HVM is bordered by Blossom Hill Road to the north, Almaden Expressway to the east, Chris Hotts Park to the south, and Pioneer High School to the west. It is close to Highway 85 and Highway 87, and is served by three Valley Transportation Authority bus lines: Routes 27, 64, and 67. There is also a light rail line nearby, with a station located approximately 0.3 mile to the east of HVM.

Multiple commercial establishments are concentrated alongside both Blossom Hill Road and Almaden Expressway. The shopping center immediately adjacent to HVM is anchored by a Whole Foods Market and includes several smaller retail establishments that serve the surrounding areas. United Methodist Church, Cornerstone Community Church, and Pioneer High School are also situated within the HVM neighborhood, which can be seen along with the shopping centers in Figure 2.

HVM's 134 residential properties are physically separated from each other due to the position of the high school and churches. Hoffman Court is the smaller of the two sections; Via Monte Drive, the larger of the two sections, is made up of six residential roads and the majority of properties are located in this area. Not only are there no access points connecting the two residential sections of HVM to each other, there are also no access points connecting the neighborhood to surrounding neighborhoods.

1.2. WHAT ARE THE LAND USES IN HOFFMAN-VIA MONTE?

The HVM neighborhood has a general plan designation of "Urban Residential" in San Jose's general plan, Envision San Jose 2040. "Urban Residential" is a neighborhood designation that allows for a density of 30 to 95 housing units per acre including mixed-use developments of retail, office, or community facilities, with a height restriction of three to twelve stories. The commercial portion in HVM is part of a larger "Urban Village Area" that may have a wide mixture of commercial, residential, institutional, or other land uses (City of San Jose). The

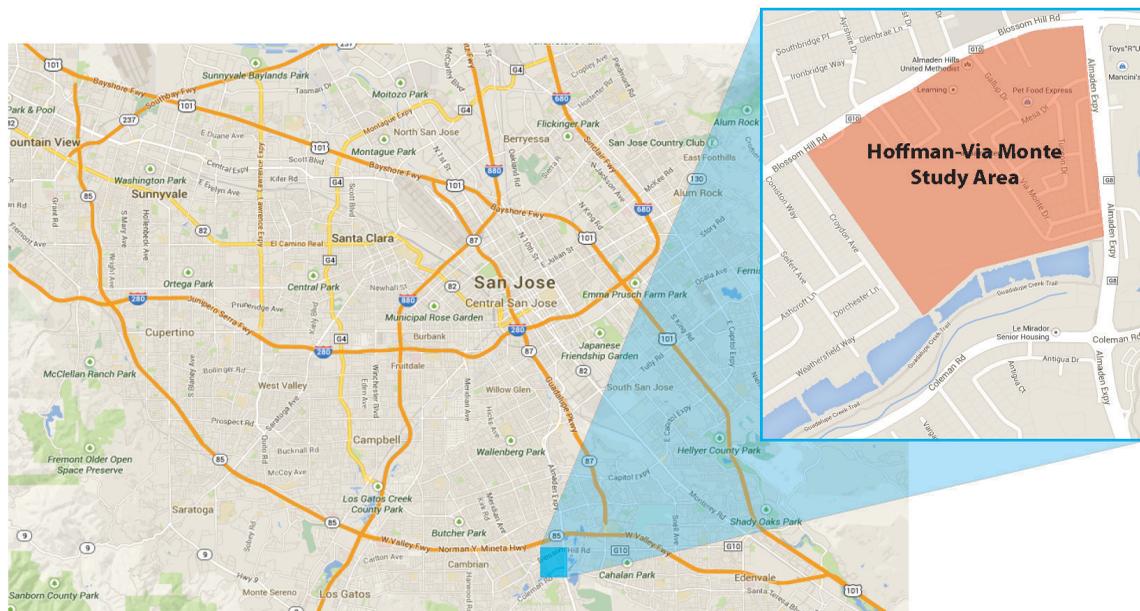


Figure 1: HVM study area map

Land Use Map displayed above in Figure 2 shows the location of various existing land uses throughout HVM.

The general plan designations are supported by San Jose’s Zoning Ordinance. The main residential area in HVM is zoned R-M, or Multiple Residential District. According to the zoning ordinance, the purpose of the Multiple Residential District “is to reserve land for the construction, use, and occupancy of higher

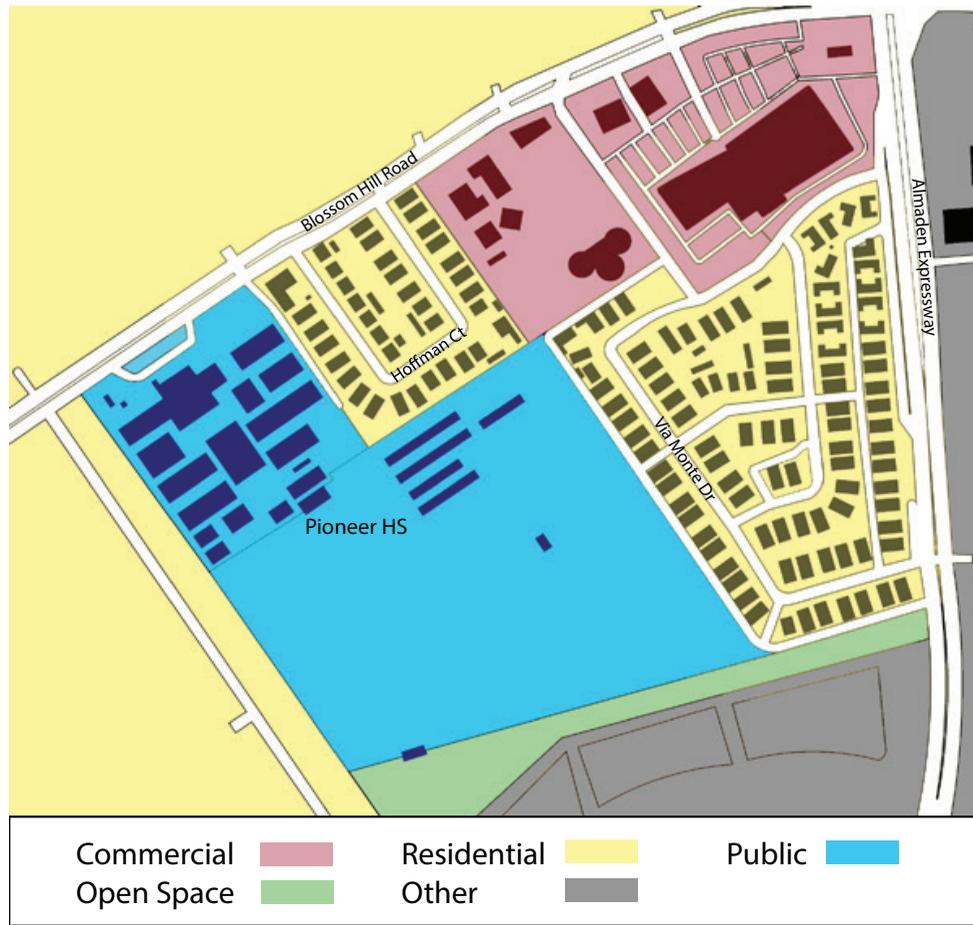


Figure 2: Land uses in HVM

density residential development (City of San Jose).” The commercial area adjacent to the homes is zoned for a mixture of Neighborhood, Pedestrian, and General Commercial to serve both the neighborhood and the region.

1.3 WHY IS AN ASSESSMENT OF HVM NEIGHBORHOOD CONDITIONS NEEDED?

The call for an assessment of HVM stems from concerns raised by NHSSV on behalf of RLEI, and by various community members throughout San Jose; property owners, residents, city officials, and community leaders have all expressed a need to address the existing conditions within the neighborhood. Problems such as gang activities, excessive trash, abandoned shopping carts, insufficient property maintenance, graffiti, and abandoned vehicles throughout the neighborhood are among the list of concerns voiced by community members. Repeated violations of



Photo 1: Existing conditions and challenges in HVM

CODE ENFORCEMENT VIOLATIONS IN HOFFMAN-VIA MONTE

VIOLATIONS 4/30/2009 - 9/30/2013

Type	Count	Percentage
Shopping Carts	18	25%
Dumping	13	18%
Infestation	10	14%
Interior Maintenance	9	12%
Landscaping	8	11%
Overflowing Garbage	8	11%
Graffiti	3	4%
Property Blight	3	4%
Illegal Structure	1	1%
Total	73	100%

* Many Code Enforcement reports contained more than one type of violation. Reports with multiple violations were classified by the category that made living conditions most unsuitable. Incidents classified as "Routine Inspection" or lacking a description were removed from the analysis.

Violation Definitions

Shopping Carts	Collection of abandoned shopping carts
Dumping	Inoperable cars, trash, and other household items left in public areas
Infestation	Vermin, bugs, or mold within the house
Interior Maintenance	Broken appliance or fixtures inside a home that makes living conditions unsuitable
Landscaping	Unmaintained yard
Overflowing Garbage	Excess garbage flowing out of or next to bins
Graffiti	Illicit Writing and drawing in public places
Property Blight	Clutter in yard that is not trash
Illegal Structure	Buildings erected without permit



Figure 3: Code enforcement violations in HVM

the San Jose Municipal Code have been documented in the past decade by Code Enforcement inspectors, causing concern throughout the community. The map in Figure 3 shows the locations of code violations that have occurred in HVM during the past three years.

1.4 WHAT IS THE ROLE OF NHSSV & RLEI?

The Responsible Landlord Engagement Initiative (RLEI) is a partnership of community based organizations whose mission is to encourage property owners to be active in proper management and maintenance of their properties. Acting as a mediator between concerned residents and property owners, RLEI works toward engaging landlords in their commitment to their tenants and the community.

RLEI was started by a non-profit community development organization called Neighborhood Housing Services Silicon Valley (NHSSV) with the mission of providing neighborhood services to middle and low income families. NHSSV promotes responsible homeownership by using community engagement and education as tools to leverage the revitalization and economic stability of Silicon Valley neighborhoods.

1.5 WHO ARE THE STAKEHOLDERS WITH AN INTEREST IN HVM?

HVM residents, property owners, community leaders, business owners, and city representatives are just a few of the stakeholders that want to see a change in the neighborhood. Figure 4 shows the list of primary stakeholders who were identified as having a vested interest in the HVM area and want to see improvements made to the neighborhood.



Figure 4: List of primary stakeholders interviewed for this assesment

1.6 WHAT WERE THE PREVIOUS PLANNING EFFORTS?

HVM was part of the Strong Neighborhood Initiative (SNI), an effort led by the San Jose Redevelopment Agency to revitalize struggling neighborhoods. Previous efforts to improve the neighborhood included adoption of Neighborhood Improvement Plans in 2002 and 2009. These plans were designed to identify community goals and guide future investments in the neighborhood.

The plans identified key issues that affected the quality of life for residents of HVM, developed a comprehensive plan with key implementation items, and assigned a specific timeline to different departments and entities for specific tasks. Some of the key issues identified in the plans included building the Hoffman-Via Monte Neighborhood Center, improving neighborhood landscaping, improving Chris

Hotts Park, increasing neighborhood police presence, establishing recreation programs, implementing alleyway improvements, improving neighborhood lighting, and addressing blighted properties.

While not all of the goals in the SNI were achieved, the initiative was able to make improvements to some deteriorated alleyways, added new fencing and, with proactive efforts from Code Enforcement, helped to reduce blight and illegal dumping. However, during the state's budget crisis, the Redevelopment Agency was dissolved in February 2012. This meant that city funding for the SNI dried up and a new strategy for neighborhood improvement was needed.

1.7 WHAT ARE THE GOALS AND OBJECTIVES FOR THIS ASSESSMENT?

The primary objective of this project was to thoroughly document and assess the existing conditions in HVM. This can then be used to establish a baseline that will inform future efforts for improving the neighborhood. We pursued this objective through GIS mapping, interviews with key stakeholders, and a careful analysis of physical conditions in HVM. The next chapter provides details on this work.

METHODOLOGY

How was Hoffman-Via Monte Assessed?

This section of the report discusses the methods that were used to assess the HVM neighborhood. The assessment work was divided into three teams: the community design and policy analysis team, the stakeholder team, and the mapping team. The design team was assigned to study the physical conditions in the neighborhood such as urban design elements that might contribute to or improve crime and security conditions. The mapping team prepared maps to represent current demographic data of HVM. The stakeholder team studied social conditions in the neighborhood by conducting formal and informal interviews of persons having vested interest in HVM. The community outreach conducted by the graduate student team in HVM also presented a good opportunity for social interaction with residents and other stakeholders.

2.1 HOW WERE THE EXISTING PHYSICAL CONDITIONS OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD RECORDED?

2.1.1 DESIGN GUIDELINES, CPTED, AND ABCD APPROACH

In order to assess the physical conditions in HVM, a variety of documents were reviewed. Urban design policies, land use maps, Code Enforcement regulations, and zoning for the City of San Jose were used to form the basis for the evaluation. San Jose's Residential Zoning District determines which uses will be allowed, specifies the design standards, and defines the legal requirements for different developments such as: parking, setbacks, and landscaping requirements. However, many of the properties in HVM were built before certain standards were established, thus, not all properties conformed to the requirements.

The City's Residential Design Guidelines include specific design elements and recommendations for different types of residential developments in San Jose. After reviewing the guidelines it was observed that the main type of housing in HVM, four-plexes, are not directly referenced. In addition, the recommendations in the guidelines are not meant to serve as legal requirements for the existing residential

properties. However, the general design recommendations such as the provision of open space, fencing, and building design can be applied to the HVM area.

In order to record the existing physical conditions in Hoffman-Via Monte, the team of graduate students developed a survey instrument to methodically analyze physical conditions in HVM. The topics for the survey were developed by incorporating the principles of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED), the Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) approach, and the local code violation citations.

CPTED (see Figure 5) is a strategy which focuses on small-scale design analysis to identify community spaces that require modifications in order to reduce criminal activities (Sarah Price, 2013). It incorporates three guiding principles: access control, surveillance opportunities, and territorial definition. *Access control* refers to the presence of security features such as gates or professional guards. *Surveillance opportunities* refer to factors such as the orientation of buildings, placement of windows, lighting and visibility. The principle of *territorial definition* refers to the sense of ownership in the neighborhood. Indicators such as the presence of a fence or the condition of private or public areas fall under the principle of territoriality.

Along with the CPTED principles, the ABCD approach also guided assessment. This community development approach focuses first on the positive physical and social aspects of a neighborhood and, in doing so, does not advocate a “needs-based” assessment approach (Timothy Crowe, 2000). The approach engages community members by identifying and applying local skills and talents to solve neighborhood problems. Thus, it creates an optimistic environment for development activities. For the purpose of the survey, neighborhood assets such as the presence of trees, community gardens, pocket parks, and access to amenities were considered.



Figure 5: The three principles of CPTED

The primary purpose of conducting the survey was to examine whether the physical conditions in HVM had any influence on the high crime rate and blight

conditions found in the neighborhood. After studying the principles of CPTED, the team found out that urban design elements such as street facing windows, presence of fences, entry gates, street lights, and exterior condition of the property can influence the rate of criminal activity in a neighborhood. These design elements were included in the survey.

2.1.2 HOW WAS THE TERRAFLEX APPLICATION USED TO DOCUMENT SITE OBSERVATIONS?

After developing the final survey instrument, the existing physical conditions of HVM were recorded with the help of TerraFlex, a smartphone application created by Trimble. The application assists with field data collection as well as management of the geospatial data produced from the survey. In order to document our observations, the survey instrument was organized into multiple forms. Three forms (see figure 6) were created to record property level observations, block level observations, and location of street lights.

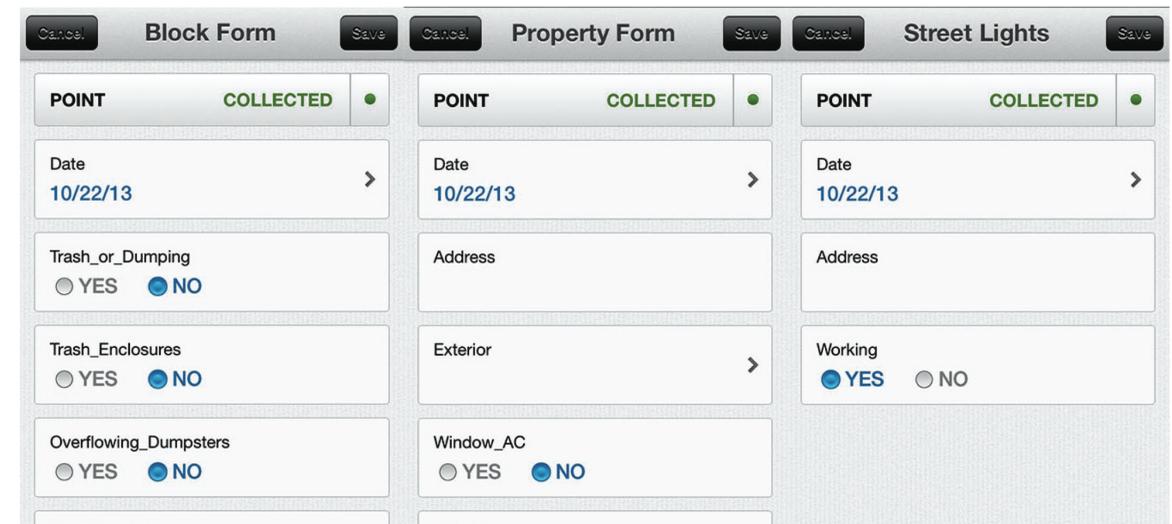


Figure 6: A screenshot of the three TerraFlex forms used for data collection. From left to right: Block form, Property form, Street Lights.

In order to collect data tied to the property form, we visited the HVM neighborhood and stopped in front of each four-plex to record existing conditions such as the presence of street-facing windows, landscaped front yards, and security gates or fences. For the block-level and streetlight forms, observations were recorded for each section of the streets, such as the presence of trash, streetlights, and landscape features blocking sight lines. By completing these forms we identified areas with blighted conditions and other areas of concern in the neighborhood.

Figure 7 shows the results of the TerraFlex data collection. The points represent the spots where data were collected, with red for information collected at the block level, teal for individual properties, and green for each street light (public and private, functioning or not) that is present in HVM.

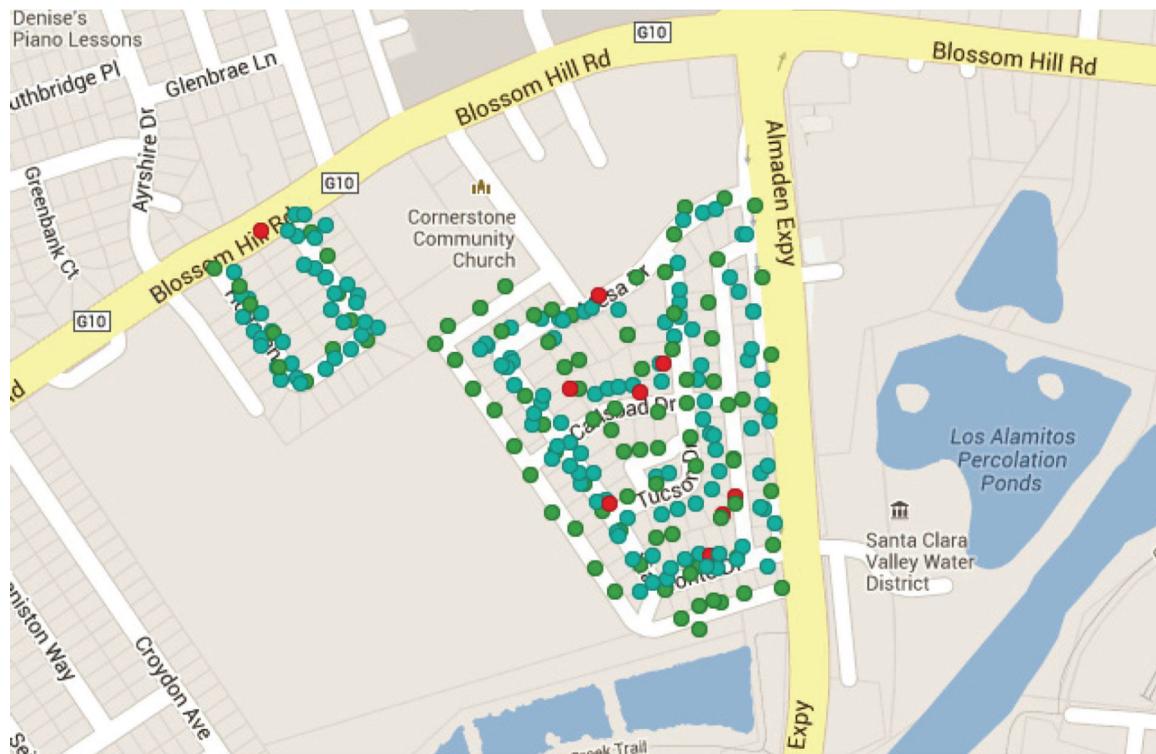


Figure 7: A screenshot of the data collected using TerraFlex



Photo 2: Councilmember Khamis (left) being interviewed by George Casey (right) from the stakeholder team

2.2 HOW WERE SOCIAL CONDITIONS IN HOFFMAN-VIA MONTE CAPTURED?

In order to better understand the social conditions in HVM, fourteen in-depth interviews were conducted with multiple vested parties that live or work in and around HVM. The goal was to solicit vital information to help us identify positive community assets, opportunity areas, and potential solutions for neighborhood improvements. The stakeholders were identified in collaboration with Neighborhood Housing Services of Silicon Valley.

Each interview began by asking the all interviewees the same five questions in order to draw possible connections between the various stakeholder's responses, followed by several questions tailored to each stakeholder's specific role (e.g. police were asked specific crime questions). The five core questions were:

- Please name the top three positive assets in Hoffman-Via Monte.
- What groups/organizations/people can participate more to bring about positive change in HVM?

- What are the top three problems/issues that need improvement in HVM?
- What are the causes of the problems?
- What are potential solutions to the problems?

Data from the interviews was analyzed for common themes and was compared to the on-site observations.

2.3 COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Through formal interviews and informal conversations, efforts were made to include the viewpoints of stakeholders within the HVM community (e.g. residents and local community leaders) and from outside the community (e.g. elected officials, members of the police, and Code Enforcement officials).



Photo 3: Photos from the HVM block party and NeighborWorks survey

In addition to the interviews conducted by the Stakeholder team, several events were organized to involve the wider HVM community. One such event occurred on November 9, 2013, organized by NHSSV to conduct the NeighborWorks surveys (a standardized national survey on residents' experiences and perceptions of their neighborhood to gauge quality of life factors). YMCA volunteers, representatives from the police department, District 10 Council Member Khamis and his staff, and San Jose State University students participated in the event to help with logistics, translation, and to facilitate the day's activities. The event was promoted as a block party for HVM with food for participants and raffle prizes for neighborhood children.



Photo 4: Photos from HVM block party on November 9, 2013

To publicize the event, invitations were sent to HVM residents by NHSSV and assisted by Victor Gomez's District 10 team. In addition, on the day of the event, organizers went door-to-door to encourage residents to join and participate in the event. While the main objective of the event was to conduct surveys, the event also sought to draw residents out of their homes to start a conversation on how HVM

could be improved. This event also presented a good opportunity for the student team to investigate the alleyway conditions and other areas that might have been overlooked during the survey.

About 45 residents attended the event and 20 of the participants were children living in the area. PhotoVoice was an activity used to start the community conversation by documenting positive aspects in HVM and those that needed improvement through the eyes of its youngest residents - the children of HVM. To achieve this, disposable cameras were given to each child who came to the event. With their parents' consent, they were led around HVM by YMCA volunteers to take photos of places where they play and like, as well as places where they didn't feel safe or wished to see improved.



Photo 5: Kids and the SJSU team participating in the PhotoVoice event during HVM block party

These pictures were then compiled into collages at a follow-up event on December 5, 2013. At this event, not only were the findings of the class presented to the

community, but residents were encouraged to actively participate in a dialogue with the team to share their first-hand knowledge, experience, and perception of HVM.



Photo 6: Kids presenting their photo collage at the Community Conversation event

The December 5 event, publicized as a “Community Conversation,” was held at Cornerstone Church on Gallup Drive. San Jose State University students and NHSSV took the lead in organizing the event. Other groups that assisted were the South Valley YMCA and the office of Councilmember Johnny Khamis. To publicize the event, door hangers were delivered to all of the residents in Hoffman Via Monte. Additionally, the event was mentioned to parents at the YMCA after-school program. The event's main goals were to build upon the collaboration at the November 9 block party, present an opportunity for community input and collaboration, and to showcase the work of the San Jose State students.

The Community Conversation was held in the lobby of Cornerstone Church. Conversation stations showcased posters and maps, and tables were set up for discussions and a survey area. An area was set up for food that was provided by NHSSV and some residents. The posters presented facts about HVM, maps of the neighborhood profile, and code-enforcement violations. Also included was a large poster with a blank word bubble titled “I want ____ in my neighborhood,” that adults and children later filled in.



Photo 7: Photos from the Community Conversation on December 12, 2013

There were activities for both adults and children of HVM that were led by the San Jose State students and the YMCA staff. Both groups placed pictures of the neighborhood (taken during the November 9 event) on posters that were split into different sections that asked questions such as what they would like to change, where they do and do not play (or where they do and do not let their kids play), and what they would like to see on the empty lot.

Each group also had the option to write and draw their thoughts on the poster. The adults and the children completed activities separately, then both groups presented their posters to share their thoughts and explain why they placed the pictures where they did. The activities that took place at the Community Conversation can be seen in Photos 6 through 9.

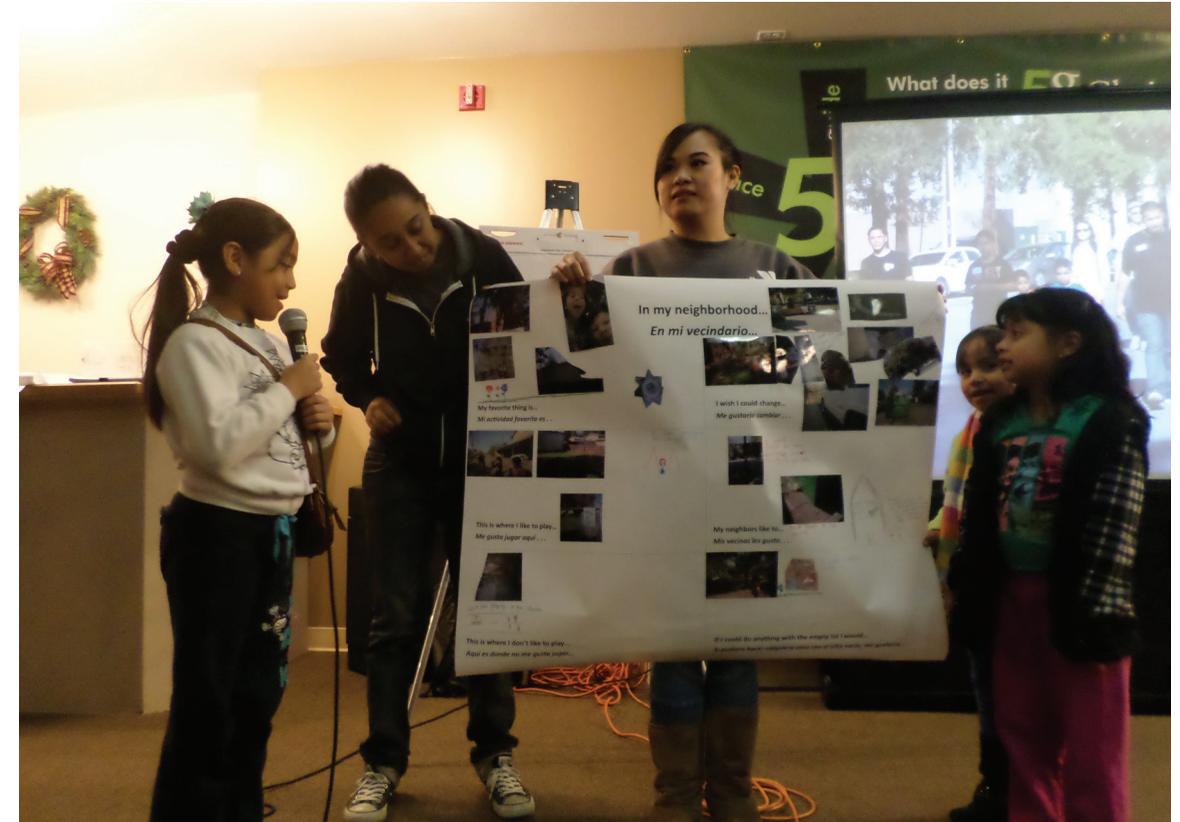


Photo 8: Kids presenting their photo collage at the Community Conversation

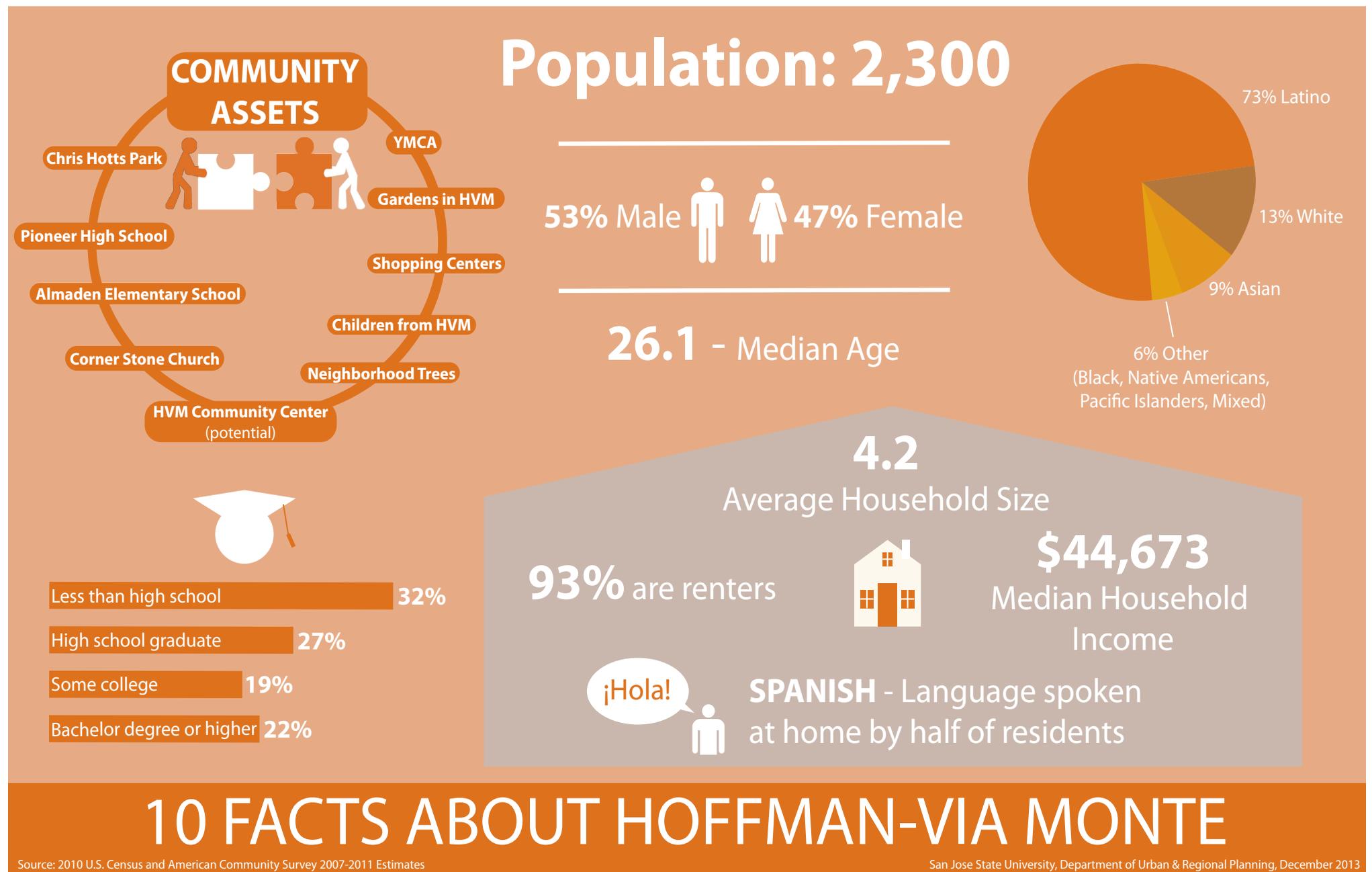


Photo 9: Discussion with stakeholders during the Community Conversation

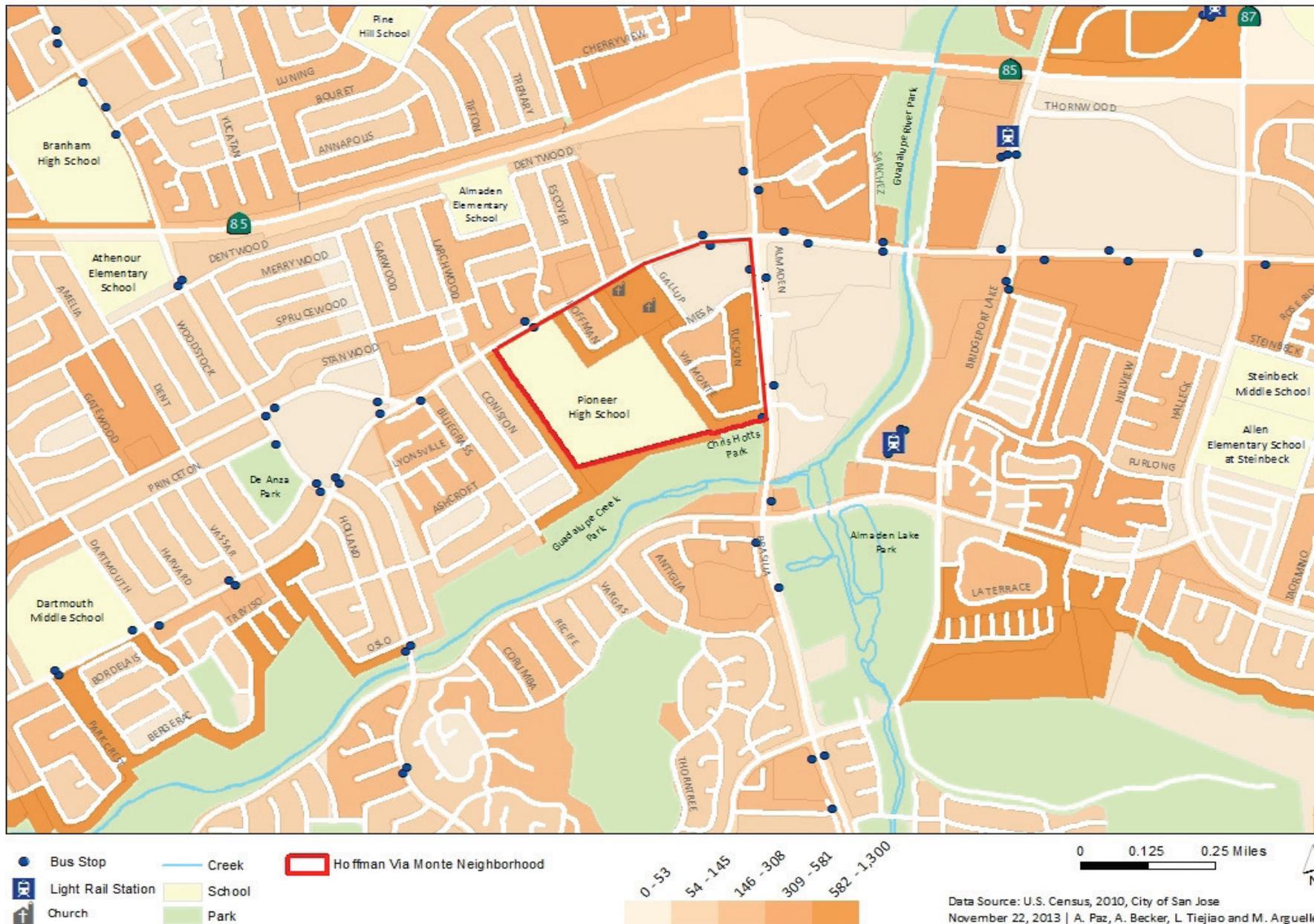
ANALYSIS

What are the findings in HVM?

This section of the report summarizes the findings of the assessment. It is a synthesis of the assessment completed by the three teams: the design team, the stakeholder team, and the mapping team.



Source: 2010 U.S. Census and American Community Survey 2007-2011 Estimates
 San Jose State University, Department of Urban & Regional Planning, December 2013
Figure 8: An infographic representing interesting HVM demographic data



Map 1: Population in HVM by block, 2010

*Census data was obtained at the block level, and included areas within HVM as well as beyond for context.

3.1 THE RESIDENTS OF HVM

According to the 2010 Census*, there are about 2,300 residents in HVM. This translates to an average household size of 4.2, higher than that of the City's (3.1) and that of the surrounding area (US Census Bureau). A map showing household size can be seen in Map 2.

HVM has a high percentage of foreign born (47 percent) and recent (arriving after the year 2000) immigrant population (22 percent). This is also reflected in the languages spoken at home; in fact, approximately two-thirds of the population in HVM speaks a language other than English at home, according to

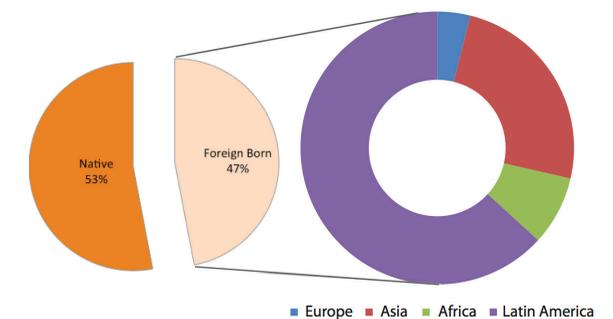
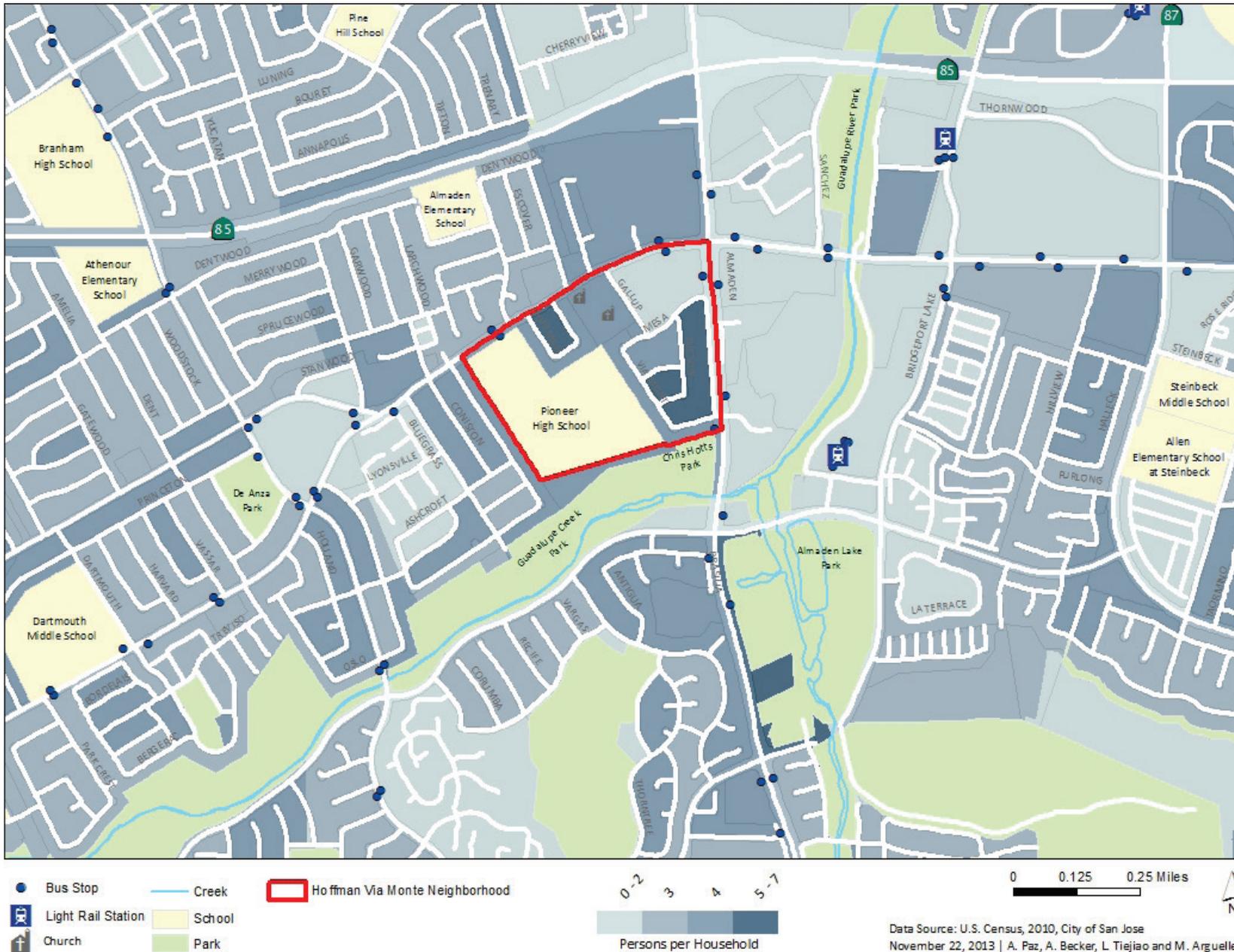


Figure 9: Chart showing the native composition in HVM



Map 2: Average household size in HVM by block, 2010

the US Census Bureau. Figure 9 shows the origin of HVM residents (native versus foreign born).

The population in HVM is younger than the city as a whole, with a median age of 26.1 years; this is about ten years younger than that of the City's. The racial/ethnic composition in Figure 10 shows that the Latino population in HVM, at 73 percent, is more than two times greater than city-wide average.

The majority (94 percent) of residents are renters. This is higher than the rental rate of 42 percent for the city as a whole. While the unemployment rate is similar for HVM and San Jose, American Community Survey (ACS) data shows the median household income in HVM (\$44,673) to

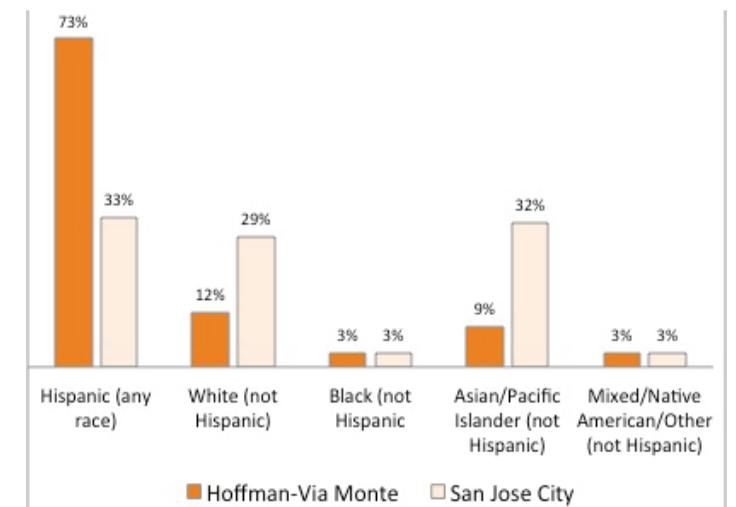
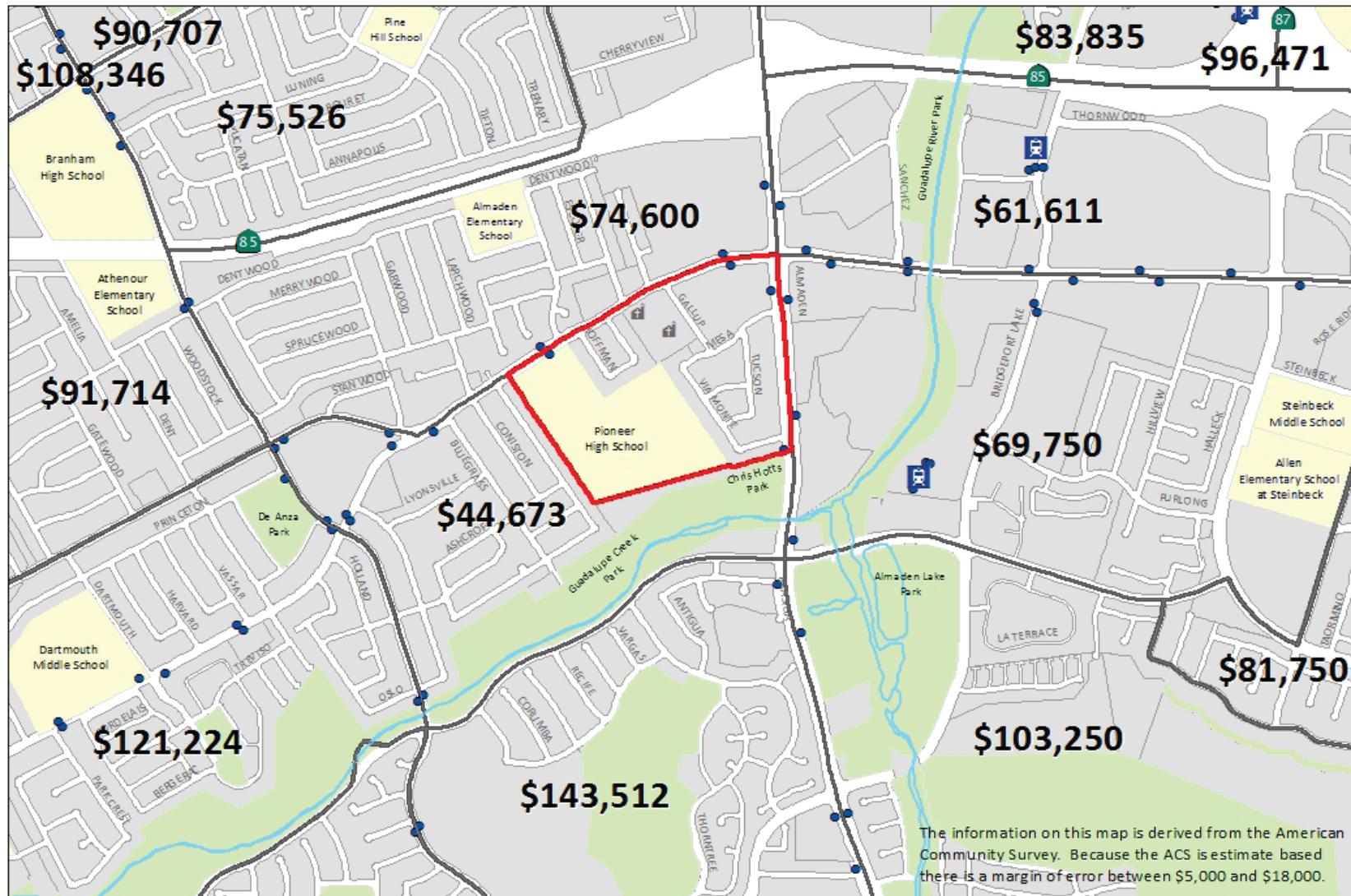


Figure 10: The racial/ethnic composition of HVM



Map 3: Median household income in HVM by tract, (2007-2011 estimates)

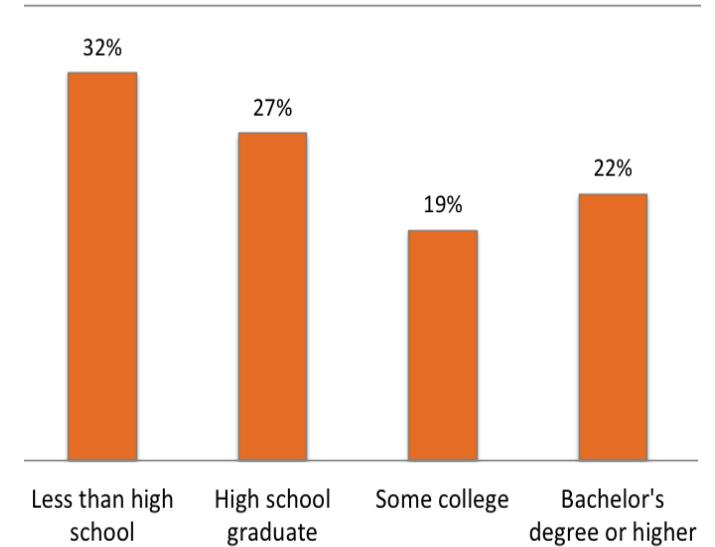


Figure 11: Educational attainment in HVM

be much lower than that of the City of San Jose (\$80,764) and of Santa Clara County (\$89,604). Locally, the disparity in income between HVM and surrounding neighborhoods is shown in Map 3.

Approximately 32 percent of residents 25 years and older in HVM have no high school diploma, and only about 22 percent have a bachelor's degree or higher as shown in Figure 11. Approximately 14 percent of the families in the neighborhood are living below the poverty level. Another interesting fact about HVM is that 17 percent of people walk to take public transportation to work, much higher than the citywide average of 5 percent.

3.2 ASSETS IN HVM

From a physical and urban design perspective, the assets of HVM include trees that provide shade for properties and streets. The average number of trees on each property is four. On Hoffman Court, there is a slight decrease in the number of trees as compared to the rest of the neighborhood.

In addition to trees, many properties have vegetable gardens and upkeep landscape, showing that there are residents and owners who care about the condition of their properties. HVM residents have access to food, shopping, churches, and schools, all within walking distance of their homes. There are also many pedestrians moving through the neighborhood at all times of the day. On most of the streets, automobiles tend to travel at a slow speed, making HVM a relatively safe place for pedestrians as well as for children playing in the neighborhood.

Many of the four-plexes feature doors and windows that face each other, allowing for interaction between residents and surveillance of common spaces. The properties



Photo 10: Potential site for community center; vegetable gardens in HVM



Photo 11: Opportunities for "eyes on the street"

facing Carlsbad Drive, Tucson Drive, Via Monte Drive, Almaden Expressway, and a part of Hoffman Court were observed to have more street facing windows and entrances as compared to other streets in HVM. The presence of street facing windows and entrances suggests that there are "eyes on the street": opportunities for monitoring activity on the street.

Potential assets in the future include the development of a community center and providing residents with access to the private swimming pool located on Mesa Drive. The proposed site for a community center is located at the intersection of Gallup Drive and Mesa Drive. This site was acquired by the city's redevelopment agency in 2008. This community center, if developed, can provide opportunities for recreational activities or neighborhood events planned for HVM.

3.3 CHALLENGES IN HVM

Within HVM, property conditions vary from street to street. Code violations and other challenges in HVM include an excessive amount of abandoned shopping carts, limited street parking, lack of access control, insufficient surveillance opportunities, and absence of enclosed trash receptacles. The presence of excessive trash and other abandoned items was noted both within alleyways and along adjacent streets.

3.3.1 LACK OF ACCESS CONTROL

The properties in HVM have no gates to control entry or exit to the properties. In terms of access control in the form of fences, approximately half of the properties in HVM have a fence. It should be noted that many of these fences lack gates. It is also worth noting the great variation among the types of fences throughout the neighborhood. Via Monte Drive and Carlsbad Street have a higher percentage of fenced properties than other streets in HVM. Photo 12 shows some examples of the various fences on HVM properties.



Photo 12: Access control - lack of gated fences

Although a majority of properties had fences, they did not extend to the backyard of each property, thereby providing open access to the backyards. Due to this unrestricted entry, these backyards may serve as potential hiding spots or escape routes for criminals.

3.3.2 LACK OF SURVEILLANCE OPPORTUNITIES

Many of the housing units in HVM lack street facing windows. The properties facing Mesa Drive, and several sections on Tuscon Drive and Hoffman Court, were found to have no street facing windows. Alleyways in HVM also had few street facing windows. The lack of “eyes on the street” could potentially lead to increased levels of crime and other undesirable activities.

3.3.3 ALLEYWAY CONDITIONS

The alleyways in HVM are generally not well cared for. The alleyway at Hoffman Court was observed to have a considerable amount of trash and abandoned furniture. Alleyways in HVM also lack dedicated parking spaces which results in underutilization of parking lots or crowding, depending on time of day. Adding gates to all of the alleyways could prevent some of these problems.

3.3.4 OTHER CHALLENGES

Abandoned shopping carts, use of balconies for storage, and graffiti were some of the other problems observed in the HVM neighborhood. Hoffman Court and Carlsbad Drive tend to collect many abandoned shopping carts (Photo 13). This is a quality of life issue that can exacerbate safety and aesthetic conditions in HVM, along with being a code violation.



Figure 12: Diagrammatic sketch indicating access to properties and setbacks from the streets. The circulation within HVM is indicated with red arrows. The areas marked in yellow indicate uninterrupted access to properties



Photo 13: Abandoned shopping carts found in HVM

In HVM, a significant number of units throughout the neighborhood made use of their patios or balconies for storage. This is a problem because it indicates that overcrowding is an issue in HVM, and the use of balconies as storage can be an impediment during an emergency situation.

Graffiti was found in the Via Monte area (but much less so in Hoffman Court). Mesa Drive exhibits the most evidence of graffiti. Neglected and poorly maintained property may attract theft. The chances of crime may be reduced if the property appears well maintained and cared for. Murals or public art can help to prevent further graffiti in HVM and help to create a sense of community.

3.3.5 LACK OF COHESIVENESS IN PHYSICAL DESIGN OF HVM

Challenges in terms of neighborhood design stem from the disconnection of HVM from surrounding neighborhoods. The figure-ground map in Figure 13 shows that the two sections of HVM have no direct connection to each other or to surrounding neighborhoods.



Figure 13: Figure-ground map for HVM showing the disconnection of HVM from surrounding neighborhoods. The area highlighted in yellow marks the HVM neighborhood

Blossom Hill Road to the north, Almaden Expressway to the west, Chris Hotts Park to the south, and Pioneer High School to the east, separate the HVM neighborhood from the surrounding developments. In addition, the Hoffman Court and Via Monte areas of the neighborhood are separated from each other. The shopping center that recently opened adjacent to the neighborhood has its back to the Via Monte area and is separated from the Hoffman Court area by two churches. This disconnection is a contributing factor to how the neighborhood has evolved.

3.4 SWOT ANALYSIS

Common practice for contemporary urban planners is to conduct a “high-level” evaluation of a study community’s strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, abbreviated SWOT. Such evaluations serve as one typical product of a preliminary community assessment such as the sort reflected in this report. Building upon our work for this report, including many discussions with community residents, numerous trips to explore Hoffman Via Monte with community leaders, and an analysis of our own collected data, we have prepared this brief SWOT analysis. It is our hope that future collaborators might refer to these points, perhaps to chart progress made since we prepared these thoughts in late 2013.

3.4.1 STRENGTHS & OPPORTUNITIES

Location: The location of HVM is an asset itself. The neighborhood is located six miles south of downtown San Jose, with access to major freeways and thoroughfares. It connects to the city through bus lines and a light rail station near Blossom Hill Road and Almaden Expressway.

Access to Amenities and Neighborhood Organizations: HVM has access to various amenities such as Pioneer High School, Guadalupe Creek, Whole Foods grocery store, and two community churches located within a five-minute walking distance.

The Almaden Hills United Methodist Church and Cornerstone Community Church organize community events and conduct English and Spanish language classes for community members. Such activities encourage interaction between community members. Other organizations such as the YMCA positively influence the neighborhood by conducting afterschool programs for kids, and education programs for parents. These organizations have been a driving force behind local improvement efforts. The YMCA and the local churches conduct various youth, adult, and family programs, all of which combine to provide a forum for neighbors to discuss local concerns, devise solutions, socialize, and build relationships.

Relative Affordability: San Jose’s median income in 2013 was estimated to be \$90,737. Interestingly, the area of San Jose just one mile south of HVM is the city’s wealthiest, with a median income of \$145,429. The cost of renting a three-bedroom apartment in this area is more than \$3,500. Although HVM lies quite close to this wealthy neighborhood, its rental prices are substantially lower. Thus, HVM residents enjoy access to surrounding neighborhood amenities such as schools, parks, and grocery stores for a comparatively lower price.

Opportunities for Resident Interaction: The physical design of HVM, a community of fourplexes, presents many opportunities for resident interaction. The multi-generational dynamic in HVM is a significant strength of this neighborhood since, for example, grandparents and children in HVM can be a valuable resource and can serve as a vehicle for uniting residents. If good relations are encouraged to flourish amongst the residents, they might eventually form a committee to help revitalize the neighborhood. Creating a Homeowners Association (HOA) for HVM and forming a tenant’s union can be effective agents of organized, positive change.

Neighborhood Design Elements: The landscape elements and open spaces in HVM are very positive aspects of this neighborhood. Unlike many newer San Jose tract developments, HVM features an enviable number of mature trees that provide environmental and aesthetic benefits. Side setbacks and yards between buildings

offer safe places for children to play with ample opportunities for parental “eyes on the street” monitoring, as well as additional landscaping opportunities. The empty lot behind the Cornerstone Community Church presents a major opportunity for creating a community garden or formal children’s play area, both of which are lacking in the neighborhood.

The underutilized parking lots and alleyways in the neighborhood also provide opportunities for design interventions. Providing reserved parking for residents and converting the underutilized parking spaces into pocket parks could be viable alternatives worthy of further study by local leaders. Similarly, the alleyways can be better utilized by providing designated parking spaces or serving as safe routes leading to the Pioneer High School.

Attention from the City, NHSSV, and Neighborhood Organizations: HVM is a neighborhood in transition and is benefitting from close scrutiny and sustained support from a wide variety of local persons and larger efforts. The attention from a number of City of San Jose departments, Councilmember Johnny Khamis and his staff, Neighborhood Housing Services of Silicon Valley (NHSSV), YMCA, local churches, and other groups is substantial. If residents embrace efforts put forth by the organizations, they could make their voices heard to make HVM a cleaner, safer, and desirable place to live.

3.4.2 WEAKNESSES & THREATS

Lack of Collective Identity and Cohesive Design: There is a lack of neighborhood organization, leadership, and collective identity in HVM. The orientation of buildings in the neighborhood, while beneficial (as noted earlier) can also turn people away from their neighbors and streets that negatively impacts surveillance opportunities. Litter, graffiti, abandoned shopping carts, and persistent crime can largely be attributed to unclear territorial definition, poor surveillance, and lack of access control.

Absentee Landlords and Overcrowded Housing Units: Persistent overcrowding and a lack of an organized tenant association to confront (or collaborate with) property owners remain significant hurdles for the health of this community. As a result, unspoken and tenuous understandings tend to take root: property owners avoid maintaining their properties, and tenants do not complain since the owners permit them to exceed the maximum occupancy limit. Further, immigration status concerns could limit the desire of community residents to speak out for fear of retaliation or exploitation.

High Crime Rate: HVM has a high crime rate due to high turnover of residents, lack of territorial definition, poor surveillance opportunities, lack of access control, and negligence on the part of residents as well as property owners.

Lack of Protection for Renters: There is a possibility that the City of San Jose might file injunctions against HVM property owners for poorly maintained properties. This can negatively influence the renters in HVM as the owners might pass on the injunction costs to their tenants in the form of rent increases.

Redevelopment/Neighborhood Improvements Could Lead to Rent Increases: It is possible that the improvement efforts called for in this neighborhood, while leading to a cleaner and safer community for all, might also cause upward “gentrification” pressures that tend to increase rents. Over time, such increases could force residents and kids to leave the area and its many amenities, such as its location in a desirable school district.

Funding: The biggest hurdle for neighborhood improvements will be funding. Due to the dissolution of California’s Redevelopment Agencies and the consequent disintegration of San Jose’s Strong Neighborhoods Initiative, the money required to fund these types of projects has disappeared. Additionally, lingering City budget challenges and the tendency of higher income areas to shape the “political voice” are other concerns. If the efforts of NHSSV and RLEI initiative do not pro-

duce significant results, the residents and property owners might not participate in community development attempts in the future.

3.5 RECOMMENDATIONS

Despite the various challenges noted in HVM, many opportunities for improvements have been identified throughout the course of this assessment. Making improvements in the neighborhood may have significant impacts on HVM, initiating positive changes to the quality of life for community members. Because many of the impacts associated with these improvements may be measureable, it will allow community members the opportunity to experience firsthand how stakeholder groups interacting with the community can have lasting, positive effects on their neighborhood. These experiences often spark the interest of residents, as they gain a clearer understanding of their own potential to make a difference within their community. Empowerment of the community sparks further community action, and as more residents become engaged in the development process, assets within the community are unveiled. Listed below are opportunities for improvements that we identified over the course of this community assessment:

3.5.1 ORGANIZING NEIGHBORHOOD CLEAN UPS

Of the various concerns voiced by both adults and children living in HVM, the presence of excessive trash was cited most frequently. Facilitating neighborhood clean ups on a regular basis will improve sanitation, aesthetics, and safety for children playing in the neighborhood. Engaging community members in neighborhood clean ups will create pride and ownership in the community. In addition to clean up events, installing trash enclosures on properties throughout the neighborhood will help to contain trash, reduce litter, control rodents, and improve overall aesthetics, making HVM a more desirable place to live.

3.5.2 IDENTIFYING COMMUNITY LEADERS

Community engagement often begins with a small group of residents who demonstrate interest in making positive changes in their neighborhood. Residents who establish community associations and facilitate community events are community leaders, and may be further empowered by connecting with other associations of community organizers, such as RLEI and NHSSV. Such leaders are key to engaging communities and empowering residents. As community leaders organize and facilitate positive changes in their neighborhoods, residents become aware of the benefits. Positivity radiates outward thus engaging other members of the community. Continuing to engage residents through involvement with neighborhood associations, community centers, trash clean ups, or any organized community events is critical to ensure that community efforts are sustainable for future generations.

3.5.3 IMPROVE TENANT & LANDLORD RELATIONS

Efforts by community leaders to strengthen relationships between tenants and landlords are essential for improving both the physical and social environments in HVM. Landlords who have a stronger presence in the care and maintenance of their properties will likely see an increasing number of tenants who show respect for the properties and take better care of their units. Landlords who conduct careful screening and conduct background checks on potential renters will also likely see a trend of an increasing number of tenants who are respectful of their units and comply with the rules and regulations of the properties. Furthermore, landlords must respond to maintenance requests from tenants, just as tenants should respond to the requests of landlords. Improving communication between landlords and tenants who both engage in the community and comply with regulations will likely have significant impacts on making positive changes toward a cleaner, stronger, happier neighborhood.

3.5.4 LEVERAGE RESOURCES

HVM is located in District 10, which is known for being in an outstanding public school district. An opportunity to improve access to Pioneer High School exists because of the close proximity of the school to the residences in HVM. The involvement and support of residents, neighborhood associations, and community leaders is necessary for neighborhood development. It is important to encourage organizations like YMCA and Cornerstone Church which conduct afterschool programs for kids and English and Spanish speaking classes for parents. Multi-sector partnership organizations such as CommUniverCity San José are equally invested in providing community leaders with the tools to make improvements in their neighborhood, and in turn, could improve the quality of life for HVM residents. Furthermore, such organizations can develop strong communication network with neighborhood associations and community groups to improve livability.

3.5.5 EXPLORE PERMIT PARKING FOR THE NEIGHBORHOOD

While the configuration and availability of residential street parking poses a concern for community members, opportunities to improve the existing conditions have been identified. Placing time restrictions on street parking may help reduce the congested feel of the streets and mitigate the presence of abandoned vehicles and vehicles in disrepair. A limited number of parking permits could be issued to neighborhood residents, allowing their vehicles to remain parked in the same space for up to 72 hours. Fewer automobiles parked on the street would allow for clearer lines of sight for pedestrians and from residences in the neighborhood.

3.5.6 IMPROVE ACCESS CONTROL

In order to improve safety in neighborhood, it is necessary to improve access control by providing gates for fences, and security gates for protecting common entrances for housing units in HVM.

3.5.7 IMPROVE ACCESS TO OPEN SPACES

One of the concerns raised by residents was the lack of dedicated spaces for gardens or play areas for kids. As a result, the kids in the HVM neighborhood end up playing on streets. This problem can be solved by incorporating pocket parks or gardens in the spaces between buildings. Further, by providing low hedges or fences to enclose these parks, a safer environment for kids to play can be created.

3.5.8 IMPROVE STREET LIGHTING

The presence of street lighting impacts the safety of the neighborhood and provides more visibility. It prevents the creation of dark areas that may serve as potential hiding spots for criminals. Besides the presence of street lights, it is necessary to ensure that they work, so we recommend a scheduled inspection for checking the condition of street lights in HVM.

3.5.9 IMPROVE TERRITORIAL DEFINITION OF THE PROPERTY

Defining the property edges with fences, low hedges, or other type of vegetation can create a sense of ownership and territoriality. This will also help to differentiate between public and semi-private spaces along the street. Well maintained properties can exhibit a sense of ownership that can help reduce crime. Figure 14 shows recommendations for improving territorial definition for multi-dwelling units such as those in HVM.



Figure 14: Recommendation for developing frontage to improve territorial definition

Source: Mobility Hub Guidelines. Incorporating CPTED techniques to improve natural surveillance and territorial definition. <http://www.metroinix.com/mobilityhubs/en/placemaking/placemaking6-1.aspx> (accessed on December 17, 2013).

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