



Memorandum

TO: HONORABLE MAYOR AND
CITY COUNCIL

FROM: Toni J. Taber, MMC
City Clerk

SUBJECT: SEE BELOW

DATE: December 17, 2024

SUBJECT: Access to and Use of Neighborhood Blight Programs by Traditionally Marginalized Communities Audit Report

Recommendation

As recommended by the Neighborhood Services and Education Committee on December 12, 2024, accept the report on an audit of access to neighborhood blight programs by traditionally marginalized communities.

CEQA: Not a Project, File No. PP17-009, Staff Reports, Assessments, Annual Reports, and Informational Memos that involve no approvals of any City action. (City Auditor)

[Neighborhood Services and Education Committee referral 12/12/2024 - Item (d)5]



Office of the City Auditor

**Report to the City Council
City of San José**

**ACCESS AND USE OF
NEIGHBORHOOD BLIGHT
REDUCTION PROGRAMS:
BEAUTIFYSJ CAN
CONTINUE AND EXPAND
ITS EQUITY EFFORTS**

**Report 24-08
December 2024**

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December 5, 2024

Honorable Mayor and Members
Of the City Council
200 East Santa Clara Street
San José, CA 95113

Access and Use of Neighborhood Blight Reduction Programs: BeautifySJ Can Continue and Expand Its Equity Efforts

The BeautifySJ Neighborhood Blight Reduction and Beautification programs provide a variety of services, including illegal dumping and graffiti removal; neighborhood beautification, litter pickups, and volunteer events; and grant programs to promote neighborhood association engagement and support. BeautifySJ is located within the Department of Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services (PRNS). Residents access services under these programs in different ways, such as through San José 3-1-1 (SJ311), the PRNS website, and other means. The FY 2024-25 Adopted Operating Budget for these programs was \$10.3 million.

The objective of this audit was to assess access to and use of BeautifySJ's Neighborhood Blight Reduction and Beautification programs by traditionally marginalized communities.

Finding I: Priority Communities Have Received the Same or Higher Levels of Service From Neighborhood Blight Reduction Programs. Residents from priority communities, typically including traditionally marginalized communities, were able to access and use the BeautifySJ Neighborhood Blight Reduction and Beautification programs at an equal or greater level as other areas of the city. We found:

- Priority communities received a higher proportion of BeautifySJ grants and dumpster days than other communities.
- There was no discernable difference in timeliness of graffiti removal or illegal dumping responses across neighborhoods.
- BeautifySJ can maintain and review disaggregated program data to ensure continued equitable access and use of its services.
- Language translations can be improved across different City platforms, (including SJ311) and PRNS can expand access to volunteer events by providing accessibility information.

Recommendations: The Administration, PRNS, and the Information Technology Department should:

- Maintain and review disaggregated data on BeautifySJ services to ensure continued equitable service delivery.
- Improve translation options and guidance for SJ311 and the grant and volunteer websites.
- Include accessibility statements for volunteer events.

This report has 6 recommendations. We plan to present this report at the December 12, 2024, Neighborhood Services and Education Committee. We would like to thank the Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services Department, the Information Technology Department, the Finance Department, and the Office of Racial and Social Equity for their time and insight during the audit process. The Administration has reviewed the information in this report, and their response is shown on the yellow pages.

Respectfully submitted,



Joe Rois
City Auditor

Audit staff: Brittney Harvey
Michael O'Connell Jr.
Adrian Perez
Peter Childs (Stanford in Government fellow)

cc:	Jennifer Maguire	Jon Cicirelli	Angel Rios	Khaled Tawfik
	Nora Frimann	Andrea Flores Shelton	Olympia Williams	Andrea Aguiar
	Omar El-Qoulaq	Namrata Batra Agrawal	Claudia Chang	Zulma Maciel
	Raania Mohsen	Alice Vurich		

This report is also available online at www.sanjoseca.gov/audits

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Background

In his 2023 March Budget Message, the Mayor provided the following direction.

To ensure we continue to make progress toward a more just and equitable future, the City Auditor is directed to prepare and publish an Information Memo that explores the scope and costs associated with conducting an audit of access to and use of our most critical city services in traditionally marginalized communities, including recommendations for improving the value the City is delivering to residents who most need these services.

Subsequently, the City Auditor issued a memo proposing a series of audits to address the breadth of critical services that the City provides.¹ This is the first such audit and it is focused on access to BeautifySJ Neighborhood Blight Reduction and Beautification Programs within the Department of Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services (PRNS).

Also included in the 2023 March Budget Message, the Mayor gave direction for the City Manager to bring greater organizational focus, staff resources, and governance-level goals to a small number of foundational goals or focus areas. Cleaning Up Our Neighborhoods was one of the foundational goals and encompasses the work of BeautifySJ. For this reason, these critical neighborhood-focused services were identified for this audit.

In its October 2024 City Council Focus Areas status report, the Administration reported that in FY 2023-24 just 36 percent of respondents to a resident survey reported that the appearance of San José overall was “very clean” or “somewhat clean”. However, 70 percent rated their neighborhood as “very clean” or “somewhat clean”.

BeautifySJ Neighborhood Blight Reduction and Beautification Programs

The mission of BeautifySJ is “to support residents’ efforts at reclaiming their public space and to empower residents to aesthetically demonstrate their pride in our City.” The BeautifySJ Neighborhood Blight Reduction and Beautification programs support residents’ needs through services such as:

- Graffiti removal
- Removing and Preventing Illegal Dumping (RAPID)
- BeautifySJ grants (including neighborhood association engagement and support)

¹ The City Auditor’s Memorandum can be found at <https://www.sanjoseca.gov/home/showpublisheddocument/99564/638231383930770000>.

- Neighborhood litter removal, neighborhood beautification (including dumpster days), and volunteer events

In FY 2024-25, the Adopted Operating Budget for these programs was \$10.3 million.²

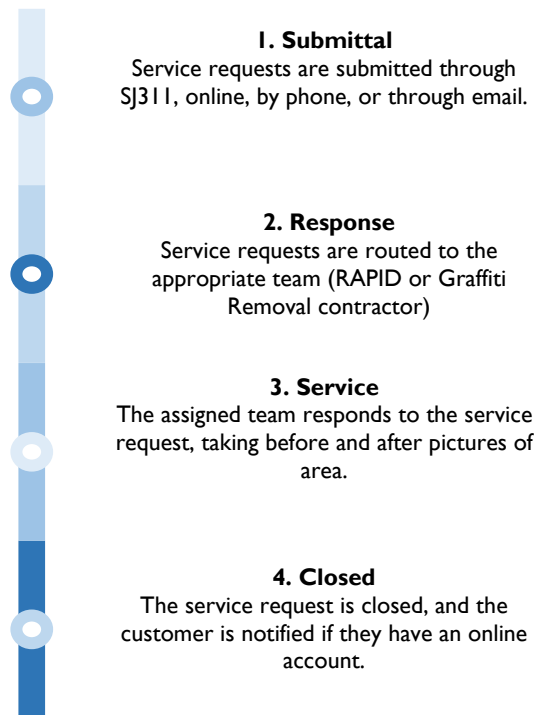
Residents Access BeautifySJ Programs in A Variety of Ways

The process for accessing Neighborhood Blight Reduction and Beautification programs varies depending on the program.

Illegal Dumping and Graffiti Removal Services

Both graffiti removal service and illegal dumping pickup can be accessed through the City’s San José 3-1-1 (SJ311) website, phone application, by email, or by calling 3-1-1. The process for accessing these services is outlined below in Exhibit I.

Exhibit I: Accessing Illegal Dumping and Graffiti Removal Services



Source: Auditor observations based on online material and staff interviews.

² In FY 2024-25, PRNS restructured the budget for the Community Services Division, separating Neighborhood Blight Reduction and Beautification into its own budget program.

In addition to eradication efforts, PRNS has begun to focus on outreach and education to reduce graffiti and illegal dumping. BSJ Proud is an outreach and education campaign to motivate residents, neighborhoods, and businesses to reduce illegal dumping and blight. PRNS reports they recently signed a partnership with the San Jose Earthquakes to promote the program through in-stadium advertisements, and a community event. BeautifySJ staff also provide presentations on litter prevention at some local schools educating students about the impacts of littering and how they can reduce litter in their communities.

Additionally, PRNS has begun efforts around enforcement to deter illegal dumping. PRNS has eight cameras to monitor high-volume illegal dumping hotspots to act as deterrents, and to capture illegal dumping as it happens. If the cameras capture sufficient evidence to issue a citation, they may forward it to Code Enforcement for review and enforcement, as appropriate. PRNS reports they will be adding a new position to aid in these efforts.

Volunteer Events, Dumpster Days, and Grants

The process for accessing BeautifySJ volunteer events, dumpster day events, and the BeautifySJ grant program differ from the graffiti removal and illegal dumping requests. To access volunteer events, individuals interested in participating will register through an external volunteer website.³ Dumpster Day events are coordinated by BeautifySJ staff in communities most impacted by illegal dumping, or neighborhood associations can request an event to be held in a designated community.

³ PRNS also offers volunteer opportunities for cleanups at locations such as parks and hiking trails. These volunteer events differ than the ones offered by BeautifySJ Neighborhood Blight Reduction programs, which focus on neighborhood and creek beautification.

Exhibit 2: BeautifySJ Volunteers Program



Source: Auditor observations based on staff interviews and online material.

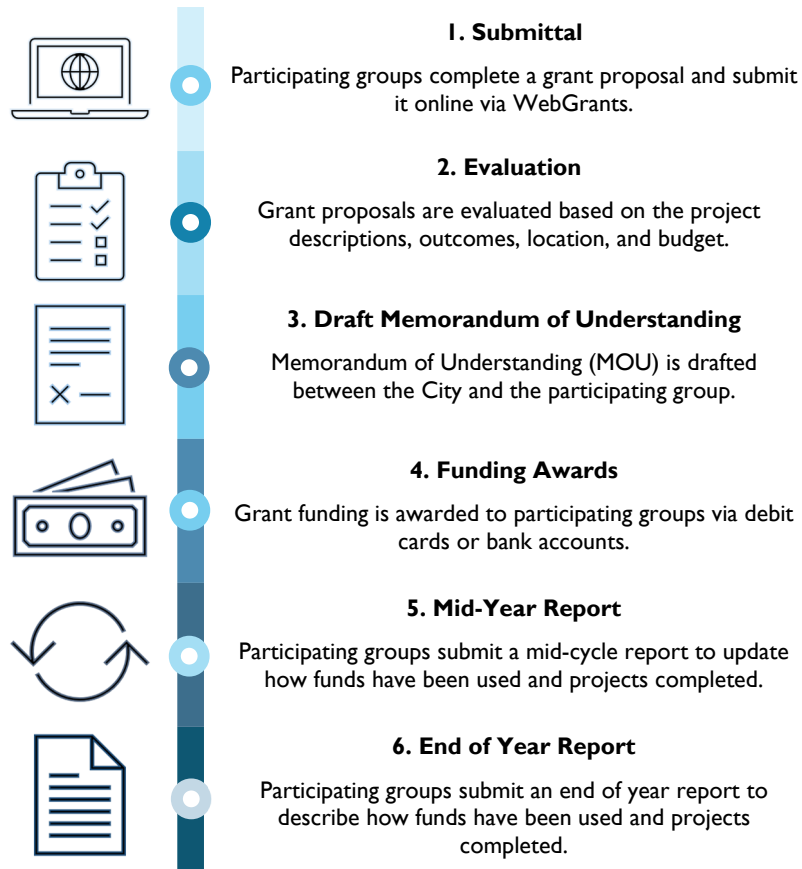
Exhibit 3: BeautifySJ Dumpster Day Events



Source: Auditor observations based on staff interviews and online material.

The BeautifySJ grant program is accessed through the WebGrants platform. To assist in accessing the BeautifySJ grant program, staff conduct multiple pre-cycle grant proposal workshops and question and answer (Q&A) sessions. Both the pre-cycle proposal workshops and the Q&A sessions are offered in-person, via video broadcast, and by phone. Additionally, translation services are available for both in-person and virtual attendees.

Exhibit 4: BeautifySJ Grant Program



Source: Auditor observations based on online material and staff interviews.

Multi-lingual Efforts to Engage Residents

BeautifySJ Neighborhood Blight Reduction and Beautification programs have made efforts to increase service accessibility. BeautifySJ has multi-lingual flyers about program information for grants, graffiti, and illegal dumping. BeautifySJ staff reported that they hand out these flyers at events like Viva Calle or as door hangers when working in neighborhoods.

Exhibit 5: Multi-lingual Flyers Can Inform Residents of Information to Beautify Their Neighborhoods



Source: Spanish flyer provided by BeautifySJ.

The City Is Working to Integrate Equity In Its Programs And Services

In 2024, the City Council adopted Council Policy 0-22, Equity Values And Standards Policy. This policy establishes an implementation framework and expectations of City departments to advance racial and social equity.⁴

According to this policy the City’s Office of Racial and Social Equity, is to “provide strategic support to City departments in their efforts to advance racial and social equity...” The Office is a resource to all City

City’s Definition of Racial and Social Equity

“The condition that would be achieved if one’s group identity – based on categorizations that have experienced discrimination including race/ethnicity, color, disability, neurodivergence, religion, age, citizenship/immigration status, gender expression, sexuality – no longer predicted, in a statistical sense, how one fared in society...”

⁴ Initiation of this policy came after voters approved an amendment to the City Charter requiring the Mayor and City Council to adopt and maintain "a statement of values, as permitted by law, promoting racial and social equity, inclusion, and racial and social justice" among other improvements. The policy can be found online at <https://www.sanjoseca.gov/home/showpublisheddocument/113950/638599303957800000>.

departments and has established multiple tools for departments to use to intentionally consider equity in their work.

- The **Racial and Social Equity Action Plan** is a template that serves as a place for City departments to outline goals and programs that advance racial equity within its workforce and services.⁵
- The **Racial Equity Impact Assessment Guide** serves as a tool for City staff to utilize for sample questions, examples, and key information to consider racial equity into programs and policies.
- The **Budgeting for Equity Template** is a guide for departments to identify resources to further their equity work. It incorporates principles such as how to focus on impact, establish accountability, and use data to budget for equity.

These along with other tools from groups like the Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE)⁶ can help to promote considerations for equity in City services. To assist local, regional, and state governments in achieving these objectives, the GARE organization offers several resources, including guides for developing and implementing Racial Equity Action Plans.

Equity Lenses Can Help to Provide Understanding Where Areas of Greater Need Are

The Office of Racial and Social Equity emphasizes that in addition to race, intersectionality requires systems to consider other social identities and how they are related. Using equity lenses that consider social identities, in addition to race, helps capture individual lived experiences.

- The **Healthy Places Index (HPI)**⁷ is a project of the Public Health Alliance of Southern California that makes data available through an open data platform to support efforts to prioritize equitable community investments, programs, and policies. Community indicators like education, job opportunities, and clean air and water are considered and factored into a combined score. These are then ranked on a quartile system from 1 to 4 of all Census tracts in the city, where 1 indicates less healthy community conditions and 4 indicates more healthy community conditions. See Appendix B.

⁵ Council Policy 0-22 requires City departments to develop Racial and Social Equity Action Plans on a timely and periodic basis. These are posted on the City's website at <https://www.sanjooseca.gov/your-government/departments-offices/office-of-the-city-manager/racial-and-social-equity/racial-and-social-equity-action-plans>.

⁶ GARE is a national network of government entities focused on advancing racial equity in government, supported by over 13,000 racial equity practitioners across 400+ jurisdictions.

⁷ Information on the Healthy Places Index can be found at <https://www.healthyplacesindex.org/>.

- The **San José's Equity Atlas**⁸ is a tool created by the City to help departments inform equity work. Considering racial and income data, census tracts are assigned a score of 1-5 for each. The combined score can range from 2-10, with higher scores signifying higher proportions of people of color and lower household income. See Appendix C.
- The **Equity Priority Communities by the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC)**⁹ are census tracts within the Bay Area with significant concentrations of underserved populations incorporating demographic factors such as race, income, English proficiency, disability status, and age. Census tracts can be classified into one of the following groups: High, Higher, Highest, or not an MTC Equity Priority Community (None). See Appendix D.

For the purposes of the report, we used each of these lenses to identify priority communities and understand how they may be receiving services.

⁸ The San José Equity Atlas can be found online at <https://gis.sanjoseca.gov/maps/equityatlas/>. There are efforts underway in other jurisdictions to implement equity atlases. The Bay Area Equity Atlas is another example which looks at an expanded series of indicators across the area.

⁹ Information on these priority communities can be found online at <https://mtc.ca.gov/planning/transportation/access-equity-mobility/equity-priority-communities>.

Finding I Priority Communities Have Received the Same or Higher Levels of Service From Neighborhood Blight Reduction Programs

Summary

Based on program data, residents in priority areas of the city received services from the Neighborhood Blight Reduction and Beautification programs at an equal or greater level. PRNS has awarded a higher proportion of BeautifySJ grant funding for priority communities than if funding was spread equally across neighborhoods. In addition, priority communities have seen a higher proportion of dumpster days, and there has been no discernible difference in the timeliness of graffiti removal or illegal dumping responses among neighborhoods. Some programs, such as the BeautifySJ grant program, have made an effort to advance equity by focusing on priority communities of San José. To ensure continued equitable access for its services, PRNS should begin to maintain and review disaggregated data on BeautifySJ services to priority communities. The Administration can make additional improvements by updating resources and web platforms to ensure compliance with the City’s Language Equity Policy & Guidelines, as well as including accessibility statements for volunteer events.

Priority Communities Received Services at an Equal or Greater Level

Based on program data, there did not appear to be barriers to access and use of the Neighborhood Blight Reduction and Beautification programs. Generally, Neighborhood Blight Reduction and Beautification services provided equal or greater levels of service to priority communities within the city.

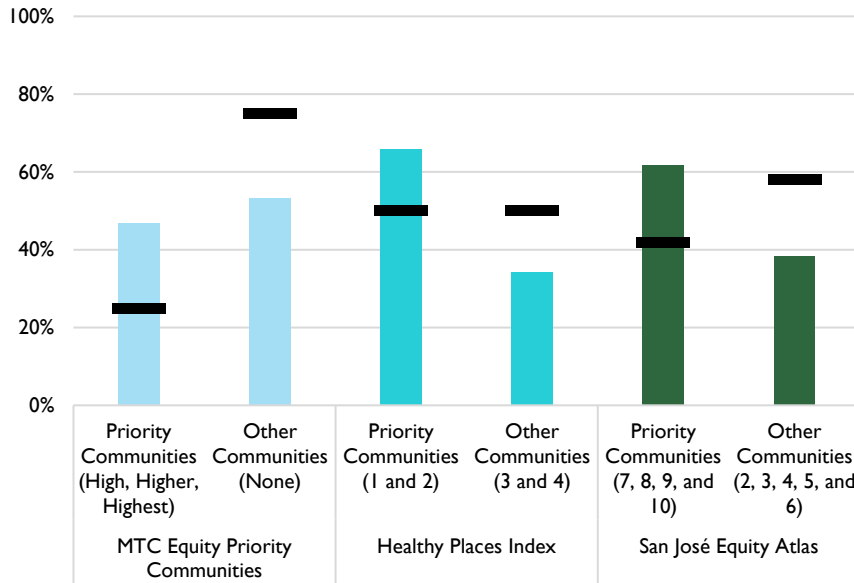
Some Neighborhood Blight Reduction Programs Served Priority Communities at A Greater Rate Than Other Areas of the City

There have been some efforts in the Neighborhood Blight Reduction and Beautification programs to address equity in access and use of services. Previously, BeautifySJ grant program staff conducted an analysis of BeautifySJ grant awards to understand who was applying for grants and where grant funding was being used. This analysis led to programmatic changes to increase accessibility and participation from priority communities in San José. As a result, the grant program identified several steps to remove barriers to access and increase program participation in priority communities. These changes include:

- Establishing an emerging neighborhoods category to increase participation in underserved communities. This allows neighborhoods that do not have a formal neighborhood association to still participate in this program.
- Adding bonus points for proposals that target projects in Priority Neighborhoods as identified by the Youth Empowerment Alliance, Project Hope neighborhoods, and MTC Equity Priority Communities. This ensures that priority communities are receiving program resources.
- Establishing an eligible service provider list. All approved grantees from the 2024 cycle of grant awards are eligible to complete a simplified Request for Proposal (RFP) for the next two grant cycles instead of having to complete a grant proposal through the WebGrants platform each year. The simplified RFP process requires less detail from the grant applicant and is easier to complete.
- Implementing the option for grantees to receive grant funding awards through debit cards in lieu of requiring the group open a bank account. This broadens the opportunity to participate.

The impact of these equity efforts can be seen in the data on locations of grant recipients. In the 2024 grant cycle, the BeautifySJ grant program provided more grant funds to priority communities than would be expected if there were an even distribution of grant funds across San José's census tracts.

Exhibit 6: BeautifySJ Grant Funding Targeted Priority Communities



The columns in the chart display the results of BeautifySJ Grant funding awards for the 2024 grant cycle. Results are broken out across three equity lenses. For each equity lens, results for priority communities are displayed in the left column, with results for all other communities displayed in the column to the right. The corresponding black line for each bar represents what would be the result if awards were equally distributed across census tracts.

Results show that more grants were distributed to priority communities than would have been if grant funds were distributed equally across all communities.

Source: Auditor analysis of the 2024 cycle of BeautifySJ grant awards data, disaggregated by equity lenses. For each equity lens, priority communities are aligned in the bar on the left.

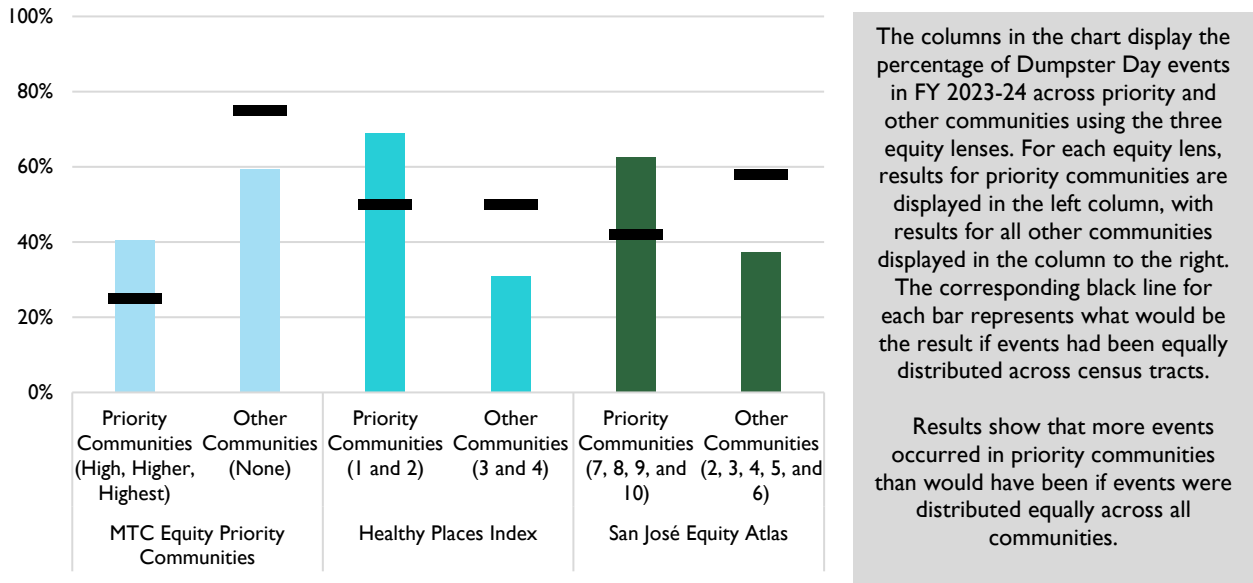
Notes:

- Data includes review of 72 of 76 grant agreements which were executed and uploaded to GILES as of September 2024.
- For MTC Equity Priority Communities, “Priority Communities” indicates areas which have been assigned High, Higher, or Highest. For the Healthy Places Index, census tracts with a score of 1 or 2 have been grouped to indicate communities with less healthy community conditions and considered “Priority Communities”. For the San José Equity Atlas, census tracts with scores of 6 or greater indicate higher proportions of people of color and lower household income which also indicate potential “Priority Communities”.

BeautifySJ Beautification Program Also Provided Greater Coverage to Priority Communities Through Dumpster Day Events

BeautifySJ dumpster days also provided greater coverage to priority communities highlighted in the Healthy Places Index, San José’s Equity Atlas, and the MTC Equity Priority Communities. For instance, dumpster days conducted more events in census tracts with a Healthy Places Index quartile score of 1 or 2 than would be expected if there were an even distribution of events.

Exhibit 7: More Dumpster Day Events Were Conducted in Priority Communities Than If Equally Distributed Across Neighborhoods



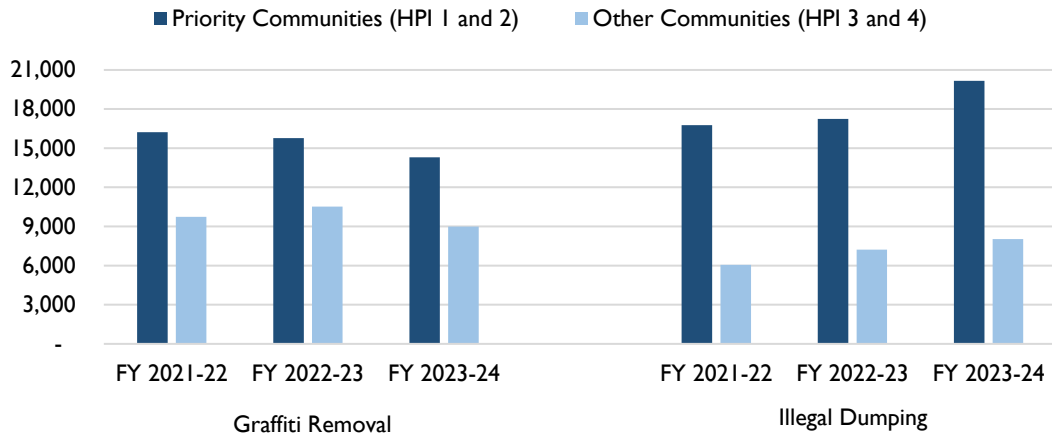
Source: Auditor analysis of dumpster day events FY 2023-24, disaggregated by equity lenses.

Note: For MTC Equity Priority Communities, “Priority Communities” indicates areas which have been assigned High, Higher, or Highest. For the Healthy Places Index, census tracts with a score of 1 or 2 have been grouped to indicate communities with less healthy community conditions and considered “Priority Communities”. For the San José Equity Atlas, census tracts with scores of 6 or greater indicate higher proportions of people of color and lower household income which also indicate potential “Priority Communities”.

There Are Higher Levels of Service Requests for Illegal Dumping and Graffiti Removal in Priority Communities

There are more illegal dumping and graffiti removal service requests in priority communities than other areas of the city. In FY 2023-24, there were 14,300 graffiti service requests in Healthy Places Index quartiles 1 and 2 and 9,000 in quartiles 3 and 4. Additionally, there were 20,200 illegal dumping requests in Healthy Places Index quartiles 1 and 2 and 8,000 in quartiles 3 and 4 for the same fiscal year. This has been consistent for the last three fiscal years.

Exhibit 8: More Services Are Requested in Priority Communities Than Other Areas of the City



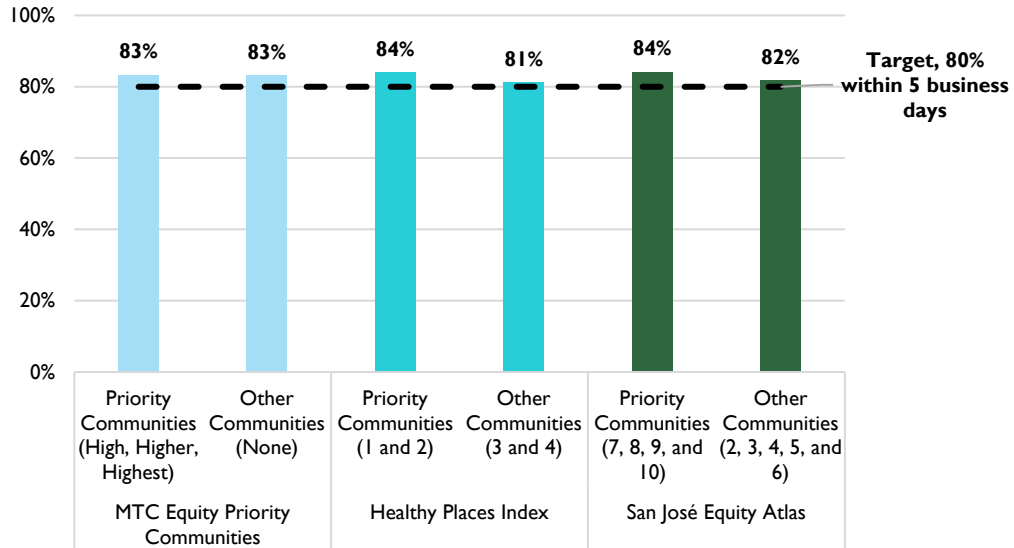
Source: Auditor analysis of SJ311 service request data for illegal dumping and graffiti removal for the for FY 2021-22 through FY 2023-24, disaggregated by Healthy Places Index quartiles.

Despite More Service Requests in Priority Communities, the Department Met Timeliness Targets for Graffiti Removal and Illegal Dumping Service Requests Across All Areas of the City

Despite more service requests occurring in priority communities, the City and its contractor have responded to requests for service within equal timeframes regardless of where the request was made. This is consistent for timeliness of response for graffiti removal and illegal dumping service requests. Over the past three fiscal years, staff met their timeliness targets for service delivery of graffiti and illegal dumping removal across all areas of the City.

Overall, BeautifySJ Removing and Preventing Illegal Dumping (RAPID) staff responded to 83 percent of service requests within five business days in FY 2023-24. As shown in Exhibit 9, there was no significant variation across locations and priority areas.

Exhibit 9: Illegal Dumping Removal Timeliness Was Consistent Across All Areas of the City, Including Priority Communities

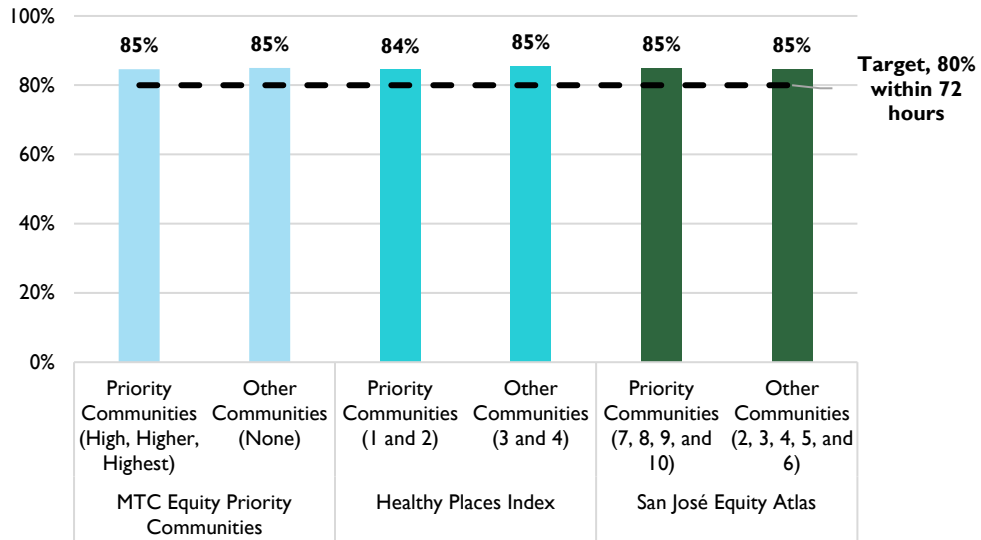


Source: Auditor analysis of SJ311 service request data for illegal dumping in FY 2023-24, disaggregated by equity lenses.

Note: For MTC Equity Priority Communities, “Priority Communities” indicates areas which have been assigned High, Higher, or Highest. For the Healthy Places Index, census tracts with a score of 1 or 2 have been grouped to indicate communities with less healthy community conditions and considered “Priority Communities”. For the San José Equity Atlas, census tracts with scores of 6 or greater indicate higher proportions of people of color and lower household income which also indicate potential “Priority Communities”.

Overall, 85 percent of graffiti removal service requests were responded to within 72 hours in FY 2023-24. As shown in Exhibit 10, this was consistent across all service areas.

Exhibit 10: Graffiti Removal Timeliness Was Consistent Across All Areas of the City, Including Priority Communities



Source: Auditor analysis of SJ311 service request data for graffiti removal service in FY 2023-24, disaggregated by equity lenses.

Notes:

- For MTC Equity Priority Communities, “Priority Communities” indicates areas which have been assigned High, Higher, or Highest. For the Healthy Places Index, census tracts with a score of 1 or 2 have been grouped to indicate communities with less healthy community conditions and considered “Priority Communities”. For the San José Equity Atlas, census tracts with scores of 6 or greater indicate higher proportions of people of color and lower household income which also indicate potential “Priority Communities”.
- The goal for graffiti removal is within 72 hours from notification, however it excludes weekends and holidays. For gang and offensive graffiti, BeautifySJ has set a goal of removing graffiti within 24 hours, however that is not separated from the data.

Measuring Performance in Priority Communities Can Ensure Continued Equity Within Neighborhood Blight Reduction Programs

BeautifySJ Neighborhood Blight Reduction and Beautification programs can further support equitable service delivery by measuring service delivery in priority communities. The Equity Values and Standards Policy (Council Policy 0-22) offers City staff a framework to advance racial and social equity through City programs. For example, the Policy provides instructions for implementing the practices to advance racial and social equity:

- Use disaggregated data for analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data.
- Proactively assess program operations including routine, major, and retrospective activities.

The City's Office of Racial and Social Equity maintains the Racial Equity Impact Analysis (REIA), a resource guide that helps departments consider racial equity outcomes when shaping policies, practices, and programs. The REIA emphasizes that advancing racial equity requires the setting of goals and measures to track progress, with the recognition that strategies must be targeted to close the gaps. In addition, the Government Alliance for Racial Equity (GARE) identifies performance measurement as a requisite for advancing equity through government programs.

As previously discussed, BeautifySJ Grants program staff have used disaggregated program data to understand who was participating in the program, where grant funding was being allocated, and identify potential barriers to access and use of the program. From this analysis, staff were able to identify potential barriers to access and use of the program and proposed changes to mitigate these barriers and increase program participation in priority communities. Regularly reviewing disaggregated program data for the other Neighborhood Blight Reduction and Beautification programs would help ensure continued equity in access and use of these programs.

Recommendation:

- I: To ensure continued equity of service delivery for the BeautifySJ Blight Reduction and Beautification programs, the Department of Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services should create a process to maintain and review disaggregated program data using an equity index for each of its programs to evaluate equitable service delivery on an ongoing basis.**

Residents Can Access Services in Multiple Ways, Although the City Can Increase Accessibility of Digital Platforms and Communications

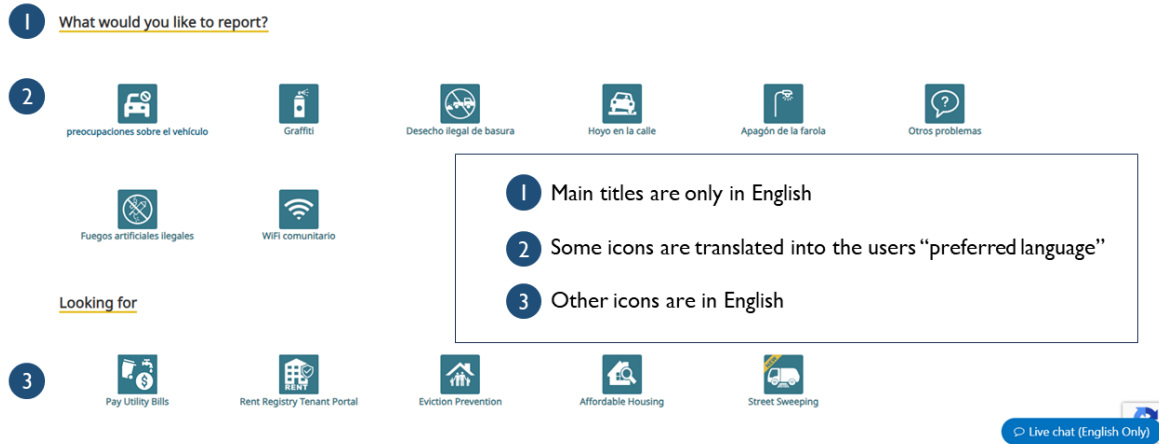
As noted in the Background, the public can access Neighborhood Blight Reduction and Beautification programs through phone or email. Additionally, the public can submit service requests for graffiti and illegal dumping removal using the SJ311 website, application, or phone line.

SJ311 Experienced Translation Issues on Its Website and Phone Application and Was Not Fully Translating Information to Spanish and Vietnamese

At the time of the audit, the SJ311 website and phone applications were not fully translating content into Spanish or Vietnamese. Customers who register to use SJ311 can set their preferred language to English, Spanish, or Vietnamese. When functioning properly, this prompts the website and phone application to translate information such as service requests. The Information Technology Department

(ITD) was notified and are working to resolve this issue. Exhibit II shows the SJ311 website partially translated into Spanish.

Exhibit II: SJ311 Website Partially Translated Website Into Spanish



Source: Auditor analysis of a portion of the SJ311 website as of August 2024.

SJ311 Should Include Chinese Translations for Its Various Platforms

Additionally, SJ311 does not have preset translations for residents whose preferred language is Chinese, despite it being spoken by over 5 percent of the city’s population. The agreement with the vendor for SJ311 only requires them to provide translated interfaces into English, Spanish, and Vietnamese.

The City’s Language Equity Policy and Guidelines (6.1.10 of the City’s Administrative Policy Manual) outlines requirements for departments to make information available into other languages when appropriate. The Policy identifies Spanish, Vietnamese, and Chinese (including Cantonese and Mandarin) as the standard for translations of documents, signage, call tree instructions, interpretations, and other items identified in the policy.¹⁰

According to ITD, translation for Chinese is planned for a future SJ311 update.

External Websites for Grants and Volunteers Are Limited to English

External websites for volunteer opportunities and grant applications are only available in English. These language limitations may discourage residents from

¹⁰ The [City Auditor issued Language Accessibility: The City Can Strengthen Efforts to Address Language Equity Across its Services](#) in March 2024. The first recommendation from the audit was for the Administration to develop mechanisms and procedures to monitor language accessibility of common points of customer contact across departments, including phone trees, translations of vital documents, and signage posted at City facilities. In the most recent status update from the City Manager’s Office, they reported working on a three-phase plan to translate department phone trees, which involves creating a list of frequently contacted numbers, phone tree updates, and phone tree translation into languages spoken by at least 5 percent of the city’s population.

applying to volunteer opportunities or grant funding for communities to contribute back to their neighborhoods.

- **Grant platform** – The City’s grant platform, used for BeautifySJ grants, does not translate information into a user’s preferred language. Additionally, the agreement for the grant program’s website was expired at the time of the audit. Language and web accessibility should be addressed in the next Request for Proposal (RFP) for this service.
- **Volunteer website** – The volunteer website is used by BeautifySJ for individuals seeking to volunteer for litter pickups. There currently is no option specifically on the website for volunteers to select a preferred language other than English to interact with the site. According to the vendor for the City’s volunteer website, there are different ways for the information on the site to be translated into a user’s preferred language.¹¹ However, at the time of the audit, instructions on how to do this are not found on the City or PRNS’ website.

The City’s Website and Digital Services Governance Policy (1.7.9 of the City’s Administrative Policy Manual) states that the City has a goal to continuously improve page translations on City websites and within connected transactional applications.¹² The City uses a variety of approaches including manual translation, Google Translate, and Google’s machine learning language translation tool. The City can take steps to ensure the public using these external sites receive information in their preferred language, either through the next RFP with the grant platform or instructions on how to use alternative ways to translate the volunteer website.

BeautifySJ Can Provide Accessibility Information About Volunteer Opportunities

The BeautifySJ Neighborhood Blight Reduction and Beautification program can better inform potential volunteers about events by including accessibility statements in event postings. This may include providing information about physical spaces where events are occurring, such as whether the ground is mostly flat or if the cleanups occur along a creek. This can help individuals decide whether to volunteer. Currently, event postings do not include such information.¹³

¹¹ This includes forced translation links or using Google translate through the browser. The Language Access Policy & Guidelines (6.1.10) instructs departments to make sure that for web-based translations “[c]ustomers should be informed that these web-based translations may contain translation errors.”

¹² This policy also provides guidance on website accessibility standards to ensure compliance with laws such as from the Americans with Disabilities Act. In April 2024, the Federal Register published the Department of Justice’s final rule updating Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). This includes specific requirements for local governments on how to ensure web content and mobile applications are accessible to people with disabilities. The City would be expected to ensure compliance by April 24, 2026.

¹³ BeautifySJ posts volunteer opportunities on Facebook, Nextdoor, and Eventbrite through the Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services Department website.

The City and County San Francisco has made efforts to inform potential volunteers about conditions at volunteer events. It has used accessibility features on its online event postings that include information such as whether the events have accessible bathrooms, are on mainly flat ground, or have wheelchair ramps. See Exhibit I2 for an example.

Exhibit I2: San Francisco Public Works Event Page Includes Accessibility Information on Volunteer Events

Accessibility

- ✓ Mainly flat ground
Accessible restrooms
Dedicated parking spots
- ⊕ Have accessibility questions? Reply to your registration email to confirm your requirements or request more information.

Source: Accessibility statement from the San Francisco Public Works Department Beautification Day event posting.

The City of San José prioritizes an inclusive and barrier-free environment so that people with disabilities have equitable access to City services and programs. In its Disability Inclusion Equity Pledge, the City commits to prioritizing event accessibility that includes accommodations language on invitations for all events that the City hosts and sponsors. Also, the City's Language Access Manager and Disability Affairs Officer have developed an accessibility statement that City staff can use to provide equitable access to meetings and events. Adding accessibility information to volunteer events can help move the City toward that commitment.

Recommendations:

- 2: To ensure residents who speak languages other than English can request services, the Information Technology Department should work with its vendor to immediately fix the Spanish and Vietnamese translations on the SJ311 website and mobile application.**
- 3: To ensure accessibility of languages in accordance with the City's Language Equity Policy & Guidelines (6.1.10), the Information Technology Department should incorporate languages spoken by 5 percent or more of the population into the SJ311 website and mobile application, as well as the 3-1-1 phone tree.**
- 4: The City Administration should, in its next Request for Proposal for a grant platform, require translated information and ensure web accessibility in accordance with the City's Language Equity**

Policy & Guidelines (6.1.10) and Website and Digital Services Governance (1.7.9).

- 5: To improve communication about Neighborhood Blight Reduction and Beautification volunteer events, the Department of Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services should include accessibility statements in advertisements or notifications for BeautifySJ-organized volunteer events.**

- 6: The Department of Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services should provide translated guidance of how to use BeautifySJ's volunteer website in languages identified in the City's Language Equity Policy & Guidelines (6.1.10).**

Conclusion

Residents in priority communities across San José used the City’s Neighborhood Blight Reduction and Beautification programs at an equal or higher level than other areas of the city. Despite more illegal dumping and graffiti removal service requests occurring in priority communities, the City and its contractor responded to requests for service at equal levels regardless of where the requests were made. Some programs, such as the BeautifySJ grant program, have made an effort to advance equity by focusing on priority communities of the city. To ensure continued equitable access for its services, PRNS should begin to maintain and review disaggregated data on BeautifySJ services to priority communities.

Additionally, some digital access points are limited and only available in English. For instance, translation services for the SJ311 website and mobile application were not working properly at the time of the audit. Also, other websites, such as for the grant and volunteer programs, were only available in English. The City Administration should update access points to ensure compliance with the City’s Language Equity Policy & Guidelines, as well as including accessibility statements for volunteer events.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Finding 1: Priority Communities Have Received the Same or Higher Levels of Service From Neighborhood Blight Reduction Programs.

Recommendation #1: To ensure continued equity of service delivery for the BeautifySJ Blight Reduction and Beautification programs, the Department of Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services should create a process to maintain and review disaggregated program data using an equity index for each of its programs to evaluate equitable service delivery on an ongoing basis.

Recommendation #2: To ensure residents who speak languages other than English can request services, the Information Technology Department should work with its vendor to immediately fix the Spanish and Vietnamese translations on the SJ311 website and mobile application.

Recommendation #3: To ensure accessibility of languages in accordance with the City’s Language Equity Policy & Guidelines (6.1.10), the Information Technology Department should incorporate languages spoken by 5 percent or more of the population into the SJ311 website and mobile application, as well as the 3-1-1 phone tree.

Recommendation #4: The City Administration should, in its next Request for Proposal for a grant platform, require translated information and ensure web accessibility in accordance with the City’s Language Equity Policy & Guidelines (6.1.10) and Website and Digital Services Governance (1.7.9).

Audit of Access and Use of Neighborhood Blight Reduction Program

Recommendation #5: To improve communication about Neighborhood Blight Reduction and Beautification volunteer events, the Department of Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services should include accessibility statements in advertisements or notifications for BeautifySJ-organized volunteer events.

Recommendation #6: The Department of Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services should provide translated guidance of how to use BeautifySJ's volunteer website in languages identified in the City's Language Equity Policy & Guidelines (6.1.10).

APPENDIX A

Audit Objective, Scope, and Methodology

The mission of the City Auditor’s Office is to independently assess and report on City operations and services. The audit function is an essential element of San José’s public accountability, and our audits provide the City Council, City management, and the general public with independent and objective information regarding the economy, efficiency, effectiveness, and equity of City operations and services. In accordance with the City Auditor’s Fiscal Year (FY) 2024-25 Audit Work Plan, we have completed an audit of access to and use of critical services by traditionally marginalized communities – BeautifySJ Neighborhood Blight Reduction and Beautification programs. The audit was conducted in response to direction from the Mayor to explore an audit scope in this area in the March 2023 Budget Message.

We conducted this performance audit in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

The objective of this audit was to assess access and use of BeautifySJ Neighborhood Blight Reduction and Beautification programs by traditionally marginalized communities. We sought to understand the relevant internal controls around access of use of BeautifySJ Neighborhood Blight Reduction and Beautification programs. We did not review all internal controls over all BeautifySJ operations. We have performed the following to achieve the audit objective:

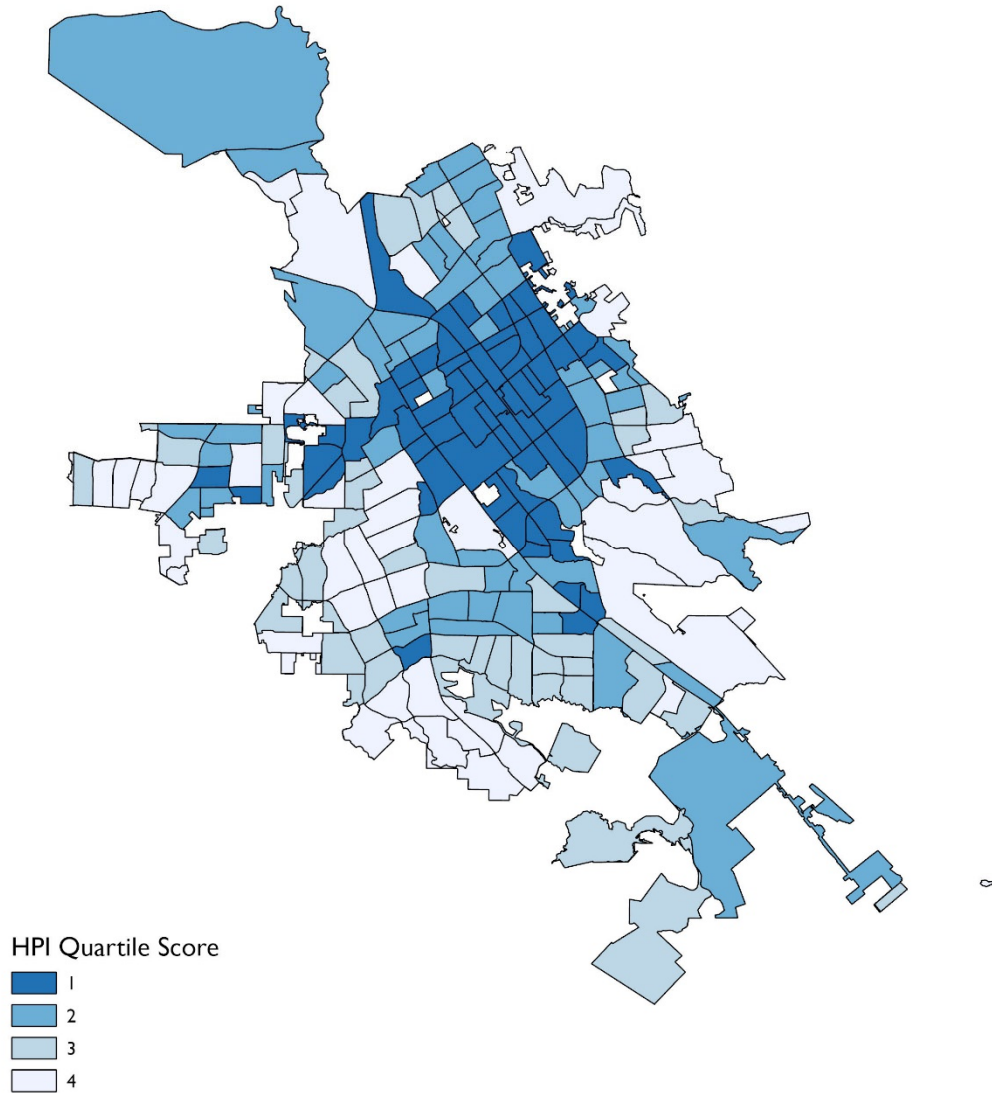
- To understand City policies and procedures pertaining to language and website accessibility we:
 - Reviewed the following Citywide policies:
 - Language Equity Policy & Guidelines [City Policy Manual (CPM) 6.1.10];
 - Website and Digital Services Governance (CPM 1.7.9);
 - Equity Values and Standards Policy (Council Policy 0-22); and
 - CSJ Translation Technology Standard Operating Procedure (SOP).
 - Interviewed staff from the City Manager’s Office of Racial and Social Equity, and the Office of Communications.
- To understand the BeautifySJ Neighborhood Blight Reduction and Beautification programs and how the public requests these services, we interviewed staff from:
 - Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services Department and
 - Information Technology Department.
- To identify priority communities that potentially contain traditionally marginalized communities, we reviewed:
 - The Public Health Alliance of Southern California’s Healthy Places Index,
 - The City of San José Equity Atlas, and
 - Equity Priority Communities identified by the Metropolitan Transportation Commission.

- To assess the access of services in identified priority communities, we:
 - Reviewed and compared service requests for illegal dumping and graffiti service requests across priority communities and other parts of San José for FY 2021-22 through FY 2023-24,
 - Reviewed and compared Cycle 6 (2024) BeautifySJ project locations, identified in the grant agreements, across priority communities and other parts of San José, and
 - Reviewed and compared FY 2023-24 dumpster day events across priority communities and other parts of San José.
- To understand customer satisfaction around the City's efforts around beautification and overall cleanliness of the city, we reviewed Focus Area Community Survey responses to questions regarding perceptions of city cleanliness for FY 2023-24 Q1, Q2, Q3, and Q4.
- To understand accessibility requirements and accessibility features offered for volunteer opportunities, we:
 - Reviewed the Americans with Disabilities Act (Title II), and
 - Reviewed the City and County of San Francisco's Public Works website.

The Office of the City Auditor thanks the Park, Recreation and Neighborhood Services Department, the Information Technology Department, the Finance Department, and the Office of Racial and Social Equity for their time and insight during the audit process.

APPENDIX B

Healthy Places Index Quartile Scores for Census Tracts in San José



Source: Auditor created map based on data from the Healthy Places Index for San José. Information on the Healthy Places Index can be found at <https://www.healthyplacesindex.org/>

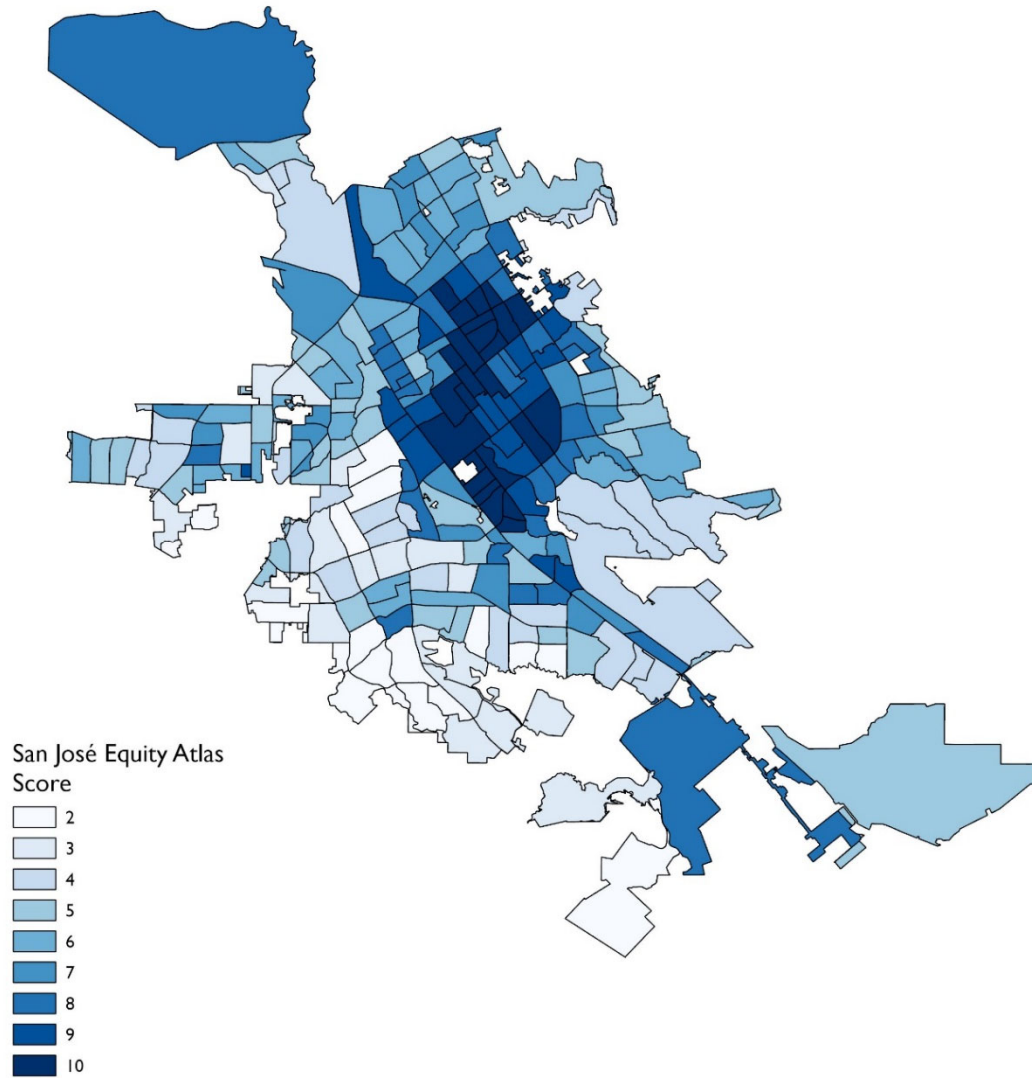
Notes:

- The Healthy Places Index (HPI) is a project of the Public Health Alliance of Southern California that makes data available through an open data platform to support efforts to prioritize equitable community investments, programs, and policies. Community indicators like education, job opportunities, and clean air and water are considered and factored into a combined score. These are then ranked on a quartile system from 1 to 4 of all census tracts in the city, where 1 indicates less healthy community conditions and 4 indicates more healthy community conditions.
- Some census tracts do not have data available from the Healthy Places Index due to their exclusion criteria.

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APPENDIX C

San José Equity Atlas Scores for Census Tracts in San José



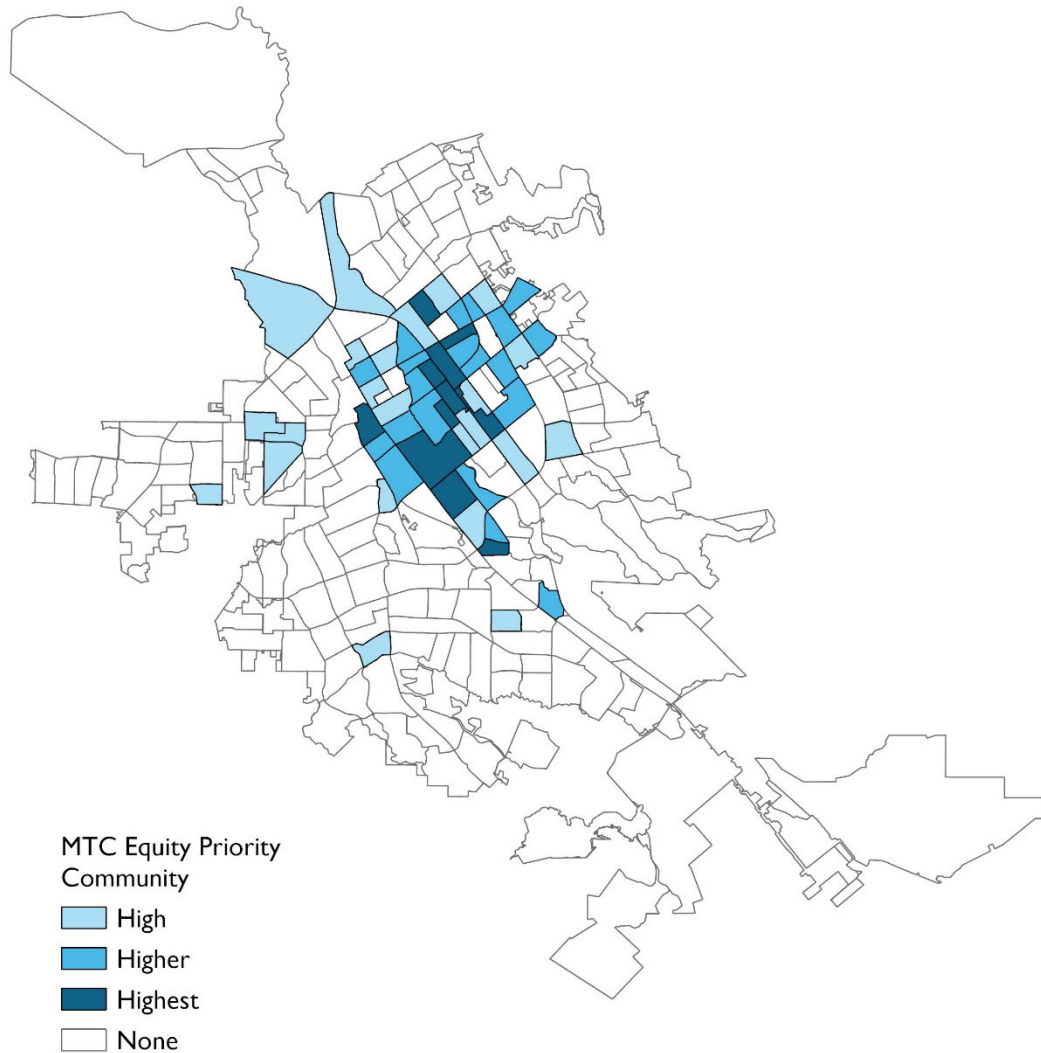
Source: Auditor created map based on data from the San José Equity Atlas. The San José Equity Atlas can be found online at <https://gis.sanjoseca.gov/maps/equityatlas/>.

Note: The San José's Equity Atlas considers racial and income data. Census tracts are assigned a score of 1-5 for each. The combined score can range from 2-10, with higher scores signifying higher proportions of people of color and lower household income.

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APPENDIX D

Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) Equity Priority Communities in San José



Source: Auditor created map based on data from the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC). Information on these priority communities can be found online at <https://mtc.ca.gov/planning/transportation/access-equity-mobility/equity-priority-communities>.

Note: The MTC Equity Priority Communities are census tracts within the Bay Area with significant concentrations of underserved populations incorporating demographic factors such as race, income, English proficiency, disability status, and age. Census tracts can be classified into one of the following groups: High, Higher, Highest, or not an MTC Equity Priority Community (None).

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Memorandum

TO: Joseph Rois
City Auditor

FROM: Jon Cicirelli, Dir. PRNS
Khaled Tawfik, Dir. IT
Drew Corbett, Dir. Finance

SUBJECT: SEE BELOW

DATE: December 3, 2024

Approved

Date

12/4/2024

SUBJECT: RESPONSE TO THE AUDIT OF THE BEAUTIFYSJ PROGRAM: ACCESS AND USE OF NEIGHBORHOOD BLIGHT REDUCTION PROGRAMS

BACKGROUND

The BeautifySJ Neighborhood Blight Reduction and Beautification programs provide a variety of services, including illegal dumping and graffiti removal; city-wide beautification, litter pickups, and volunteer events; and grant programs to promote neighborhood association engagement and support. Residents access services under these programs in different ways, such as through San José 3-1-1 (SJ311), websites, and other means. The FY 2024-25 Adopted Operating Budget for these programs was \$10.3 million. BeautifySJ is located within the Department of Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services (PRNS).

In the 2023 March Budget Message, the Mayor provided the following direction.

To ensure we continue to make progress toward a more just and equitable future, the City Auditor is directed to prepare and publish an Information Memo that explores the scope and costs associated with conducting an audit of access to and use of our most critical city services in traditionally marginalized communities, including recommendations for improving the value the City is delivering to residents who most need these services.

Subsequently, the City Auditor issued a memo proposing a series of audits to address the breadth of critical services that the City provides.¹ This is the first such audit and it is focused on access to Beautify San José (BeautifySJ) Neighborhood Blight Reduction and Beautification Programs within the Department of Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services (PRNS).

¹ The City Auditor’s Memorandum can be found at <https://www.sanjoseca.gov/home/showpublisheddocument/99564/638231383930770000>.

Also included in the 2023 March Budget Message, the Mayor gave direction for the City Manager to bring greater organizational focus, staff resources, and governance-level goals to a small number of foundational goals or focus areas. *Cleaning Up Our Neighborhoods* was one of the foundational goals and encompasses the work of BeautifySJ.

The objective of this audit was to assess access to and use of BeautifySJ's Neighborhood Blight Reduction and Beautification programs by traditionally marginalized communities.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND ADMINISTRATION'S RESPONSE

Finding 1: Priority Communities Have Received The Same or Higher Levels of Service From Neighborhood Blight Reduction Programs.

Recommendation #1: To ensure continued equity of service delivery for the BeautifySJ Blight Reduction and Beautification programs, the Department of Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services should create a process to maintain and review disaggregated program data using an equity index for each of its programs to evaluate equitable service delivery on an ongoing basis.

Administration's Response: The Administration agrees with this recommendation.

Green: The BeautifySJ Program will establish guidelines and determine what equity index the Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services Department will use to evaluate the neighborhood blight reduction programs identified in the audit. The program data will be reviewed annually to evaluate equitable service delivery and to make program adjustments as needed to ensure services are delivered equitably.

Target Date for Completion: September 2025

Recommendation #2: To ensure residents who speak languages other than English can request services, the Information Technology Department should work with its vendor to immediately fix the Spanish and Vietnamese translations on the SJ311 website and mobile application.

Administration's Response: The Administration agrees with this recommendation.

Green: The Information Technology Department team is working with its vendors to resolve the language translation issues and restore the translation for Spanish and Vietnamese in the SJ311 application.

Target Date for Completion: March 31, 2025

Recommendation #3: To ensure accessibility of languages in accordance with the City's Language Equity Policy & Guidelines (6.1.10), the Information Technology Department should incorporate languages spoken by 5 percent or more of the population into the SJ311 website and mobile application, as well as the 3-1-1 phone tree.

Administration's Response: The Administration agrees with this recommendation.

Green: This item is planned in the Information Technology Department's SJ311 2025-2026 Strategic Plan for the SJ311 application to support Chinese Traditional and Chinese Simplified.

Target Date for Completion: June 30, 2026

Recommendation #4: The City Administration should, in its next Request for Proposal for a grant platform, require translated information and ensure web accessibility in accordance with the City's Language Equity Policy & Guidelines (6.1.10) and Website and Digital Services Governance (1.7.9).

Administration's Response: The Administration agrees with this recommendation.

Yellow: The City Auditor's recent report highlighted limitations in the webGrants platform, including its inability to provide multilingual support and its expired license agreement. These issues impede accessibility and hinder compliance with the City's Language Equity Policy and Guidelines (6.1.10).

The Finance Department, as the primary user of the WebGrants platform, is committed to addressing these concerns in collaboration with City Administration.

a. **Short-Term Actions:**

- The Finance Department's Purchasing Division is finalizing a two-year extension for the current WebGrants license. This extension will ensure uninterrupted service while allowing sufficient time to develop a comprehensive RFP.
- During this period, the Finance Department will engage with the vendor to explore enhancements to the current platform, including the incorporation of multilingual functionality to align with audit findings.

b. Long-Term Plan:

- The Finance Department will spearhead the development of an RFP for a new grant platform that fully complies with the City's Language Equity Policy. The new platform will prioritize accessibility features such as multilingual support, enhanced user experience, and adherence to best practices in digital governance.
- This process will involve consultation with key stakeholders, including the Parks, Recreation, and Neighborhood Services Department, the Office of Racial and Social Equity, and the Information Technology Department, to ensure the platform meets both operational and equity goals.

Target Date for Completion: Target Date for Completion 4a: June 30, 2025

Target Date for Completion 4b: June 30, 2026

Recommendation #5: To improve communication about Neighborhood Blight Reduction and Beautification volunteer events, the Department of Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services should include accessibility statements in advertisements or notifications for BeautifySJ-organized volunteer events.

Administration's Response: The Administration agrees with this recommendation.

Green: PRNS will add accessibility information to advertisements and notifications for BeautifySJ organized volunteer events beginning January 2025.

Target Date for Completion: January 2025

Recommendation #6: The Department of Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services should provide translated guidance of how to use BeautifySJ's volunteer website in languages identified in the City's Language Equity Policy & Guidelines (6.1.10).

Administration's Response: The Administration agrees with this recommendation.

Green: PRNS staff will develop multilingual materials that provide guidance on how to utilize the BeautifySJ volunteer website in languages identified in the City's Language Equity Policy and Guidelines (6.1.10).

Target Date for Completion: May 2025

CONCLUSION

The Department would like to extend its gratitude to the City Auditor's Office which dedicated their time to the completion of this audit. It has been a positive experience that yielded opportunities to improve these services that the Department provides to the residents of San José.

/s/
JON CICIRELLI
Director of Parks, Recreation
and Neighborhood Services

/s/
KHALED TAWFIK
Chief Information Officer
and Director of information Technology

/s/
DREW CORBETT
Director of Finance

For questions, please contact Olympia Williams, Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services Deputy Director, Community Services Division, at Olympia.williams@sanjoseca.gov

Namrata Batra Agrawal, Information Technology Department, Enterprise Supervising Technical Analyst at Namrata.batraagrawal@sanjoseca.gov

Drew Corbett Finance Department, Acting Director of Finance at Drew.corbett@sanjoseca.gov