

Mujeres Empresarias Tomando Acción (META)



Photo courtesy of Mujeres Empresarias Tomando Acción

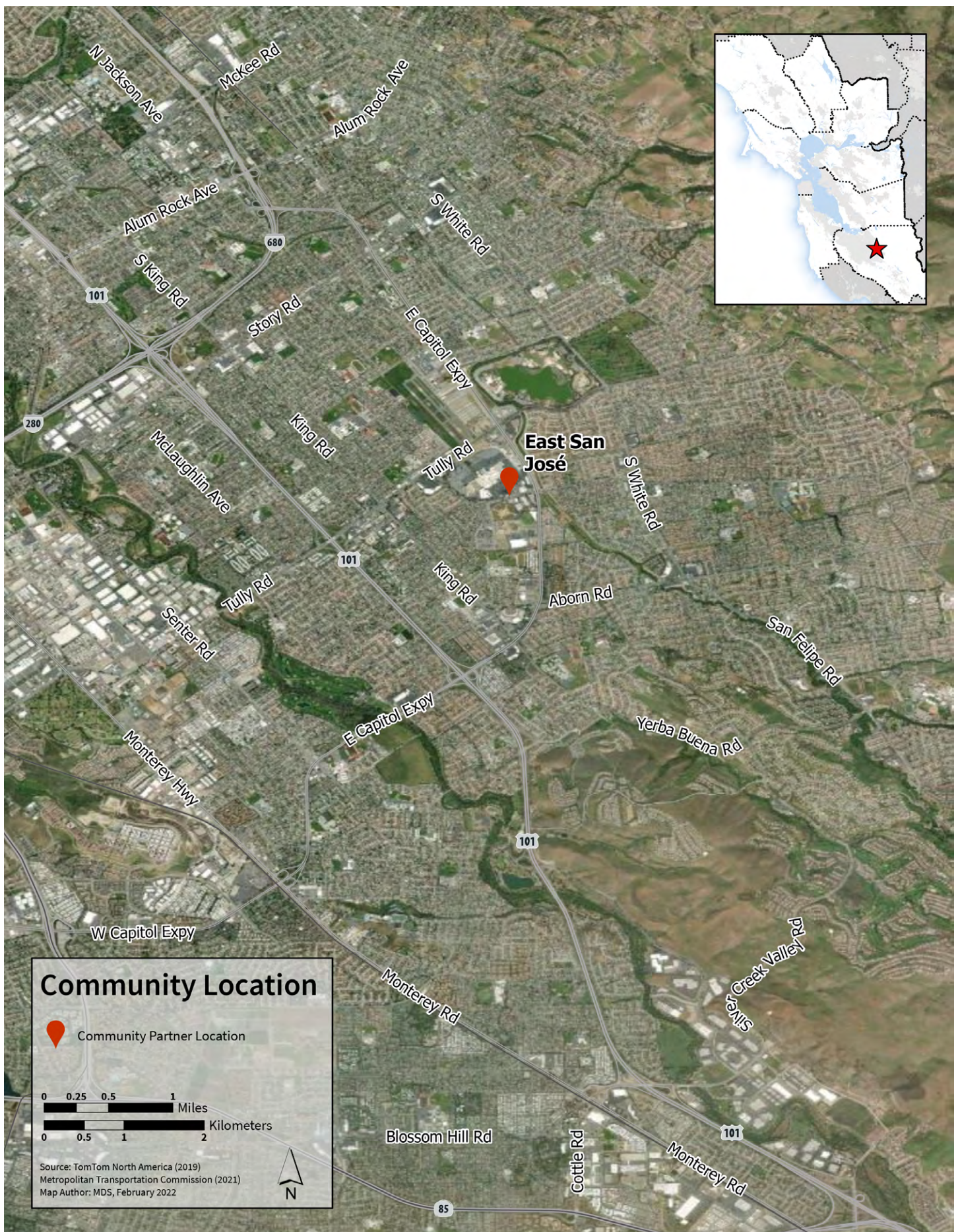


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Mujeres Empresarias Tomando Acción (META) is a woman-owned business comprised of community workers who provide quality services, developing the leadership of each client through workshops and children's activities.

META provides outreach services to inform and mobilize the community, being a connecting bridge to make changes and prosper. They conduct their business with respect, honesty and with a focus on improving the quality of life for communities and their families.

META has a vision that advances economic power through leadership development and is a symbol of strength and prosperity. META also motivates women in their community to pioneer their own businesses and to be able to raise awareness among more people to support women entrepreneurs like them to make their dreams come true and activate the local economy and the entire community.



Project Description

In 2021, META conducted a water-related community needs assessment in the east San Jose area as defined by the DWR DAC Mapper Tool. META conducted outreach for the needs assessment through a social media campaign, surveys, and two focus groups. META aimed to include traditionally marginalized communities that are typically underrepresented such as the Latinx and Vietnamese communities. META worked with partner organizations to develop their outreach strategy to ensure strong representation of community groups most prominent in East San Jose.

Background on East San Jose

Demographics

East San Jose is located in the city of San Jose, California, and consists of the Alum Rock and Evergreen districts.

The District of Alum Rock has a population of 12,042, of which 67% identifies as Hispanic or Latino, 19% identifies as Asian, 16.7% as White, 3.4% American Indian, 1.4% Black, 0.3% Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander. 15.7% identify as two or more races. 43.3% identify as some other race. 35.4% of the population of Alum rock identified as foreign-born in the census. 43.4% of whom identified as not a U.S. citizen. 11.3% of the population is below the poverty line.

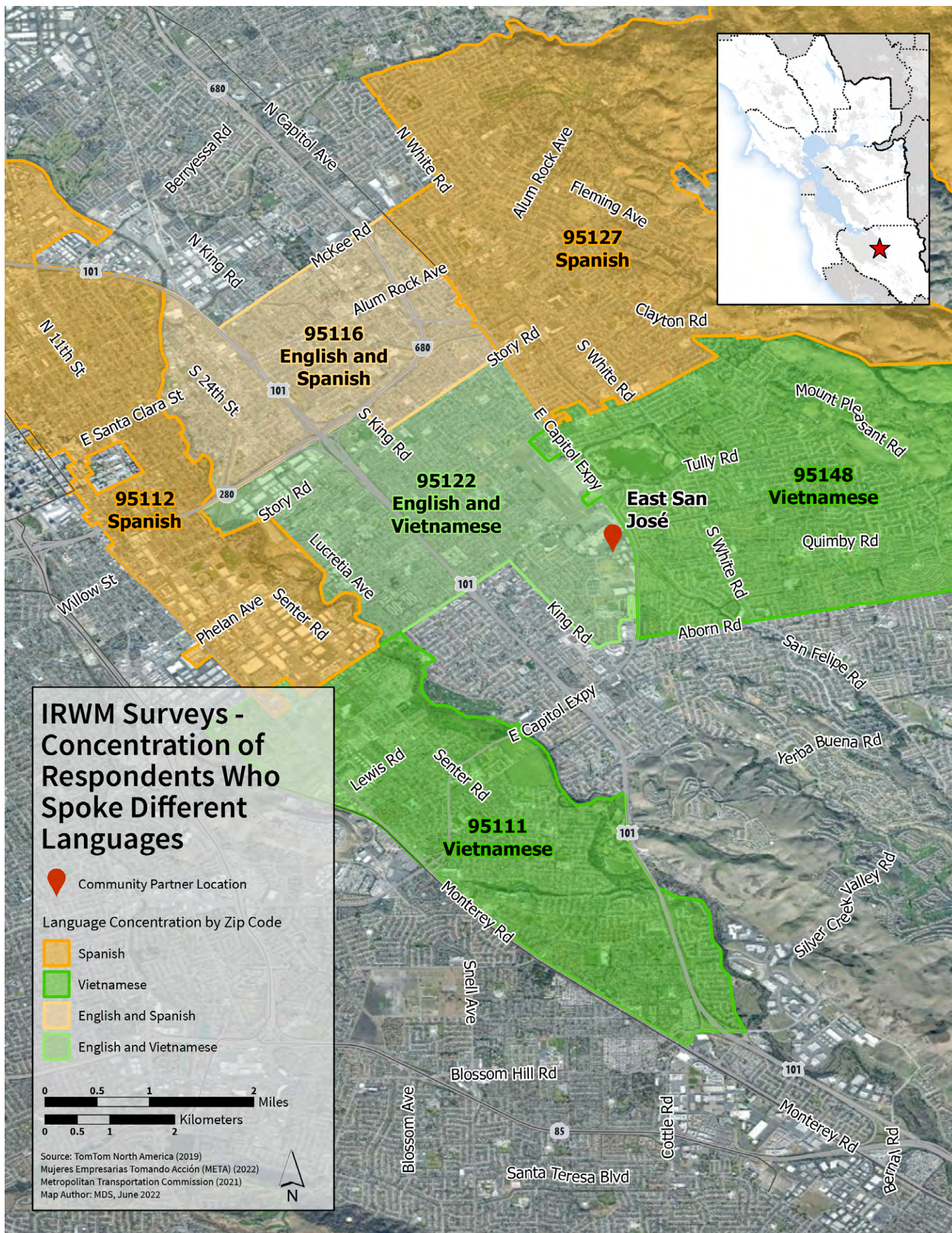
Unlike Alum Rock, the District of Evergreen does not have discrete census data available. META describes the community of East San Jose as largely Latinx and Vietnamese, the majority of whom are working-class families and students.

History of Environmental Injustice and Inequity in East San Jose

Similar to many other marginalized communities, the residents of East San Jose are disproportionately impacted by environmental justice issues. Many community members have experienced poor water quality and frequent flooding during the rainy season. Most recently, the community of East San Jose worked to shut down Reid-Hillview Airport, a small aviation airport whose activity has been linked to high levels of lead in the blood of children living nearby (KPIX5 CBS SF Bay Area, 2021; Ramirez, 2021).

Community-Identified Strengths and Assets

Local nonprofits such as the Si Se Puede Collective and Asian Americans for Community Involvement have helped to inform community members about environmental justice issues and have helped mobilize residents to take action in addressing them. The communities residing in East San Jose have powerful local leaders working side-by-side with the community to address social inequities. The cultural experiences and established cultural hubs of East San Jose such as the Mexican Heritage Plaza serve as an asset in facilitating communication and outreach with external partners working in East San Jose. This was recently demonstrated with the powerful mobilization of East San Jose leaders in mitigating the impact of COVID-19 on the local community through food drives, COVID testing, and vaccinations.



Summary of Outreach and Engagement Efforts

Survey: Needs assessment surveys were conducted from April to May 2021. The survey was provided in English, Spanish, and Vietnamese. A total of 257 surveys were conducted (84 in English, 139 in Spanish and 34 in Vietnamese). The survey was shared through weekly social media outreach, door-to-door outreach, and outreach at local community events. META also conducted one-on-one phone calls to establish community connections prior to sharing the survey. The survey collected demographic data and asked questions related to water education needs, prioritization of water issues, and water usage.

Focus Groups: During May 2021, META conducted two focus groups. Both groups were conducted in Spanish with a total of 21 participants. The questions were structured to provide open dialogue on water quality, prioritization of water issues, and solutions to water issues.

Needs Assessment Findings



Drinking Water



Flooding



Trash and Litter



Industrial Contamination

The main issues identified through the needs assessment were problems with drinking water quality and infrastructure. Participants also mentioned trash, flooding, and industrial contamination as issues.

META aimed to talk with people who represent the major communities within East San Jose to elevate the perspective of the East San Jose community, which is largely Vietnamese and Latinx. The survey results are broken down into the three main languages in which the data was collected; Vietnamese, English, and Spanish. The results showed differences between the responses in these languages for specific questions. Most of the English survey respondents expressed that their ethnic or racial group is Latinx, indicating that the survey respondents as a whole are primarily Latinx.

Survey

Vietnamese: The Vietnamese survey respondents were primarily concentrated in the 95122, 95111, and 95148 zip codes of East San Jose. The majority of respondents (73.5%) indicated that they have lived in East San Jose for five to ten years. However, most respondents share that they do not work in East San Jose. Additionally, most of the respondents (61.3%) reported that they do not receive a water bill, which might indicate that they are renters. Around 50% of respondents reported that they use water for cooking. A larger percentage (67.7%) indicated that they buy water used primarily for drinking. Most (62.5%) consider the tap water to be “good.” However, the main concern reported by respondents was unsafe drinking water followed by industrial contamination and cost of water. The top three requests for additional information about water were safety of water, cost of water, and disaster preparedness in relation to water. Respondents indicated that they would prefer to learn more about water issues through video.

English: The English-speaking respondents were primarily concentrated in the 95122 and 95116 zip codes of East San Jose. Many respondents identified as Hispanic/Latino and indicated that their primary languages spoken at home were English and Spanish. The majority of respondents (75.6%) shared that they have lived in East San Jose for five to ten years. However, 60.2% do not work in East San Jose. In comparison to the Vietnamese survey respondents, 54.8% shared that they do receive a water bill. This might indicate that a slightly larger percentage of respondents are homeowners. Most respondents shared that they use water for bathing. Additionally, 60.2% expressed that they buy their water, mostly for drinking. Over 50% of respondents consider the quality of water to be “fair.” The top three issues for respondents in this group were cost of water, safety of drinking water, and infrastructure/pipes. The top three issues respondents want to receive more information about are chemicals in the water, safety of the water, and cost of water. Respondents indicated that they would like to learn more about water issues through video and flyers.

Spanish: The majority of respondents in the Spanish survey group identified as Hispanic/Latino. All of the respondents indicated that their primary language is Spanish. Most respondents were located in the 95116 and 95112 areas of East San Jose. A large majority (80.1%) of respondents have lived in the East San Jose area for 11 years or more. However, about half of the respondents did not work in East San Jose. A majority of respondents (62%) do not receive a water bill, which might indicate that a majority of the respondents in this group are renters. Respondents also shared that they use the water primarily for cleaning and bathing. More than half (52.6%) of respondents buy water. Many use the purchased water to drink or cook. The majority (62.8%) of respondents expressed that the quality of water is “acceptable.” The top three water issues identified by respondents were: safety of water, old infrastructure/pipes, and trash. Respondents expressed wanting to know more about water quality and contamination. Respondents indicated that they would like to learn more about water issues through video and flyers.

Focus Groups

The focus group participants were asked the following questions:

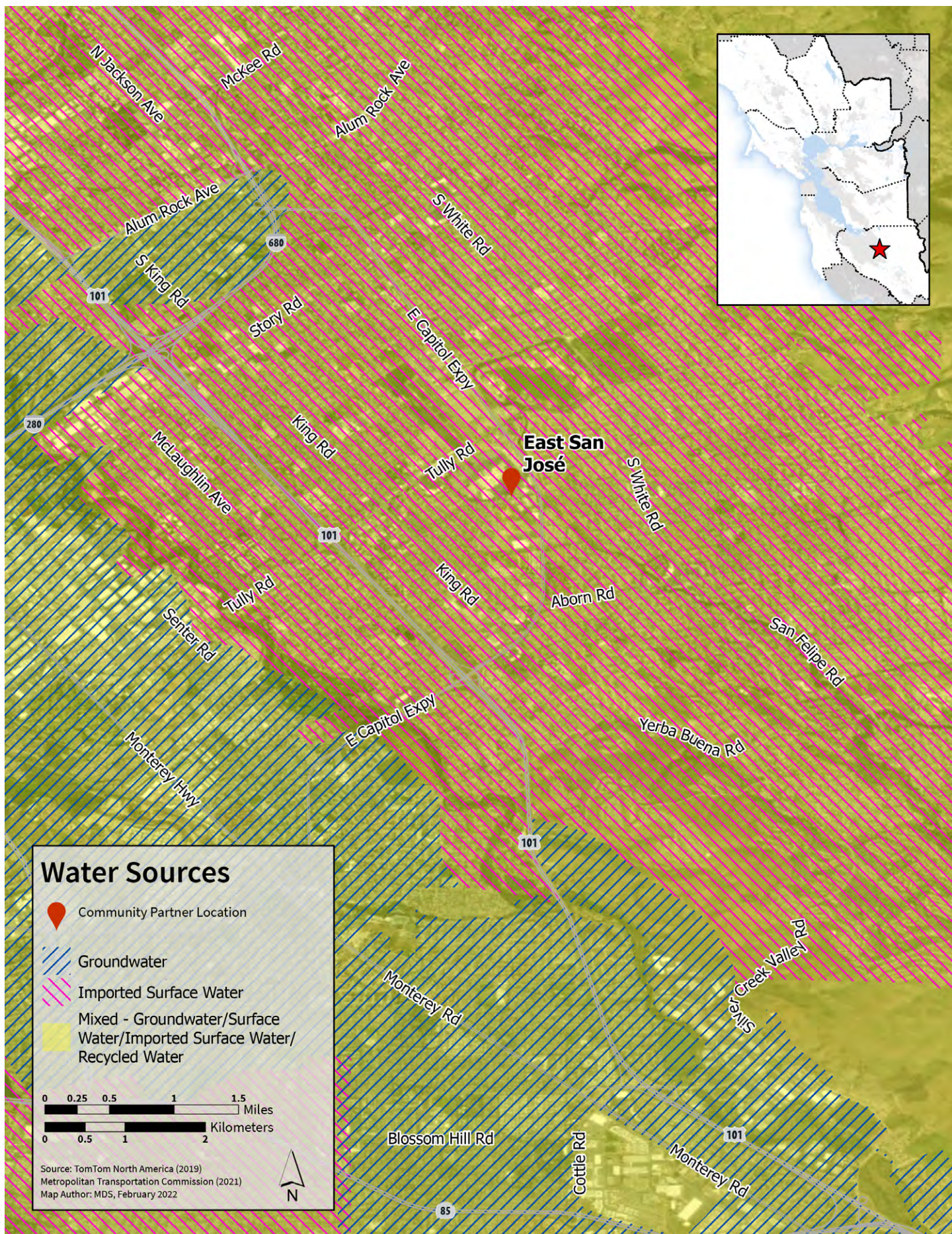
What do you think of the quality of water in East San Jose?

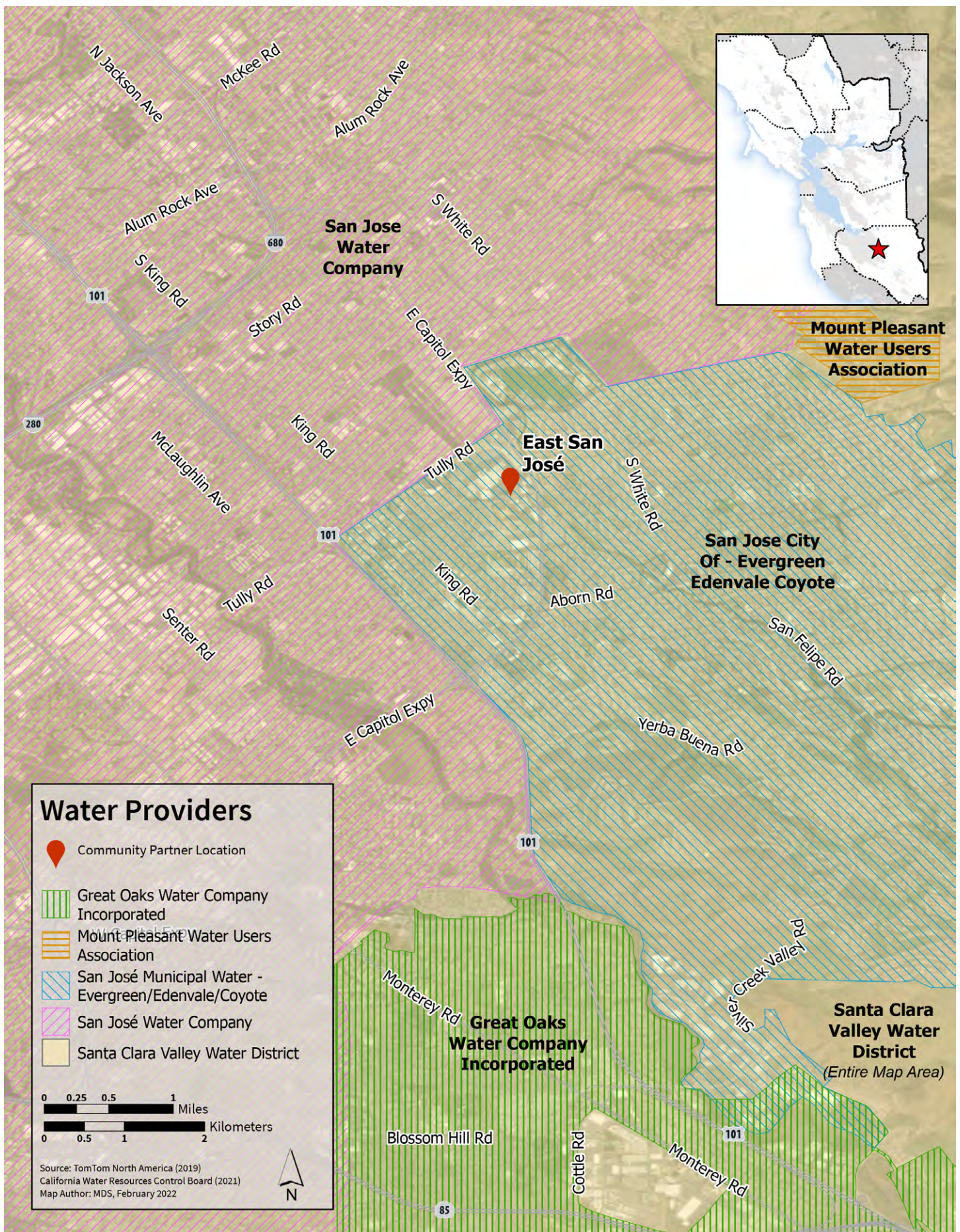
- Of common water problems, which should we prioritize?
- What do you think are the solutions to these problems?
- If we analyze tap water quality, what kind of information would you like to know?

Participants shared that they do not think the quality of their tap water is good. Many reported buying tap water specifically because they are not sure about or do not trust the safety of cooking with or drinking tap water. Some described the water that comes from their tap as brown/yellow in color with a smell and taste of bleach. One participant shared that they have experienced a stark difference between clear water in Mountain View and the water they drink at home in East San Jose. At least one participant had read that the tap water in East San Jose should not be used for cooking or drinking.

Participants prioritized the safety of drinking water as the primary water issue they are facing. Other priority issues include old infrastructure, cost of water, industrial contamination, and the intersection of trash and flooding. Participants specifically mentioned that trash accumulates and can clog storm drains and exacerbate flooding issues.

Participants want to be better informed about the quality of their water. Many participants recommended testing tap water to understand whether lead or other constituents that might be harmful to their health are present. Some participants recommended routine maintenance of the water pipes, and some suggested implementing programs to help reduce water waste. Additionally, participants requested information about the quality of their water pipes and would like to know what types of water filters can be used at home. One participant suggested a program that would provide low-income individuals with free water filters.





Recommendations and Next Steps

Overall, participants expressed being the most concerned about the safety of tap water, with many sharing that they buy bottled water for cooking and drinking. Participants also expressed high levels of interest in understanding what type of constituents are found in their water. Many participants do not receive a water bill, and therefore do not have access to outreach and information about water quality found on the water bill. The quality of pipes/infrastructure, industrial contamination, trash that intersects with flooding, and cost of water were also among the top concerns expressed by survey and focus group participants.

META would like to partner with local water utilities to support the evolution of their engagement with communities to meaningfully bring communities in and address water quality concerns. META recommends the following next steps to follow up on the needs assessment findings and provide additional information to the East San Jose community:

Outreach

Culturally sensitive outreach to inform community members of water issues in East San Jose should include:

- Outreach in Vietnamese, Spanish, and English as well as other languages that may be found in this area
- Informative videos and flyers

Outreach strategies should also consider 1) that a majority of people who live in East San Jose do not work there and therefore might not be able to participate in community meetings on particular days or times during their work day; 2) that the Vietnamese community members who responded to surveys through this process were elderly and had limited literacy skills, and outreach to this particular population might need to be adapted to ensure that the community can access information without additional barriers; and 3) that many participants have lived in East San Jose for over five years, which could help make outreach easier as these communities have established meeting areas and events.

Additionally, META recommends exploring the following outreach and information-sharing strategies to ensure that the East San Jose community can be informed and supported:

1. Developing programs to help pay water bills
2. Providing information on how people can save water and how that benefits the community
3. Creating programs where people can receive help in changing the water valve when it is not working, and changing broken pipes or other household items that can waste water
4. Conducting tap water quality testing to understand what is in the tap water and ensure that drinking water is safe
5. Providing additional information about the water treatment process, including how it is filtered and how it reaches community members' homes
6. Keeping the sewers clean, especially in rainy weather, and cleaning the streets frequently so that there is not garbage buildup

References

KPIX5 CBS SF Bay Area. (2021, August 18). San Jose Reid-Hillview Airport To Close Because Of Lead Levels Following Vote By County Supervisors. *CBS Broadcasting Inc. and Bay City News Service*. <https://sanfrancisco.cbslocal.com/2021/08/18/reid-hillview-airport-san-jose-lead-levels-closing/>

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