

Addressing Small Business Displacement in San Mateo County

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Colorful storefronts line parts of Middlefield Road, in North Fair Oaks, Calif. (Allison McCartney/Peninsula Press).

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Table of Contents

Executive Summary.....	3
Project Purpose.....	4-8
Literature Review.....	9-20
Methodology.....	21
I. Survey Collection.....	21
II. CartoDB Mapping.....	22
Deliverables.....	14-15
I. Community Surveys.....	23-24
II. Online Map.....	25-26
III. Recommendations.....	26-27
Conclusion.....	28
Appendices.....	29
I. Contact Information.....	29
II. Literature Review Citations.....	30
III. Survey.....	31-35

Executive Summary

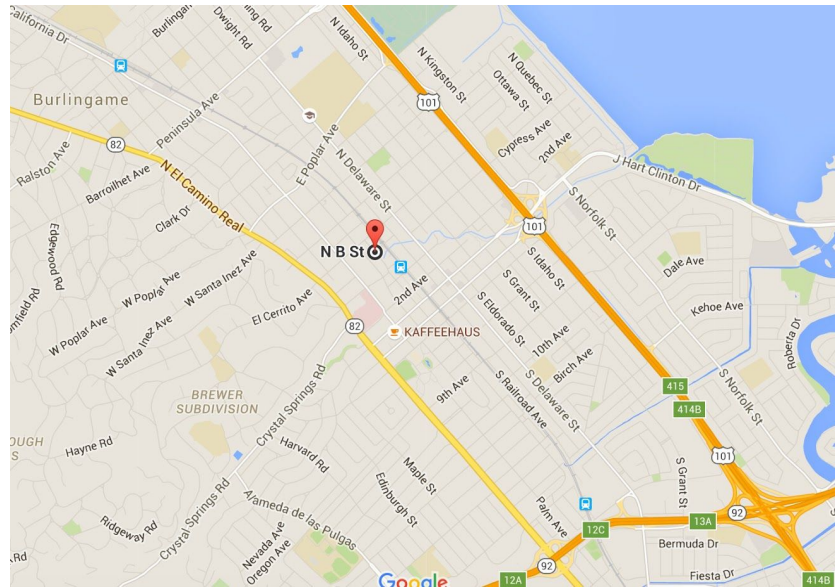
We've spent the quarter cooperating with Urban Habitat, a Bay-Area non-profit working to create a just and connected Bay Area for low-income communities and communities of color, to address the issue of small business displacement in San Mateo County. Urban Habitat collaborates with Peninsula Faith in Action, and the Lawyer's Committee for Civil Rights of the San Francisco Bay Area to approach the issues of gentrification and displacement from an interdisciplinary standpoint. Although this dilemma pervades the entire Peninsula region, as has been documented by surveys collected from downtown San Mateo and Redwood City, most of our effort was focused on the unincorporated area of North Fair Oaks, situated along Middlefield Road and bordered by the municipalities of Atherton to the south and Redwood City to the northwest.

Our primary goal was to identify, through fieldwork involving solicitation of written surveys and voice-recording personal testimonies, the principal causes of small business displacement, and suggest methods of relieving pressures associated with these causes. We made frequent visits to small businesses along the main strip of Middlefield and conducted interviews, primarily in Spanish, with owners and employees of taquerías, salons, joyerías, income tax and insurance services. Despite steadily increasing commercial rent, most owners felt that increasing rent in the residential areas was forcing the relocation of lower-income community members to more affordable cities, thereby decreasing clientele and constituting the major cause of small business displacement.

We incorporated the survey and audio responses into our interactive GIS map, which is publicly available as an online resource for neighborhood residents, as well as visitors, to learn more about small businesses in their respective communities. By providing more personal information like photos and testimonies, we hoped to encourage patronage so that these ethnic, at-risk businesses continue to thrive and serve the ethnic, lower-income communities reliant upon such establishments.

Project Purpose

Originally, the project area of interest was the North B Street Corridor, a vibrant, one block strip of largely immigrant-owned small businesses at the northern edge of downtown San Mateo. We were tasked with creating digital entries for survey responses and organizing them into a website that would allow the user to identify significant trends causing small business displacement.

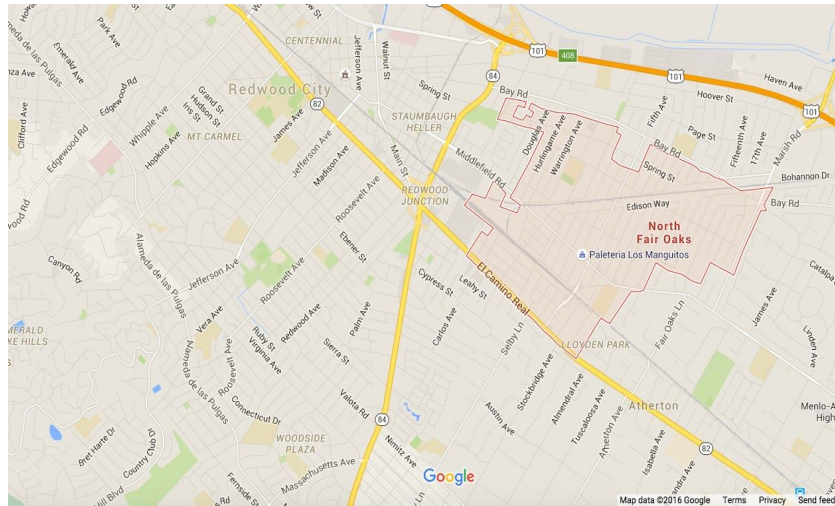


North B Street, San Mateo, CA



However, Urban Habitat and Faith in Action had already collected a sufficient number of surveys from this area as well as Redwood City, so they requested that we move our concentration to North Fair Oaks. North Fair Oaks, CA is a 73.1% Hispanic, residential

unincorporated area, and one of the poorest communities in the Peninsula. Fair Oaks was originally a residential area north of Menlo Park which incorporated as the town of Atherton in 1923, leaving North Fair Oaks unincorporated.



Middlefield Road, North Fair Oaks, CA



Taquerías, panaderías, paletérias, joyerías, salons, bodegas, coin laundries, and social service providers line the approximately one mile stretch of Middlefield Road and produce quality goods and services for the surrounding community. The area is known for its large population of Latino residents with ties to the Mexican state of Michoacán. Many of these small, ethnic business have served the neighborhood for over a decade. However, few own their commercial space, with many still operating on month-to-month leases. The area has been largely overlooked by both public and private investment, apart from the recent county-sponsored initiative.

Our community partner, Tony Samara, is employed by the non-profit organization Urban Habitat (UH). Urban Habitat was founded by Carl Anthony in 1989, after he saw the inequitable distribution of public funds and undemocratic decision-making disadvantaging low-income communities of color in the Bay. Anthony hoped to push the mainstream environmental movement to confront the often sensitive issues of race and class. Anthony and UH also helped to bring Bay Area land-use and transportation authorities under the scope of environmental impact, while simultaneously broadening the definition of sustainability to include equity and justice across demographic boundaries. UH's mission statement, displayed proudly on their website, reads as follows:

Urban Habitat works to democratize power and advance equitable policies to create a just and connected Bay Area for low-income communities and communities of color. We confront structural inequalities impacting historically disenfranchised communities. Through strategic partnerships, we support increasing the power and capacity of low-income communities and communities of color.

They value democratizing power, enabling disenfranchised communities to determine their own destiny. Sustainability is another core value, upheld by challenging racial and class-based segregation, urban sprawl, and climate change. UH also believes that reversing oppression of low-income communities and maintaining diversity benefits the Bay Area as a whole and builds a stronger and more economically resilient community. One method by which these values are enforced is advocacy, which involves analyzing funding and planning decisions, as well as providing alternatives to equalize public investments by race and class. Another method is to train leaders of color to analyze regional planning through a race/class lens. In many situations, the goal is to reframe the debate on policy decisions shaping transportation, land use, and housing. These decisions principally impact low-income communities of color and not necessarily the consultants and government planners who usually weigh in.

North Fair Oaks consists primarily of small, locally-owned ethnic businesses that are very important contributors to neighborhood's well-being, as they provide employment for local residents. In addition, the businesses owned by people of color tend to provide jobs for people of color, who have higher than average unemployment rates. Small business owners also live and spend locally, further supporting the local economy. Ethnically serving businesses create cultural identity, leadership, and social cohesion within communities, as well as support vibrant cultural connection by providing niche goods and services. Because NFO is an unincorporated area without a formal Chamber of Commerce, HOA, or ancillary city leadership and staff, there are fewer stakeholders capable of voicing their concerns to those with the resources to create measureable change. Despite this setback, community

stakeholders include merchants, local residents, the North Fair Oaks Community Council, and the San Mateo County Board of Supervisors. Nonetheless, small businesses in particular are vulnerable to displacement due to rising rent, incoming competition, and loss of clientele.

Our project task was to partner with Tony Samara and Urban Habitat to analyze existing survey data from the San Mateo Anti-Displacement Coalition and Peninsula Faith in Action, develop criteria for assessing the vulnerability of small businesses, refine existing survey instruments, conduct additional outreach to small businesses, and offer legal strategies for public policy recommendations. Although we'd initially been assigned to investigate the North B St Corridor in downtown San Mateo, refocusing to North Fair Oaks proved to be relatively facile, as the two areas share many economic and cultural aspects. In both neighborhoods, however, preservation of small ethnic businesses is not limited to sentimental value. These businesses provide affordable goods and services unavailable at larger retailers, as well as aspects of diversity and stability to the local economy. Much of San Mateo County's business displacement is being driven by its transformation into an affluent region with an economy centered around the technology industry. Surrounding cities like Redwood City, Atherton, and Palo Alto are becoming increasingly expensive to cater the needs of the wealthier job-sector, while pockets like East Palo Alto and North Fair Oaks illustrate the widening gap between rich and poor. Nonetheless, gentrification associated with the continued influx of tech employees threatens to displace residents and businesses in these areas. Small businesses serving such communities may either choose to relocate due to lack of clientele and lower profit margin, or be forced to leave because of failure to adjust to the new market.

As described by Professor Chan in the course syllabus, sustainability encompasses issues of *social equity* and *economic vitality*, as well as environmental issues. Truly sustainable cities make it possible for everyone to share benefits and experience a high quality of life without marginalizing certain populations. "High quality of life can be characterized by access to clean air, water, and land; safe and affordable housing; reliable and non-polluting transport; and opportunity to jobs, schools, open space, and food security" (Chan). Urban Habitat's mission of advancing equitable policies to empower lower-income communities like North Fair Oaks fits into the broader theme of sustainability outlined in the course description. As expressed by Kaid Benfield, Director of Sustainable Communities, Energy & Transportation Program at the Natural Resources Defense Council, "Sustainability isn't just about numbers, and it isn't always explicitly about 'the environment' by which most of us mean issues related to pollution and resource consumption. If our urban solutions don't work for people--if we don't make cities wonderful places to live, work, and play--they will never sustain enough favor to work for the planet" (Chan). Small businesses are vital to a neighborhood's well being, and thus contribute to the standard for a high quality of life.

Because small businesses owned by people of color tend to provide jobs for people of color as well, these small business owners support the local economy by hiring, spending, and living locally. They create a sense of cultural identity and connection by providing niche goods and services, and promote leadership and social cohesion within communities. However, they are particularly vulnerable to displacement due to rising rent and incoming competition, so corridors like North B and North Fair Oaks must be protected and enhanced.

Literature Review

We conducted a literature review to better identify and understand the causes of small business displacement as a part of overall gentrification, as well as investigate different solutions to prevent this displacement. Through our review of ten sources, we found several approaches to combating gentrification, as well as many business displacement and gentrification case studies done on various American cities.

Our biggest takeaways and most recurring themes throughout the literature review are that:

- Ethnic communities should flaunt their cultural identity, to both connect the community and attract outside visitors
- Poor communication between local government officials and small business owners leads to a lack of trust and knowledge for the business owners
- Lack of communication among business owners and lack of community network
- Proactive community outreach and legal aid is critical, as many small businesses are unaware that they can get help, and some don't even know what help they could benefit from
- There are many negative aspects of revitalization, including a Catch-22 where investment in neighborhoods can lead to displacement of its businesses
- Housing displacement can lead to a lack of business clientele, causing an unsustainable loss of profit that business owners cannot adjust to

Our summaries and conclusions for each report below. First we discuss a commercial stabilization toolkit, then provide seven case studies on gentrification and business displacement, including San Mateo and North Fair Oaks themselves. After that, we look at two articles that explore the use of GIS in combatting business displacement.

Equitable Development Toolkit for Commercial Stabilizing

PolicyLink, a national think tank dedicated to ensuring economic and social equity, provides a toolkit for commercial stabilization that lists a variety of strategies to help communities strengthen their commercial districts. Commercial stabilization is most commonly achieved through targeted business assistance, capital investment, design guidelines, business attraction, facade improvement, and community controlled commercial development. Of all these tools, the most important is widespread community involvement. Communities need to identify for themselves what kind of business growth they want, so as to avoid bringing in businesses that add to social issues such as gentrification. All planning processes should involve a wide range of stakeholders, including (but not limited to) residents, local merchants, community development organizations, and local government. Additionally, there should be open community input throughout the entire process, as well as feedback on all proposed measures. PolicyLink recommends forming a community development corporation (CDC) to connect low-income neighborhood residents with real

estate, finance, and legal professionals. This CDC will be able to create a clear development plan that can identify the types of businesses that will best serve neighborhood residents.

PolicyLink recommends a 4-point approach to economic revitalization: organization, restructuring, promotion, and design. Organization involves coordinating a wide range of neighborhood stakeholders, as well as ensuring their involvement and communication. Economic restructuring includes strengthening exist businesses and attracting new ones - making sure the new businesses are ones that sufficiently serve the local community. Promotion refers to active efforts to bring in new customers, such as advertising efforts. Better physical design and other ways of improving storefront appearances will also help to attract more customers.

This toolkit also lists activities most commonly used in stabilization efforts. One such activity is the introduction of business assistance organizations and commercial stabilization programs. The former work from the bottom up, offering aid to any businesses that serve the community. The latter target struggling commercial districts and work to determine which local businesses have the greatest future potential to contribute to the community. They then find resources to aid and address the specific needs of those selected businesses. Storefront facade improvement efforts include providing merchants grants and low interest loans as well as design assistance. If these efforts are coordinated and strategized, neighborhoods can develop and strengthen their cultural facilities. This will make it easier for the community maintain its cultural identity, which helps with both establishing a unifying centerpiece in the fight against gentrification and attracting new customers. Streetscape improvements, unlike storefront design ideas, should focus on repairing and maintaining basic infrastructure such as sidewalks, parking spots, and public parks rather than putting up flashy signs or fancy banners. Commercial development can also be a remarkably powerful tool in fighting business displacement, but only if it is both community initiated and community serving. Large-scale reinvestment in local businesses should be a major component of this development, as it is the abandoned neighborhoods lacking viable economic niches that are most at risk for “discovery” and subsequent gentrification. Neighborhood commercial districts are a better option than shopping centers, as shopping centers can pick and choose their tenants to craft a specific economic identity that might not actually help the community.

PolicyLink uses San Francisco’s Mission District as an example of the planning process. Suffering from a perception of heavy crime and unmaintained streets while also dealing with rising gentrification, the local community came up with goals for the Mission Corridor Project. The primary goal is ensuring business stability within the community, ensuring local ownership and employment. All new development should serve local residential needs as well as maintain local architectural and cultural identity. In addition to preventing business displacement, the Mission District wanted to expand housing options for families with low to moderate-incomes, both in terms of rental and ownership. The

community also wanted to improve safety by providing more youth activities and family entertainment, as well as promoting street maintenance and lighting improvements to increase nighttime safety. The toolkit also presents Fruitvale Main Street as an example of successful stabilization efforts and really stressed the long-term impact of small-scale things. One of the best programs is the annual Dia De Los Muertos festival, which features local artists, performers, and food in order to both draw in new customers and reinforce local identity. Fruitvale also established a Main Street Manager who is able to provide informal assistance to struggling businesses, able to bring in committee volunteers that can help merchants with their issues.

Some of the greatest challenges in fighting business displacement include getting funding for organizing and keeping merchants involved, but these can be mitigated by finding experienced professionals to lead community efforts. Another issue stems from the fact that Investing in community-serving retail spaces is riskier than investing in affordable housing. This makes it hard to convince commercial brokers to list spaces in “tough” neighborhoods and find the right financing tools. Oftentimes a developer will insist that there is no market for a certain business, in which case it is up to the community to collect and provide their own data to meet the market in the middle and show that there is in fact a demonstrable need. It is also important to remember that there is no one space that will attract everyone - communities must make choices as to whom they’re targeting and trying to serve.

Silver Spring (MD) Case Study

The study, performed by the Urban Studies and Planning Program at the University of Maryland’s School of Architecture, Planning, & Preservation, identifies the issues facing small business owners brought on by the County’s redevelopment effort. Many were struggling to adjust to the negative externalities of the revitalization effort, such as the disruption caused by construction activity, losing market share to the new businesses, rapidly increasing rent, and insufficient exchange of information both among local businesses and between the businesses and the county government. The study cited poor exchange of information as a critical issue regarding small business displacement. Many owners didn’t take advantage of county assistance programs either because they were unaware or they believed that the programs were inaccessible to them. Others lamented about the excessive paperwork required by the programs, and claimed the process took too long to justify the work needed to see benefits.

These issues are pertinent to the situation currently unfolding in North Fair Oaks and the B Street Corridor in downtown San Mateo. But rather than a county-funded revitalization effort like that of Silver Spring, the Peninsula’s business displacement is being driven by its transformation into an affluent region centered around the tech-industry. Many of the small, ethnic businesses in affected areas will either choose to relocate due to lack of

clientele and lower profit margin, or be forced to leave because of failure to adjust to the new market. Nonetheless, the Silver Spring case study asserts that small ethnic businesses provide affordable goods and services unavailable at larger retailers, as well as aspects of diversity and stability to the local economy, proving that loss of these businesses is more than just a sentimental issue.

Portland (OR) Case Study

The Portland Gentrification and Displacement Study commissioned by the City of Portland Bureau of Planning and Sustainability, authored by Dr. Lisa K. Bates, provides a working definition for gentrification, an underlying cause of small business displacement in downtown San Mateo and the Peninsula region as a whole. “Gentrification occurs when a neighborhood has attractive qualities—for example, location or historic architecture—but remains relatively low value. This disconnect between potential value and current value (called ‘the rent gap’) may occur due to historic disinvestment by public and private sectors.” The Bay Area is becoming desirable to higher-income households and investors, and as a result, lower-income households are being outbid and forced to relocate. New developments catered to these higher-income residents induces a demographic shift in the affected region, causing economic and cultural changes. This study identifies housing displacement as the defining feature of gentrification and addresses the need for an equitable and inclusive approach to development. This approach must take into consideration adverse effects on low-income communities, to ensure that benefits are shared and burdens are not disproportionate for underrepresented groups.

The bureau asserts that the cost of displacement is not simply a lost sense of community for those left behind. Measurable changes to a neighborhood, such as concentrated poverty in schools, spatial separation between low-wage workers’ homes and jobs, loss of wealth when households are displaced without benefitting from increased property value and economic revitalization. Bates cites both positive and negative vignettes of gentrification from observers and victims in various U.S. cities such as New York, San Francisco, Portland, Chicago, and Washington. Though there are ostensible rewards of new development, the Portland Plan strives to secure the accessibility of quality housing, food, education, living wage jobs, safe neighborhoods, basic goods and services, public transit, and green spaces for all community members.

Specifically, the Portland Plan will move forward by embracing three new principle in regards to new development and investment in low-income neighborhoods:

1. An inclusive development paradigm with a racial/ethnic equity lens.
2. A recognition of how public investments affect the market.
3. Ways to utilize opportunities of the role of the public sector in the housing market by anticipating change, regulating appropriately, and engaging networks of development and community actors.

Another important aspect of the Portland Plan is that it does not resign itself to changes that have already occurred, but employs a number of strategies to mitigate displacement by strengthening the existing community. Because neighborhood residents can gain a sense of community empowerment through cultural expression, city-facilitated festivals and celebrations can attract new customers of culturally-specific goods and promote cultural diversity and economic development. Leadership training is another effective strategy for building community organizing capacity. Business owners of underrepresented communities can often benefit from legal guidance and collaboration amongst fellow owners when addressing plans for economic development.

Austin (TX) Case Study

This case study carried out in the East Austin neighborhood of Austin, Texas tracks challenges to local small businesses as a result of gentrification. The relationship between East Austin and Austin is similar to that of the relationship between East Palo Alto and Palo Alto, as East Austin is both economically and racially segregated from the rest of Austin. This study identifies soaring rent as the main driver of business displacement and explains that there has been a change in the mix of local businesses due to demographic shifts within the community. As an example, many African American small businesses are moving from East Austin and into Plungerville not only because rents are cheaper, but also because other African Americans are moving there. Small business owners seek to maintain both their clientele (from a business perspective), and their friends (from a personal perspective). When their entire community seems to move elsewhere, business owners have little choice but to follow.

The new business owners are primarily white and are wealthier than the older, minority owners, who were upset about the fact that they have such difficulty accessing credit while it is so much easier for new owners to access it. Small business owners repeatedly wished for an increased ability to network with other local businesses. They felt that a large part of the problem was that non-minority owners had better networking systems that extended beyond the neighborhood businesses to also form a social and emotional community, while minority owners struggle more on their own. Many minority owners are reluctant to ask for help when they're struggling because they are more hesitant to share sensitive personal information with strangers and oftentimes don't even know who they *could* ask for help. Community organizers can help by providing technical assistance and connecting small businesses with microlending companies. Ideally, small businesses will work with these microlending companies until they become bankable, but some can even continue to work with the microlenders if they are uncomfortable with (or mistrusting of) big banks.

It is also very helpful and effective to create a business district with a distinct identity in order to strengthen the community base and draw additional customers. PeopleFund, a

small business loan provider runs the Focus East Insight Forum Series in East Austin to keep local small business owners informed about local economic and political trends. The city itself has also started a Commercial Preservation and Revitalization program that provides loans to nonprofits and other businesses as an incentive to relocate to East Austin.

St. Paul/Minneapolis (MN) Case Study

"I'm concerned people will be taxed out of their properties because of light rail and new construction," said Swan, an African-American and one of about a dozen members of the Save Our Homes Coalition." The Central Corridor study uses a Health Impact Assessment to analyze the impact of a light rail transit line moving into and along neighborhoods from downtown St. Paul toward Minneapolis. "The area is a growing medium for many small and minority-owned businesses, which are typically 'more disadvantaged than their white-owned and large counterparts,' the report suggests, and thus are more likely to be disrupted by a major development project such as the LRT line." Doran Schrantz, the project's executive director, insists that the light rail line's success must not infringe upon that of those living and working in the corridor.

2nd Avenue (NY) Case Study

The Subway Shaft: How 2nd Avenue Subway Construction Hurts Businesses in its Path is a 2009 study conducted by Betsy Gotbaum at the Office of the New York City Public Advocate. Since its fourth groundbreaking over two years ago, the lack of a firm completion date has aroused numerous public concerns. The construction has been plagued by delays and cost overruns while the neighborhood's vibrancy as well as local businesses owners' livelihoods are being threatened. Many small businesses have been forced to either lay off employees, cut operating hours, or relocate, and there is no foreseeable end to the construction. What's worse the city, state, and MTA have done little to mitigate the economic deterioration of the area. "Second Avenue in Manhattan's Upper East Side is defined by its strong community of small businesses. Some of these establishments have served the neighborhood for generations. The locally owned and operated restaurants, bars, beauty salons, hardware stores, locksmiths, grocery stores, and bodegas give this area the unique character that is essential to New York City as a whole. This character, however, is being threatened by the construction of the Second Avenue subway line."

The Public Advocate surveyed businesses in the area, as has been done by Urban Habitat and Faith in Action in the Bay Area, with the goal of determining what effect the construction has had on commerce. Similar to North Fair Oaks and the B St Corridor, the majority are small, owner-run businesses with ten or fewer employees, that all feel they would benefit from government grants until the construction is complete. In response to the data collected in surveys, the Public Advocate recommended the following to mitigate

economic downturn from the Second Avenue Subway construction: negotiate with banks to provide no- or low-cost loans to Second Avenue businesses, help owners renegotiate their leases, provide property tax abatements to landlords, suspend sales tax on all goods and services for the duration of the project, improve advertising, and create a “Lunch Bus” program for government employees to draw customers back to the corridor. Although the MTA could not afford to compensate businesses for lost revenue, the agency paid for signs on scaffolding obscuring business entrances. In addition, the MTA created the “Shop Second Avenue” campaign on its website promoting affected businesses. The Second Avenue Business Association, a coalition of local merchants, has created its own campaign called “Save Our Stores,” a technique which could be implemented in the Bay Area as well.

North B Street (CA) Case Study

As discussed in the Silver Spring case study, there is a Catch 22 of sorts between investment and displacement. How is it possible to support and retain existing small businesses while simultaneously revitalizing the corridor? When improvements are made to an area desperate for amenities that support a healthy community, the area’s desirability tends to increase which spurs escalating property values and rents. Surges in property values and rents can place low-income residents and merchants at risk of having to relocate or close down. Existing residents may start to feel like outsiders in their own community as neighborhood-serving shops are replaced by new upscale establishments. They will no longer be able to purchase affordable, culturally relevant goods and services or pay for the rising cost of housing. Second, what are the most effective strategies to build trust with merchants and facilitate communication between stakeholders and city officials? Strong proactive and bilingual outreach process was crucial in identifying merchants’ needs and visions for the corridor in the North B Improvement Initiative led by the city. Some owners even previously reported feeling neglected and burdened by city programs. The intent to support and retain businesses must be clearly communicated to owners if any sort of connection is to be established. Third there is the question of how to make quick and low-cost improvements to see tangible results in the near term? In the past, the North B Improvement Initiative organized sidewalk and alley clean-up days, installed planters and banners, extended downtown festivals to the corridor, and had police train local merchants on safe alcohol sale practices. Implementing short-term tactics could reinforce our intentions to the owners, patrons, and neighborhood residents.

Despite the corridor consisting of primarily small, locally-owned businesses, they are important contributors to neighborhood’s well-being by providing employment for local residents. In addition, the businesses owned by people of color tend to provide jobs for people of color who have higher than average unemployment rates. Small business owners also live and spend locally, further supporting the local economy. Ethnically serving businesses create cultural identity, leadership, and social cohesion within communities, as

well as support vibrant cultural connection by providing niche goods and services. Stakeholders in the community include the merchants and property owners, the San Mateo Chamber of Commerce, the Central Neighborhood Association, the Economic Development Growth Initiative, the HOA of North San Mateo, as well as City leadership and staff. However, small businesses in particular are vulnerable to displacement due to rising rent and incoming competition, so corridors like North B must be protected and enhanced. The City of San Mateo's North B Street Improvement Initiative represents a successful model of small business corridor preservation and equitable economic development.

North Fair Oaks (CA) Case Study

“As you drive north on Middlefield Road from the affluent town of Atherton toward Redwood City, the thick tree canopy suddenly vanishes from above and the lush bushes and grasses morph into gravel and cement. Iron gates fronting set-back mansions are suddenly replaced with concrete business facades, and utility wires begin to crisscross the sky above like a spider's web.” North Fair Oaks, CA is a 73.1% Hispanic, residential unincorporated area, and one of the poorest communities in the Peninsula. Fair Oaks was originally a residential area north of Menlo Park which incorporated as the town of Atherton in 1923, leaving North Fair Oaks unincorporated.

The San Mateo County Board of Supervisors has approved a plan to widen sidewalks, cut traffic lanes, and paint new bike lanes in order to make the 1-mile stretch of Middlefield Road more pedestrian friendly by 2019. However, North Fair Oaks is struggling to keep life affordable for residents as tech money fuels a boom in neighboring Redwood City's downtown. The area's greatest advocate is Linda Lopez, chairwoman of the North Fair Oaks Community Council, who can bring the district's concerns to San Mateo County supervisors but has little independent governing authority of her own. She hopes use her authority to increase the volume of affordable housing instead of market-rate rental units, beyond the price range of most residents.

San Mateo County created the North Fair Oaks Forward initiative in 2013, a feedback process intended to guide the revitalization effort and design a project reflective of the community's needs by distributing bilingual surveys and posting informational door hangers throughout the neighborhood. Both the county and Community Council have jointly held community meetings to offer residents and business owners an opportunity to voice their questions and concerns. Despite the initiative's inclusive approach to the Middlefield Road redevelopment project, many Latino small business owners fear displacement pressures will arise from the street project, and are frustrated by lack of detailed information exchange. One owner complained that the meetings were held in the evenings, preventing attendance of restaurant owners due to peak business hours; another claimed the only knowledge she'd acquired about the project was from local newspaper articles. Still, the county maintains the

fact that they want as much North Fair Oaks community engagement in this process as possible.

GIS-Based Spatial Narratives

This study argues that political relationships of urban planning, problem solving, and service delivery have changed dramatically in the past twenty years. For instance, state and private funders' growing emphasis on technical expertise, use of "best practices", and demonstrable achievement of measure outcomes has led to what some characterize as a professionalization of the field. A growing number of community organizations use digital spatial technologies such as geographic information systems (GIS) to carry out statistical and spatial data analysis and mapping for program planning and implementation, fundraising, and monitoring neighborhood change. We hope to help Urban Habitat and Faith in Action develop a dynamic map that will allow them to perform data analysis, which will allow them to negotiate, plan, and implement urban change.

The study defines spatial knowledge to the characteristics and meanings that individuals, social groups, and institutions ascribe to particular places. Through an ongoing ethnographic research with two Chicago community organizations, the study shows how they produce flexible forms of spatial knowledge to support different objectives at different times, cultivating multiple roles in urban planning, development, and social life simultaneously. Moreover, it shows how GIS plays a key role for these organizations since it is used to create narratives about neighborhoods that interpreted and reinterpreted to support different roles and activities.

State institutions, the private sector, and nongovernmental organizations all engage in a range of spatial politics through which they attempt to influence urban change and decision-making process. Urban politics play a role in the decision-making progress as well which might include lines of authority between different actors in urban government, strategies that these institutions can use to try to influence one another, and allowable terms of negotiations over urban spatial change. This complicated process shows that different types of knowledge and ways of representing the needs and conditions of a place influence the power and legitimacy of different actors' claims in spatial decision making. In North Fair Oaks, we have witness the many challenges Urban Habitat is currently facing with policy-makers and small business owners. Another implication of the complicated decision-making process is that spatial knowledge and cartographic representations produced using a GIS and other digital technologies are often given greater weight in planning and policymaking than knowledge presented in other ways. This reassures us that developing a dynamic map will allow Urban Habitat to address some of the challenges is currently facing.

The Near Northwest Neighborhood Network (NNNN) and the West Humboldt Park Family and Community Development Council (WHPFCDC) are community organizations

that work in rapidly changing neighborhood on Chicago's northwest side. The area is characterized by a complicated range of social, economic, and infrastructural conditions—just like North Fair Oaks. For the past decade, the Humboldt Park area has been the focus of intensive efforts by local government, community organizations, and residents trying to improve quality of life in the neighborhood. Similarly to Urban Habitat, WHPFCDC and NNNN, work to retain the remaining industrial and manufacturing activities. Both community organizations work on gentrification since is the source of many problems for some long-time residents and businesses as property values and housing cost increase dramatically. NNNN and WHPFCD carry out their neighborhood improvement and advocacy efforts in an urban governance context that is fraught with ambiguities. The City of Chicago and other state structures are sources of funding and political advantage, as well as targets for grievances. The public, private, and philanthropic institutions they interact with promote a paradigm of inner-city revitalizations focused on capital investment in the built landscape.

The NNNN and WHPFCDC organizations have developed complex strategies for negotiating spatial knowledge, and institutional politics. They use GIS to develop spatial narratives that allows them to share their spatial knowledge, which can be used to pursue multiple objectives and to engage other actors and institutions in multiple ways. Visualization is a way of expressing knowledge about place and spatial relations and also a way of creating spatial meaning through exploration and interpretation. In their GIS-based maps, NNNN and WHPFCDC produce multiple narratives about neighborhoods, conditions, and capacities, and use them to inform and strengthen a diverse range of projects, arguments, and decisions. For example, a map showing distribution of vacant lots in Humboldt Park might be presented through a needs narrative as sites of criminal activity. It could also be presented through an assets narrative as showing opportunities for building affordable housing. Similarly, we are building a narrative for our interactive map, which will help to create awareness of business displacement in the neighborhood and create a more cohesive community. It would also help Urban Habitat to clearly identify the locations in which small business are affected the most.

Urban planning, problem solving, and service delivery are carried out by an ever-growing range of actors. Relationships are increasingly complex as public and private institutions are simultaneously the target of community organization grievances and increasingly an important source of financial and administrative support. Navigating this complex system requires operating in relationship to an extremely diverse range of actors, positioned at multiple levels, who may have competing or conflicting understanding of the neighborhood and its needs. The strategic use of GIS allows organizations to engage in a multilayered politics that produce and transform urban spaces in a way that cannot be fully characterized as either cooperation or resistance. And although community organizations are less powerful agents in terms of their access to capital and formal political power, they have

a deep and detailed knowledge of the institutional, spatial, and knowledge politics of urban planning and problem solving, and the capacity to manipulate these in strategic ways.

San Francisco (CA) GIS Case Study

In 1998, the South Market neighborhood, affectionately known as ‘SoMa’, protested because of new developments being made next to or in place of diverse, mixed-use buildings that were housing immigrant families, artists, start-up companies, and manufacturers. A ‘living neighborhood map’ was used to start a conversation with policy-makers, and was used to illustrate changes in development that portended zoning changes at a city-wide level. This study shows how information-based maps helped to educate a diverse community of people, which empowered them to act. The result was a vision that embraced the existing character and flavor of the neighborhood, while also accommodating its growth. Currently, North Fair Oaks is going through a similar process where businesses and families are being displaced due to the high commercial and residential rent. Unfortunately, North Fair Oaks does not have a living neighborhood map that can educate small business owners to convince and persuade policy-makers to create favorable policies that would benefit the entire community. Our goal is to gather information from small business owners, through surveys, so that a dynamic neighborhood map can be developed.

South Market (SoMa), as the name implies, is just south of Market Street. Historically, it hosted the city’s manufacturing and light industry and provided provided infrastructure serving the port. Moreover, it served as a transient zone by acting as a portal where immigrants and urban poor could establish themselves before moving to a higher standard of living. South of Market Foundation (SOMF) developed a GIS living neighborhood map of SoMa, linking information about buildings, businesses and residents to produce a dynamic physical map. SOMF established a strong political neighborhood voice and influence in 1985 San Francisco Planning Department South of Market re-zoning study, which revealed that SoMa was evolving into an important service district for the financial core and it was a haven for start-up businesses. ‘Live--Work’ was created at this time as a special type of mixed-use development that allowed people to legally have studios and workshops in the same space where they lived. Nonetheless, Planning Department quickly became aware that the code was difficult to enforce since it was almost impossible to verify whether people were actually working the same spaces they were living in.

San Francisco Planning Department collaborated with SOMF in a series of GIS studies documenting traditional manufacturing and emerging high-tech industries. They learned that live-work units were a serious threat to SoMa’s economy due to business displacement caused by incompatible uses or evictions. Moreover, the high influx of computer workers led to many housing permits, especially live-work permits, which created conflicts between existing inhabitants and newcomers. Despite the evident issues, the Planning Department—backed by the Mayor—decided to shelve the GIS-based studies,

which was a major blow to the community because the studies documented live-work as a major threat to important industries in San Francisco. This led residents to create a new group called Save Our Shops (SOS) to confront the city Planning Department and Planning Commission regarding compatibility issues between small businesses and residents. In the next public hearing the Planning Department announced that over the next six months they were going to undertake a land-use study, and they were hoping that this study would show that there was an abundance of industrial land in San Francisco. If that was the case, then these industrial lands would be re-zoned. Furthermore, the Planning Department stated that there would be no community participation due the short time involved.

SOS became a more powerful organization called the Coalition for Jobs, Artists and Housing (CJAH). This group had at its disposal a very powerful GIS database, which helped disprove false claims made by developers regarding job and industry displacement and assisted in identifying potential new zoning boundaries. The living neighbourhood map became a tool that helped people move beyond their own opinions, judgments and naiveté. Maps allowed people to see complex information more easily. Economic jargon and statistics became clearer when re-drawn as pictures. At public hearings rather than reacting emotionally, people could present intelligent and well-informed fact-based economic arguments. Mapping fostered a sense of connection and commitment to place, people really started to 'know' their neighbourhood and its streets.

After a year, the Planning Department finished its land-use study and came to the opposite conclusion that it had reached a year earlier. The study concluded that all industrial land in the city was being used to capacity and was needed in order to support the predicted growth in business services over the next 20 years. The study also concluded that the city was experiencing a housing supply crisis. In the following public hearing, the Planning Commission voted unanimously to approve an Interim Industrial Protection Zone, which was by far the best-compromise solution.

The most significant outcome was that the community's voice was heard and documented. It is unlikely that the Planning Department would have engaged in such a detailed study and invited public participation had it not been for the actions of a very informed and sophisticated group of community activists. At the core of this effort was the GIS generated living neighbourhood map, which empowered the community, educated community members, and offered a means by which people could shed their individual opinions and judgments in order to see the situation for what it truly was. It is our hope that North Fair Oaks will partner with Faith In Action and follow a similar story to SoMa. The GIS map currently being developed can help small business owners reach to fact-based solutions to the many problems North Fair Oaks is currently facing.

Methodology

I. Survey Collection

We helped Urban Habitat collect and digitize surveys from North Fair Oaks and San Mateo. We started by digitizing the whole survey through a Google form. Digitizing the survey had many advantages such as providing data for our visualization tools and the ability to divide the survey into multiple sections. Our survey included five sections: basic information, place of business, neighborhood, issues, and personal demographic information. The first section was basic information, which asked a variety of questions regarding the business such as the contact information, target clientele, and yearly income. The second section was place of business, which asked how long the business in their current location and information about the lease, landlord, and rent increase. By far, the second section was the section that business owners were the most hesitant to answer since it asked very specific and personal information about their business. The third section was neighborhood, which asked if there have been any apparent changes in their neighborhood in the past couple of years. The fourth section was issues, which asked if the business has had any legal issues or if they need a lawyer for any legal help. Finally, the last section was simply basic personal information about the owner. Please see appendix III for the specific questions.

After creating the Google form, we digitize 15 surveys conducted by Urban Habitat and Faith in Action. By digitizing each one of the surveys it was clear that questions regarding yearly income and lease information were the hardest one to receive answers from. Digitizing the surveys before conducting one was extremely helpful since it allowed us to better prepare for each one of the questions. Moreover, we knew that in order to conduct a successful survey it was crucial to make the interviewee comfortable. To do this we conducted the survey in Spanish and we memorized the sequence of the questions so we could easily drive the conversation.

During our fieldwork, we stopped at the building in the intersection between Middlefield Rd and Eighth Ave. We attempted to interview many businesses along Middlefield Rd, and we ended up successfully surveying Donut Depot, Plaza Jewelers, Piñatas Surprises, Computer Repair, and Adrian's Income Tax. The key advantage of conducting the survey in person was the meaningful conversation we had with small business owners. However, we did face many challenges such as the owner not being in the location or the owner was hesitant to provide specific information about their business. For our survey findings please see the deliverables section.

II. CartoDB Mapping

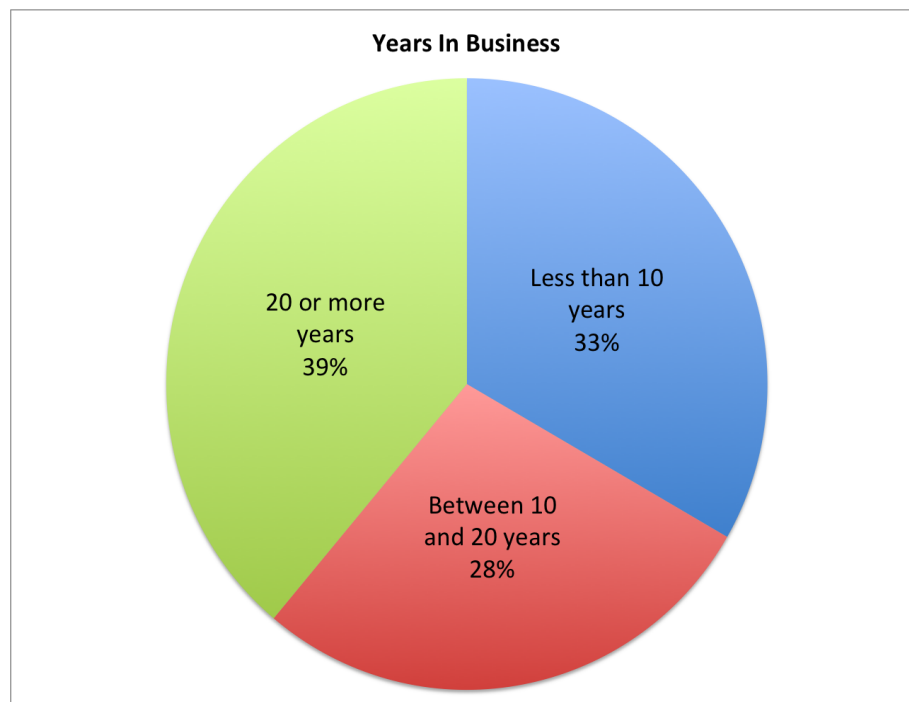
We decided to build a dynamic interactive map that would create awareness about the current challenges business owners are facing in North Fair Oaks and North B Street Corridor. We decided to build our map using CartoDB, which is a geographical information system (GIS) that allowed us to easily render the data we gather from the surveys. CartoDB is very easy to update and it can be easily synchronized with a Google form, which helped us to automate the process of rendering new conducted surveys. It is aesthetically pleasant and very simple to navigate. To see the website please see the deliverables section.

Deliverables

I. Community Surveys

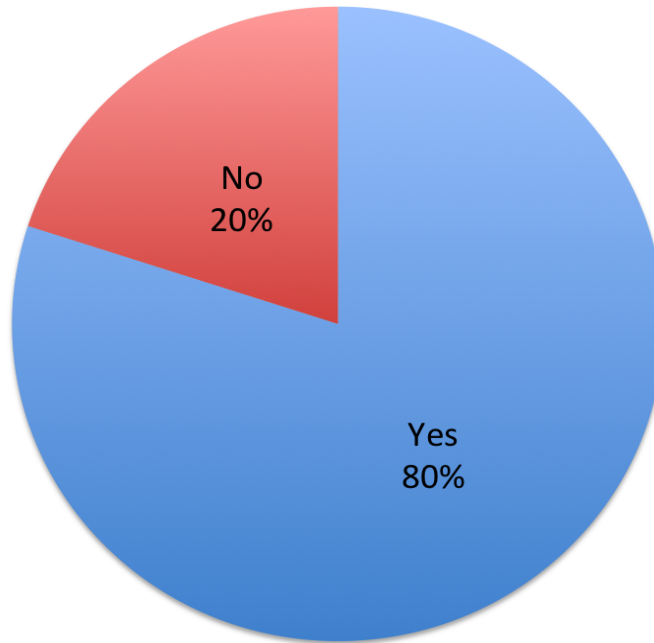
Google form link: <http://goo.gl/forms/lp2l1xfWW3>

The entire process of surveying was eye-opening for us. We learned about the many challenges small business owners are facing in North Fair Oaks, and we would like to share a few of our findings in the process.



Surveys Figure 1 (18 responses)

In Figure 1 we can see that 67%, of the businesses surveyed, have owned their business for more than 10 years. Moreover, while we were conducting our surveys we found the pattern that long-standing businesses are the only ones making enough profit to stay in business. The owner from Piñata Surprises stated that many of the new businesses are not aware of the high rent costs. We hypothesized that long-standing businesses have a better relationship with the landlord and that rent can be increased more frequently with shorter leases and new tenants.

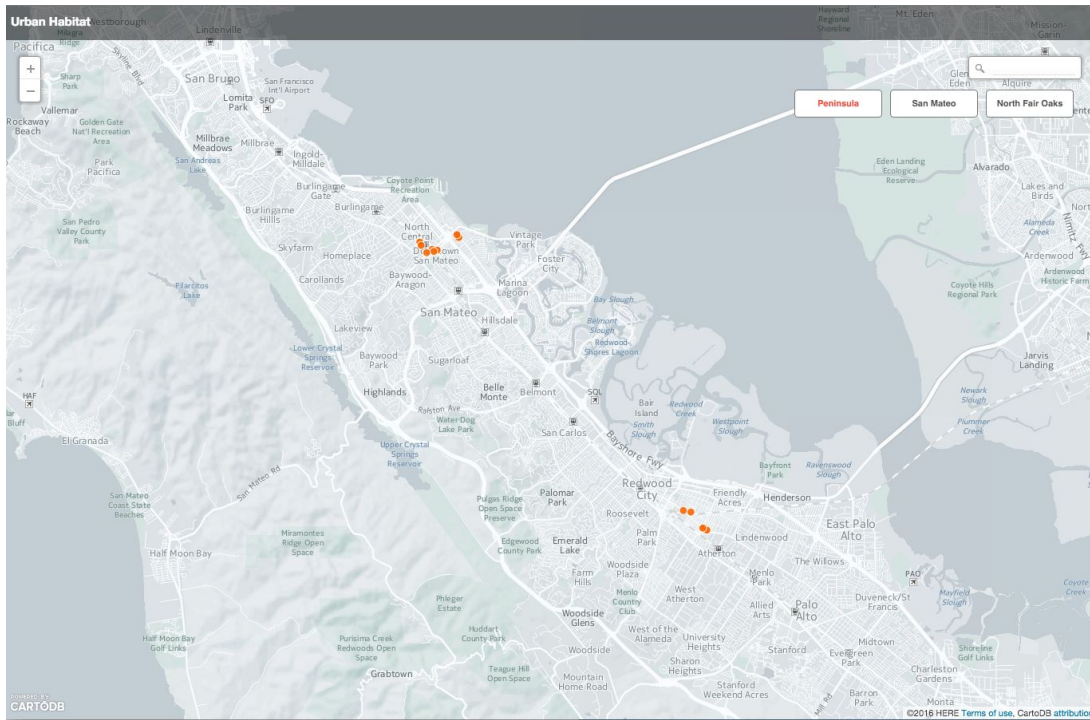
Rent Increase in the Past Two Years

Surveys Figure 2 (15 responses)

As it can be seen in Figure 2, the vast majority of businesses are suffering from rent increase. It was difficult to quantify the exact amount of the increase since many owners were not comfortable sharing an exact figure and others owners shared only a relative increase. The figure may be startling at first glance but our key finding was that it was *not* the root of the problem. The rent increase is stipulated in terms of the lease so it was not a surprise for the business owners. They were not too concerned that their rent was increasing every year. However, they were extremely concerned about their loss of clientele. The residential rent increase was directly affecting their business since many of their clients were being displaced from North Fair Oaks. Maribel Osorio from Tacos al Vapor Nueva Italia explained to us that “many clients have moved out” while Omar Magdaleno from Piñatas Surprises stated that “since rent is so high, families cannot afford parties”. It was clear to us that the main concern business owners had was that they were losing many of their clients. Moreover, the surveys showed that every business target clientele was Hispanic and that they were satisfied with their current location. This implied that businesses are having a hard time adjusting to the demands of a new clientele demographic, and they do not want to move their business to a location where the majority are Hispanic.

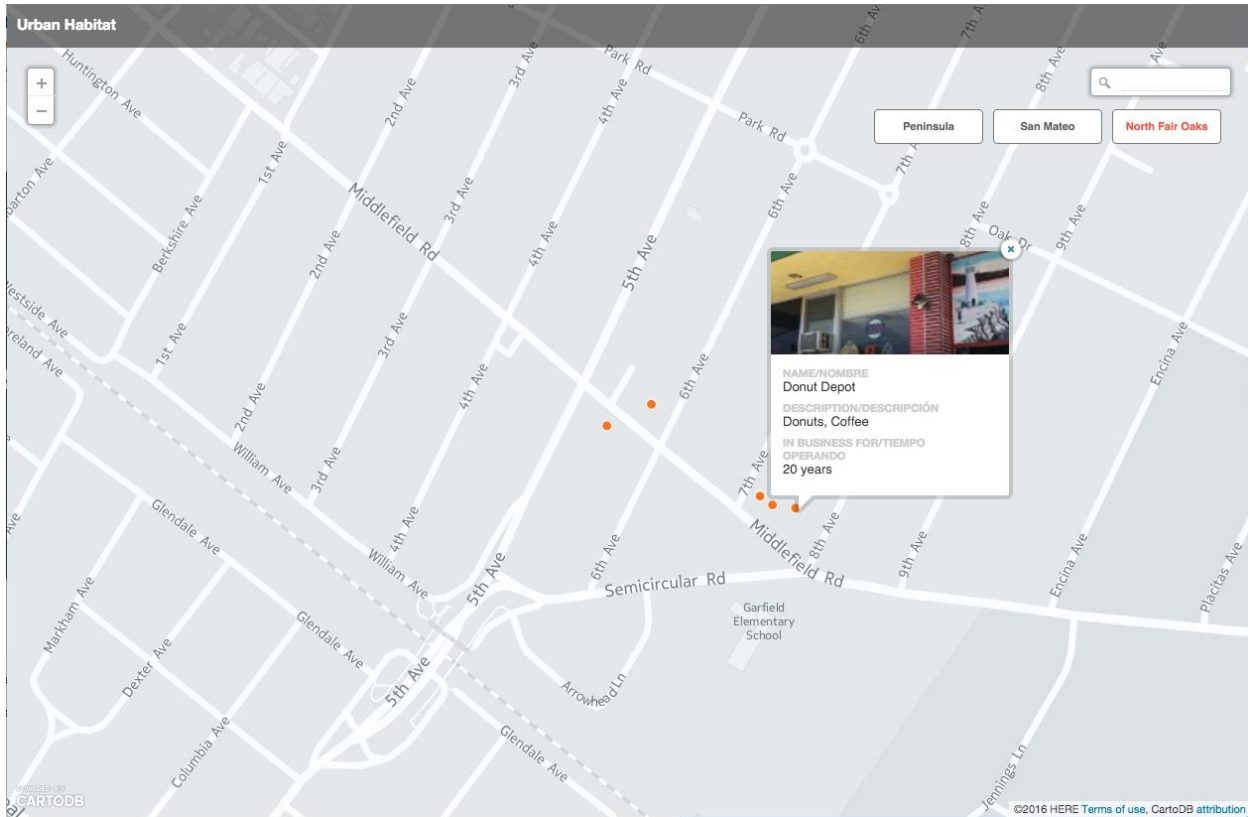
II. Online Map

CartoDB Map Website link: <http://fidelsalgado.github.io/urban-habitat/>



CartoDB Map Website Figure 1

CartoDB allowed us to easily implement a website that embedded a map showing the small businesses we surveyed. In Figure 1 we can see that there two clusters of data points, the north one is San Mateo and the south one is North Fair Oaks. We implemented two buttons that can be seen in the top right corner that automatically zooms to these two areas. The third button is for zooming out so we can get the overview of the Peninsula that is shown in Figure 1. As we mentioned in our methodology, whenever a Google survey is completed CartoDB allows us to automatically render it in our map. In other words, a data point is added to our website.



CartoDB Map Website Figure 2

In Figure 2 we can see detailed information about a business. In this specific example we show Donut Depot, and we can easily see how long it has been in business form and a short description. Moreover, notice that each one of the labels is also in Spanish since we want this tool to be used by the small business owners as well. We hope that this tool can help the community by creating awareness of business displacement. We also hope that it will serve Urban Habitat to make fact-based arguments to policy-makers that will benefit the entire community.

We plan to provide any type of training to Urban Habitat or anyone interested in contributing to the website. CartoDB allow does not require to have technical knowledge to add features to the map. However, the implementation of the website is available in Github, which makes it extremely easy to add web developers who are interested in developing new features.

III. Recommendations

Longer Term Business Leases

An employee at Piñata Surprise in North Fair Oaks notified us of the issue of long-term vs. short-term leases affecting small business displacement. Longtime business owners who have been renting their commercial space for years, such as Chun Tang from Donut Depot, are at lower risk of displacement than new establishments like the Electronics Repair shop. The stronger relationship these owners have with their landlord encourages the landlord to offer longer-term leases, which incur a steady, regular increase in monthly rent. Only at the end of the lease period, which can last for five years or more, can a new price be negotiated, preventing drastic spikes in rent due to market fluctuations. Short-term leases on the other hand, lasting for only a few months at a time, are subject to price hikes after each period. As landlords haven't had the time to foster trusting relationships with tenants, they are typically given to newly entering businesses who quickly discover that profit cannot compensate for the sum of operating costs, employee salaries, and rent. Continuation of this cycle leads to chronic instability of small businesses in certain commercial spaces, facilitated by short-term leases. To impede this cycle, we would like to have the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights help small business owners negotiate longer-term leases, particularly those who are new to the neighborhood.

Rent Control and Affordable Housing

Many businesses in North Fair Oaks were suffering due to a loss of clientele, as many neighborhood residents were forced to relocate due to rising housing rents. This connection was previously unrealized, so most earlier outreach efforts have been focused on business rent increases. We believe it would be beneficial to have Urban Habitat organize a coalition of small business owners in support of rent control and other affordable housing measures. This would also require outreach efforts to make sure the small businesses understand that rent control *does* affect them and *is* worth their time and effort to support, not just as community members but also as community business owners.

Community GIS Map

In both the literature review and our survey collection, small business owners expressed an inability to network and collaborate with their neighbors. By connecting small businesses to each other, they will feel more connected to the community and be able to communicate and share resources, as well as hopefully find a support network. Many of the businesses have similar problems but often tackle them alone, as they don't realize how many of their neighbors are similarly struggling. To connect small businesses, we have created the first version of an online map that shows local, minority-owned small businesses in both the Middlefield and B Street corridors. We hope that Urban Habitat (or another partner) will maintain and expand this map. To simplify the updating process, we have connected our map directly to the GoogleForm for inputting survey results. This means the map will automatically update as each new business survey is captured online, though it will still require some effort to attach appropriate photos.

Conclusion

Moving forward, the survey findings will be presented by Urban Habitat and Faith in Action to the San Mateo County Chamber of Commerce. The results demonstrate the connection between residential rent increase and decline in business for small, lower-income, ethnic-serving retail and restaurants. If the geographic boundaries of survey collection were expanded, a large scale effort to recognize the prevalence of this issue across the Bay Area could be undertaken. Although government-imposed rent control cannot legally be applied to commercial spaces, residential areas are under the jurisdiction of the California State Government. Thus, our findings directly correlating increased residential rent to small business displacement could potentially be used to mitigate the unfortunate trend.

We're delegating duty of website operation to our community partners, who have been familiarized with the user-friendly CartoDB interface. The map can be altered to display whatever information the County, community partners, and owners themselves deem most relevant. Inputting survey entries into the bilingual Google form automatically adds data entries to CartoDB and updates the map. The ease with which additional survey responses can be added to the database will help to corroborate existing evidence of small business displacement in the Peninsula. Our community partners plan to publicize the map to raise awareness among business owners and local residents of the growing threat. By increasing awareness, we're hoping that the push to protect threatened businesses gains traction to ensure that their owners' complaints are heard amongst discussions regarding economic development, particularly in revitalization efforts.

Appendices

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III. Survey

Section One: Basic Information

Small Business Displacement Survey

Basic Information

Business Name

Your answer

Business Address

Your answer

Business Description

Your answer

Target Clientele

Your answer

Price Point

- ☐ \$ (low)
☐ \$\$ (moderate)
☐ \$\$\$ (expensive)

Which applies to your business?

Check all that apply.

- ☐ Family Owned
☐ Minority Owned
☐ Female Owned
☐ Franchise Unit

☐ African American

☐ Caucasian

☐ Other: _____

2014 business income

Your answer

2015 business income to date

Your answer

How long has your business been operating?

Your answer

If you are a business where customers dine in, do you have wifi and internet connection?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

How many employees does your business have?

Your answer

BACK

NEXT

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Section Two: Place of Business

Small Business Displacement Survey

Place of Business

Length of time at business premises

Your answer _____

Do you rent or own your commercial space?

Your answer _____

Who is your landlord or managing company?

Your answer _____

Do you currently have a written lease?

☐ Yes☐ No

If yes, how long have you had the lease?

Skip if not applicable.

Your answer _____

When does the lease expire and how many years are left in the lease?

Skip if not applicable.

Your answer _____

Has your landlord changed in the past two years?

☐ Yes☐ No☐ No

What was your rent before the increase?

Your answer _____

What is your current rent?

Your answer _____

If your rent has increased, did the landlord negotiate the terms with you? Explain how you learned of the increase.

Your answer _____

Do you have any concerns regarding your leased space?

Your answer _____

If not, why?

Skip if not applicable.

Your answer _____

How much of an increase in rent in your commercial lease would you be able to afford?

Your answer _____

If your commercial rent increased more than you could afford, what would you do?

☐ Close the business☐ Relocate the business in the same neighborhood☐ Relocate the business in a new neighborhood

BACK

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Section Three: Neighborhood

Small Business Displacement Survey

Neighborhood

Have your neighboring businesses changed in the past two years?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

What caused them to move?

Skip if not applicable.

Your answer

Have you noticed other changes in your neighborhood in the past two years?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

If so, explain.

Skip if not applicable.

Your answer

Has your business clientele changed in the past two years?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

If so, explain.

Skip if not applicable.

Your answer

Has the demand or request for the type of goods you offer changed over the past two years?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

If so, explain.

Skip if not applicable.

Your answer

What changes have you implemented to improve your chances of success?

Your answer

Have you received outside help to help you make these changes?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No


If so, explain.

Skip if not applicable.

Your answer

BACK

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Section Four: Issues

Small Business Displacement Survey

Issues

Has your business ever been in danger of closing?

☐ Yes
 ☐ No

If so, describe what happened?
Skip if not applicable.

Your answer

Would it have helped to have a lawyer or merchants association to help you during that situation?
Skip if not applicable.

☐ Yes
 ☐ No

How would you avoid a situation like this in the future?
Skip if not applicable.

Your answer

If your business is declining or has ever been in danger of closing, what services would be useful to you to help reverse the decline?

Your answer

Have you ever hired or consulted with a lawyer for something related to your business?

☐ Yes
 ☐ No

If so, when?
Skip if not applicable.

Your answer

For what reason did you hire or consult with the lawyer?
Skip if not applicable.

Your answer

Describe any current business legal issues you have.

Your answer

Would you like for an attorney to follow up with you about this issue?
Skip if not applicable.

☐ Yes
 ☐ No

[BACK](#)
[NEXT](#)

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Section Five: Personal Demographic Information

Small Business Displacement Survey

Personal Demographic Information

First Name
Your answer

Last Name
Your answer

Business Owner Name(s)
Your answer

Phone Number
Your answer

Email Address
Your answer

Home City
Your answer

Zip Code
Your answer

Language Preference
Your answer

Do you live in the same neighborhood as your business?

☐ Yes

☐ No

If not, why?
Skip if not applicable.
Your answer

Sex of each owner
If multiple owners, put number of each sex in "Other".

☐ Male

☐ Female

☐ Other :

Country of origin of each other
Your answer

Date of birth of each owner
Your answer

100%: You made it.

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