



# Access to Shoreline Open Space

Excerpted from:

## *Measuring What Matters: Neighborhood Research for Economic and Environmental Health and Justice in Richmond, North Richmond, and San Pablo*



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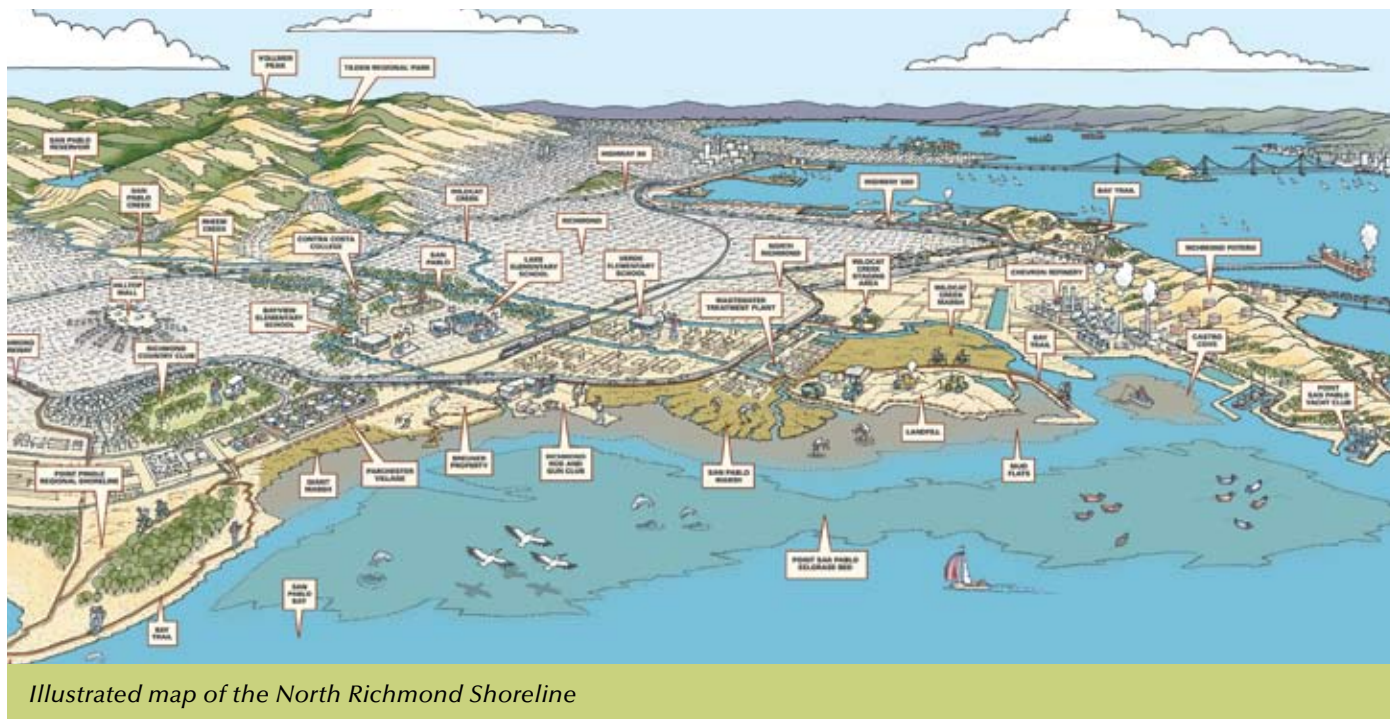


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# ACCESS TO SHORELINE OPEN SPACE



Illustrated by William S. Wells for the North Richmond Shoreline Academy

Illustrated map of the North Richmond Shoreline

**D**riving along the Richmond Parkway, long-time Richmond resident Whitney Dotson can point out every inlet and access point to the North Richmond shoreline, from old roads on private property to hidden parks. Whitney can show many visitors and locals alike a North Richmond they rarely see—one of tidal marshes and migratory birds. Instead, most people see the more glaring features of the coast: the Chevron refinery, the West County Landfill, the trains, and the trucks thundering along the parkway.

“Shoreline” refers to areas where the land borders an ocean or a bay. The shoreline of West County, including the North Richmond shoreline, curves along the southern San Pablo Bay. The West County shoreline is home to several parks, such as Miller-Knox and Point Pinole Park. The area, and the North Richmond shoreline specifically, has hundreds of acres of habitat, including one of the largest remaining salt marshes in the East Bay.<sup>1</sup> West County’s wetlands support hundreds of thousands of shorebirds, waterfowl, plant life, and several endangered species.<sup>2</sup>

Unfortunately, the majority of West County’s vibrant shoreline is inaccessible for West County residents. The Richmond Parkway—a major transportation corridor for trucks—divides most residential neighborhoods from the coast. Union Pacific train tracks run parallel

to the parkway. In addition, industrial facilities, ranging from a commercial nursery to a regional landfill to Chevron, line the parkway. For residents, these structures have cut off the recreational, aesthetic, and educational opportunities created by open spaces and have harmed the local ecology and environment.

In highly urbanized areas such as West County, a shoreline can provide much needed open space and vistas. On a daily basis, these communities endure the diesel exhaust from truck traffic routes, the noise of trains rumbling by, and emissions from local industry. A walk along the shoreline can bring physical health and greater spiritual and psychological well-being. Studies show being located close to attractive, open spaces is a critical component to increasing or maintaining physical activity.<sup>3</sup> Increased physical activity is strongly linked to improved health,

such as a reduction in the risk of heart disease, diabetes, hypertension, and cancer.<sup>4</sup> Further, studies show that areas with the poorest access to parks and other forms of open space for recreation have exceptionally high rates of obesity and diabetes.<sup>5</sup> Natural spaces, and the physical activity they promote, have also been found to relieve depression and anxiety, and generally increase psychological health.<sup>6</sup>

A protected and conserved shoreline can also support local development. Wildlife not only provides educational and environmental opportunities, but can increase the economic value of a place. Services focused on the environment, such as environmental education centers or park amenities, can attract tourism and business.<sup>7</sup>

As communities and researchers have recognized the physical and mental benefits of living near open spaces, there has also been another, more disturbing recognition. From Los Angeles to Portland to Brooklyn, the disparities in distribution of open space have been well documented: low-income communities often have less access to open spaces and recreational opportunities than more affluent communities.<sup>8</sup> In a report mapping race, income, and park access in Los Angeles, the nonprofit organization City Project found that the communities with the worst park access were predominantly communities of color and low-income communities in Central and South Los Angeles.<sup>9</sup> Not only is actual park space distributed inequitably, often the programs and amenities offered in parks and open spaces vary according to socioeconomic status.<sup>10</sup>

A recent study by the Golden Gate University School of Law found that throughout San Francisco's East Bay,

**Figure 1. WEST COUNTY SHORELINE OPEN SPACE PUBLIC ACCESS POINTS**



Image: California Spatial Information Library. Data: Pacific Institute

“the majority of park acreage owned and managed by East Bay Parks is located in or near communities where the majority of residents are white and affluent.”<sup>11</sup> As researchers have confirmed what many communities see around them in their daily lives, equitable access to parks and open spaces such as shorelines has become an important environmental justice issue.



## WHAT DID OUR RESEARCH FIND?

*“I don’t think there are very many other places in this region that you are gonna be able to capture that sunset going down like that, over the Bay... It’s just awesome... That’s where that spiritual connection starts to come in, just being able to see that...”*

—Cochise Potts, Parchester Village resident, on the benefits of being on the North Richmond shoreline<sup>12</sup>

To create a realistic picture of how many West County residents can easily walk or bike to the shoreline, we calculated how many residents live within one half mile of a public entrance to the shoreline, traveling by any public street that is “uninterrupted by nonresidential roads or other physical barriers.”<sup>13</sup> To understand who could potentially have access to the shoreline, we measured how many people live within one half mile as the crow flies from an undeveloped shoreline area. Measuring access is more complex than looking at who lives within close proximity to open space or how many acres of open space per person exist, as this does not consider the distribution of lands or barriers to accessing lands, such as a truck corridor.<sup>14</sup> As Trust for Public Land, the prominent open space advocacy organization, notes:

It is not enough to measure access purely from a map; planners must take into account such physical barriers as uncrossable highways, streams, and railroad corridors, or heavily-trafficked roads. Also, the standard for acceptable distance shouldn’t be based on an idealized healthy adult, but rather on a senior with a cane, a mother pushing a stroller, or an eight-year-old riding a bicycle.<sup>15</sup>

There are 40.3 miles of shoreline in Richmond, but much of it is inaccessible for a majority of West County residents.<sup>16</sup> Although 14% of Richmond residents currently live within a half mile of undeveloped shoreline areas, only 4% of Richmond residents have easy physical access to shoreline open space. Access is defined by the standard measure of a half mile traveling by any public street. “Undeveloped” refers to shoreline that does not have commercial, residential, or industrial facilities on it. “Open space” refers to an area that is undeveloped and open to the public.

**Although 14% of Richmond residents live within a half mile of undeveloped shoreline areas, only 4% have easy physical access to shoreline open space.**

When access to the shoreline is compared across neighborhoods, a clear pattern of inequity emerges. The neighborhoods with less than 10% rate of access have an average household income of \$31,740, whereas the neighborhoods with greater than 10% rate of access have an average household income of \$55,179.



Keller Beach in the Point Richmond neighborhood

**Table 1: ACCESS TO SHORELINE OPEN SPACE IN RICHMOND AND NORTH RICHMOND, BY NEIGHBORHOOD**

Neighborhood	Median Household Income*	Percent Residents of Color*	Residents with potential shoreline access	Residents with actual shoreline access	Percent of residents with potential access who currently have access
Coronado	\$32,978	93%	221	-	0%
Cortez/Stege	\$26,373	98%	75	-	0%
Park View	\$30,750	95%	476	-	0%
Richmond Annex	\$47,530	51%	2,313	-	0%
Shields-Reid	\$23,313	98%	244	-	0%
Panhandle Annex	\$30,750	95%	545	3	1%
Southwest Annex	\$33,250	75%	852	11	1%
Parchester Village	\$28,974	84%	1,174	103	9%
Richmond (No Neighborhood) **	\$48,660	73%	2,023	227	11%
Point Richmond	\$73,125	16%	3,323	654	20%
Marina Bay	\$74,798	52%	3,008	2,970	99%
<b>Richmond</b>	<b>\$44,210</b>	<b>79%</b>	<b>14,255</b>	<b>3,969</b>	<b>28%</b>
<b>North Richmond</b>	<b>\$24,131</b>	<b>95%</b>	<b>2,124</b>	<b>545</b>	<b>26%</b>

\*\* Some areas of Richmond are outside of any official neighborhood.

\*Source: Census (2000)

## WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR WEST COUNTY?

Areas such as Parchester Village are located directly next to the Bay, but most residents do not even have a park gate within walking distance. While 26% of North Richmond residents do have access to the shoreline, it is through the “West County Landfill Trail,” which is not a very welcoming access point.

While projects such as the San Francisco Bay Trail, a continuous ring of trails around the Bay, and the re-zoning of land uses have the potential to increase resident

access to some of West County’s natural treasures, the shoreline faces many conflicting pressures that will reconfigure shoreline access in the long term. Many of the former industrial sites are now abandoned, and there is pressure to re-develop these lots into new facilities or housing and bring revenue to the city. Our research shows there is still much work before West Contra Costa communities have adequate levels of open space access. The shoreline is a highly underutilized resource that can increase the health and quality of life for Richmond residents.

## WHAT CAN WE DO?

### Designate undeveloped shoreline areas as open space.

The City of Richmond has the rare opportunity to increase open space designated areas of the shoreline through the city’s general plan update process. The area titled Change Area 10-B is just north of North Richmond and south of Parchester Village. If the city council chooses land use “option 1” for this change area, the land north of the Parkway would be protected as open space, creating the opportunity to increase access to shoreline open space for residents of Parchester and North Richmond neighborhoods, two areas with disproportionately low rates of access.

### Invest in solutions that resolve barriers to local access.

Through the development of the Bay Trail and the projects funded by ballot measure WW, there are significant opportunities for increasing local access to the shoreline. The lack of a functional pedestrian crossing where the Richmond Parkway crosses Wildcat Creek prevents residents from safely using the Wildcat Creek trail to access the shoreline. A pedestrian bridge at this location would resolve this barrier and provide other benefits. Similarly, establishing a trail along San Pablo Creek would greatly increase access for San Pablo neighborhoods.

## COMMUNITY RESOURCES FOR INFORMATION AND CHANGE

### North Richmond Shoreline Open Space Alliance (NRSOSA)

Whitney Dotson, President

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[info@northrichmondshoreline.org](mailto:info@northrichmondshoreline.org)

[www.northrichmondshoreline.org](http://www.northrichmondshoreline.org)

NRSOSA is a group of concerned residents who organize efforts to increase access to the shoreline in Richmond and North Richmond. Contact NRSOSA for a schedule and locations of their meetings, or to take a guided tour of the North Richmond Shoreline.

### Richmond General Plan Update Process

[www.cityofrichmondgeneralplan.org](http://www.cityofrichmondgeneralplan.org)

Every five years the city updates its General Plan, a document that sets goals and policies that guide future development. See the website for upcoming meetings and relevant documents.

### Richmond Bay Trail

<http://baytrail.abag.ca.gov/>

Visit the San Francisco Bay Trail Project's website to download maps and see photos of the walking and biking trail that already has 24.5 miles of trails in Richmond.

### Golden Gate Audubon Society

Jennifer Robinson

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[www.goldengateaudubon.org](http://www.goldengateaudubon.org)

The Audubon Society hosts periodic events along the shoreline and is undertaking a bird census.

### Save the Bay

[www.savesfbay.org](http://www.savesfbay.org)

One of the leading organizations working to protect the San Francisco Bay, Save the Bay hosts day-long restoration workshops and events where you can participate in shoreline restoration activities. Visit the "Get involved" link on the Save the Bay website.

### North Richmond Shoreline Academy

[www.shorelineacademy.org/index.php](http://www.shorelineacademy.org/index.php)

The North Richmond Shoreline Academy was founded to promote knowledge and restoration programs along the North Richmond Shoreline specifically. Visit the website for information and upcoming events.

### Trails for Richmond Action Committee (TRAC)

[www.pointrichmond.com/baytrail/calendar.htm](http://www.pointrichmond.com/baytrail/calendar.htm)

TRAC hosts a variety of events, from restoration to nature walks, along the Richmond shoreline. Visit the online calendar to learn about upcoming events.

For more information about the environmental health of the San Francisco Bay Estuary, visit the following websites:

### San Francisco Estuary Project

[www.sfep.abag.org](http://www.sfep.abag.org)

The Estuary Project was founded to coordinate restoration activities among local, federal, and state agencies around the entire San Francisco Bay area.

### San Francisco Estuary Institute

[www.sfei.org](http://www.sfei.org)

Founded in 1986, SFEI works to foster the development of the scientific understanding needed to protect and enhance the San Francisco Estuary. SFEI's work tackles issues currently facing the ecosystem, including industrial and municipal discharge, non-point source pollution, biological invasions, and watershed and wetlands restoration.



*View of North Richmond shoreline*



## RESEARCH METHODS

To analyze current shoreline access we used the computer mapping software ArcGIS. The ArcGIS tool Network Analyst allowed us to find every residential building from which a resident could travel a half mile along public streets to reach an entry to shoreline open space. To identify the entry points, we referred to maps produced by the East Bay Regional Parks and conducted a survey to ensure no public entry points were missed. Spatial data on the location of residences was drawn from parcel data originally from the county tax assessor and made available by the Contra Costa County Mapping Information Center. Street lines were obtained from Street Map USA.

To analyze potential shoreline access, we identified the undeveloped parcels on the shoreline, used ArcGIS to create a half-mile buffer around them, and looked at what

residential parcels fell within the buffer area. Undeveloped parcels were identified using aerial photographs available from the California Spatial Information Library.

There are several limitations to our research methods that should be noted. This methodology does not take into consideration that freeways and the Richmond Parkway may not be considered “walkable” or “bikeable.” This analysis allows such major streets to count as means of access to the shoreline. This analysis does not count pathways that may exist and do not go along streets. In order to identify undeveloped shoreline areas, we relied on aerial photos taken in 2004 and 2005. Construction since that time may have removed some of the undeveloped areas included in this analysis.

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