



San Joaquin Villas Health Impact Assessment

A Roadmap of the Present and Potential Pathways to Health

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Over 6.5 million people currently live in California's Central Valley. It is projected that at least 11 million people will be living in the region by the year 2040. As the fastest growing region in state—with a growth rate twice that of the rest of California—it is imperative that development take advantage of the new opportunities for equitable change. The following presents a new paradigm for affordable housing and equitable development.

Far too often, communities and corporations work in silos—ignoring potential opportunities to improve health. Families are forced to live on top of one another in inadequate conditions. Liquor stores provide the only access to food in too many low-income neighborhoods. The low-income and underserved are stuck in jobs without benefits and chances for promotion. However, development in the Central Valley can take a new course, one that transforms lifestyles and landscapes toward the improvement of human health.

A holistic view of health recognizes that

health is not just the absence of injury or illness. The health of a community rests in the ability for its citizens to feed their families, to pursue meaningful work, and to live in safe environments. As the population of California's Central Valley continues to increase, new housing developments will inevitably transform the physical, built, and social landscapes of the region—affecting employment, living conditions and the distribution of wealth. Among others, these factors contribute greatly to the health of both individuals and entire communities.

Health Impact Assessment (HIA) is an emerging interdisciplinary practice that utilizes this holistic view of health to evaluate the effects of a given program, policy, or project on the health of a community and the distribution of those effects within the population. In partnership with California Community Builders and Coastal Rim Construction, The Greenlining Institute will be constructing the San Joaquin Villas, a residential subdivision of 21 affordable single-family detached homes in Firebaugh, a small rural city in the west side of Fresno County.

The Greenlining Institute has completed an HIA in tandem with its development plans in Firebaugh to determine the ways in which housing developments can most effectively promote community engagement, empowerment, and respect for the environment. This Health Impact Assessment (HIA) is an attempt to:

- Document the decisions made by The Greenlining Institute as a housing developer in the rural Central Valley city of Firebaugh.
- Analyze how these development plans will impact the health of Firebaugh residents.
- Offer recommendations for how future housing developments can best promote the holistic health of individuals and communities.

Interviews with Firebaugh community members revealed that access to housing, nutrition, and employment are among the primary health concerns of the residents, and have thus been chosen for analysis in this HIA.

Drawing upon relevant published research, qualitative data, and the established development plans, the following sections present a summary of Greenlining's recommendations.

HOUSING

Being able to live in safe homes and neighborhoods directly affects one's mental and physical health. In Firebaugh, there is a severe shortage of available rental options, and homes for sale are considered too expensive. The Greenlining Institute's development is a positive contribution toward alleviating the limited housing availability, affordability, and accessibility in the city. Future developments can be improved by incorporating additional sustainable design features, prioritizing long-term affordability for all-income levels, and incorporating linkages with existing and planned community resources.

RECOMMENDATIONS: AVAILABILITY

- Construct an adequate amount of homes with more than 3 rooms to comfortably accommodate larger Firebaugh families.
- Incorporate additional sustainable design features such as compact fluorescent lighting, low-flow fixtures and dual-flush toilets, local sources for materials, and indoor air filtration systems.
- Prioritize plans for recreation areas and community gardens in development designs to be managed by home owners associations.
- Raise density levels for residential buildings in order to make housing both more affordable and more land efficient.
- Leverage more state grants and resources toward funding city infrastructure upon demonstrating that they are growing in an affordable and sustainable way (i.e. high density).

RECOMMENDATIONS: AFFORDABILITY

- Provide financial education and first-time homebuyer courses with professional translation services.
- Take advantage of a potential-consumer base by offering rental options for visiting professionals and migrant workers.
- Create an inclusionary zoning plan so that at least 20% of new housing in Firebaugh is affordable to low and very low income residents.
- Provide incentives for market rate developers, who generally dislike inclusionary zoning ordinances, to work in Firebaugh by providing them density bonuses and a prioritized review session.
- Find a balanced approach to developing both affordable for-sale and rental housing according to the needs of the community.

RECOMMENDATIONS: ACCESSIBILITY

- Develop standards for development that takes input from public health professionals, planners and researchers around the linkages between housing, community resources, economic development and health.
- Encouraged economic development strategies that caters to the specific needs of isolated and rural regions.

ACCESS TO HEALTHY FOOD

Having access to nutritious foods is a crucial component for having a healthy lifestyle. There is a lack of options for healthy eating within Firebaugh with only one grocery store, a few convenience stores, and a once a week farmers' market from April to October. The Greenlining Institute is partnering with other community organizations and the city of Firebaugh to ensure that grocery retail and direct access to produce improves in the city. All such efforts should prioritize the affordability, accessibil-



ity, and quality of nutritious foods for all Firebaugh residents along with outreach efforts to promote healthy lifestyle choices.

RECOMMENDATIONS: GROCERY RETAIL

- Prioritize the sale of high-quality healthy food options that are made affordable and accessible to Firebaugh's vulnerable populations.
- Conduct more research around the benefits of attracting grocery retailers with an emphasis on culturally competent and healthy products.

RECOMMENDATIONS: DIRECT ACCESS TO PRODUCE

- Promote the use of Community Supported Agriculture (CSAs) to future residents of the San Joaquin Villas.
- Incorporate areas for a community garden in future developments to be managed by each neighborhood's homeowner's association.
- Conduct more outreach and education to residents of Firebaugh and other rural towns on the benefits of nutritious eating.
- Prioritize transportation as a key factor in accessing nutritious foods. Take in consideration the potential of sponsoring shuttle services to and from the grocery store.

JOB SECURITY

A stable and adequate income is necessary for people to afford nutritious goods, a safe shelter, healthcare, and to uphold a healthy community. Many local employment options in Firebaugh are only seasonal and sometimes informally arranged work related to agriculture. Existing employers are working closely with community-led efforts to enhance job training programs, but there is still a need to attract employers with higher-wage jobs. A significant step to attract these employers begins with education and vocational training programs. The Greenlining Institute and the City of Firebaugh should support existing education and training programs by contributing its research capacity as well as by connecting these programs with potential funding opportunities.

RECOMMENDATIONS: HEALTHY EMPLOYMENT

- Leverage resources and networks to help support existing education and training programs.
- Look at ways to bring "green industry" such as solar and

wind power producers, into the area when feasible.

- Expand on programs such as the Westside Institute of Technology and MESA to cultivate a more highly-trained and employable workforce.
- Continue working together to produce supportive services that develop and nurture local small businesses that will in turn employ local workers.

This health assessment is a tool that serves to inform Firebaugh's stakeholders of issues related to health and community development. Similarly, this report provides data that assists in prioritizing issues for Firebaugh city leaders and leaders from other similar cities to turn into policies or programs. *Who should use this report?* Developers, city planners, community-based health and sustainability advocates, and anyone concerned with growth in the Central Valley.

The story of viewing health holistically in the City of Firebaugh is emblematic of the various other cities in the region that will face similar development choices. A community that can connect the issues of health, housing, nutrition, and employment in partnership will be more effective in eliminating the disparities that plague underserved communities the most.

For more information, or to view the full report, please visit:
<http://www.greenlining.org>



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