

Introduction

Welcome to Live Oak! This report is primarily intended for Live Oak residents, but we hope that by widely distributing “Live Oak: A Community Snapshot” to residents throughout Santa Cruz County, key stakeholders and policy makers’ interest and involvement in the county’s third largest population area will grow.

The need for such a compilation of data has become increasingly evident as our community grows, diversifies and envisions its future. How does Live Oak compare and connect to the cities around it? Who are the people of Live Oak? How can we increase and better coordinate our resources to enhance our quality of life? And, what is Live Oak’s future? These are some of the questions being asked with greater frequency both in and out of the boundaries of Live Oak.

This report was produced by the Live Oak Family Resource Center (LOFRC), a non-profit program of Community Bridges, dedicated to promoting a healthy community and strengthening the individuals and families of Live Oak. Through projects such as this report, the LOFRC strives to not only connect people with resources that are available to them, but also to promote and support opportunities for personal and cultural exchange. By putting residents in conversation with one another and by highlighting some of the major issues that Live Oak is facing as a community, the LOFRC seeks to assist residents in mapping out their future.

The seeds of this report germinated in 2006 when the LOFRC conducted the Live Oak Human Services Campaign. Run in coordination with the broad-based organization known as COPA (Communities Organized for Relational Power & Action), the effort engaged more than 300 people in conversation about pressures on their family.

This report highlights commonly held challenges with the intention of making Live Oak better. Hopefully, the reaction to this study will lead people to think together more deeply about how to expand the common good through government, market and civic life in Live Oak. While this assessment is the first of its kind about this emerging urban center, it is not meant to be the final word.

It is important to note that the information contained within this document may not reflect the experiences of all Live Oak residents. In fact, many people who love living in Live Oak may be unaware of some of the challenges that this neighborhood faces. Here we rely on the available facts and statistics about Live Oak to elevate this neighborhood in the public’s awareness and to begin to search for ways to make our community healthier, safer and stronger.

Thank you for your interest in our community!

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Schilling & Erika Hearon
Co-Directors, Live Oak Family Resource Center

Methodology

This needs assessment study provides a birds-eye view of Live Oak today. The data reported here is not meant to be definitive, but to highlight available facts and encourage future examination.

Due to a lack of systematic information being collected about Live Oak, the reader may find that there are important missing pieces of information and gaps in our knowledge about our community. This analysis cannot fill in all of these gaps. Instead, it is meant to initiate conversations about the Live Oak community, its connections to surrounding communities, and its need for comprehensive data collection, analysis and planning.

Information has been gathered from available federal, state, and local data as well as from private sources. In addition, there is original research, including information from interviews with leaders in public agencies. A complete listing of sources can be found at the bottom of this report.

Beginning with a public announcement in August 2007, this study set out to compile the most recent, specific information about the Live Oak neighborhood. Multiple agencies, including the Redevelopment Agency, the Health Services Agency, the Live Oak School District and the Santa Cruz County Planning Department were invited to participate and collaborate in this study.

The geographic area addressed in this report is based on the most commonly held definition of the neighborhood according to Live Oak residents. The data in this report closely mirrors the basic boundaries of the Live Oak Elementary School district which is a common breakout of demographic information.

Portions of three census designated places (CDPs), Twin Lakes, Live Oak and Opal Cliffs, encompassing about 3 square miles are the focus of the report. Using this definition, the area is bordered on the south by the Twin Lakes and East Cliff beaches, on the north by Highway 1, on the west by the City of Santa Cruz (6th Avenue) and on the east by the City of Capitola (centered on 38th Avenue). As such, we vary slightly from what the Santa Cruz County General Plan defines as constituting Live Oak and do not include the roughly two miles north of Highway 1 that are in the General Plan definition.

Due to its status as an unincorporated area, there are many challenges to gathering data about Live Oak. Because much of the information we tried to collect is available only at the county or zip code level (Live Oak's 95062 zip code includes a quarter of the

City of Santa Cruz) data that reflects the large population center that Live Oak has become is especially difficult to find. There are important pieces of information that need to be collected and made public so that Live Oak's resources, challenges and needs can be better understood. Until then, this study serves as a valuable start.

Live Oak has many assets and strengths. These positive attributes are not necessarily the focus of this report. We feel space, time and attention need to be focused on Live Oak's challenges and needs as we believe these are under-recognized and underserved. Our information on these issues follows.

Community Context

Perhaps, not unlike an over-looked, homely, child who suddenly grows up to possess striking attributes and personality, Live Oak is coming into its own as a vibrant center of Santa Cruz County full of notable qualities and quirks.

"The diversity of Live Oak makes me feel comfortable, and everything is mixed up next to each other."

This is how one participant in the *Human Service Campaign* summarized the feel of the community. Young surfers live beside millionaires, a young family shops the Farmers Market with senior citizens, and the son of a concrete worker plays Mid-County Soccer with the daughter of a software engineer. Due to the dense growth of residential development, Live Oak is home to individuals of many different age, ethnic and income groups.

Historically Live Oak mirrored the agricultural diversity that still exists in some parts of the Central Coast. While the community has grown everything from wheat to lilies, the rise of Live Oak can be tied to the entry of poultry farming in the early 20th century.¹ It was at this time that the common lot sizes of 80 x 400 feet (the amount of land needed to raise enough chickens commercially in order to provide sufficient income for a typical family) were subdivided and put up for sale. Live Oak's proximity to the railroad and granaries, as well as the opportunity to purchase relatively low-priced poultry farms, drew families from around the United States into the area and solidified Live Oak's reputation as a vibrant farming community well into the 1950s.

The influx of people that came for these opportunities increased Live Oak's population and a community based on a working class ethos developed. A Soquel High School counselor recalls visiting the Del Mar Junior High School in the late 1960s prior to drainage systems being installed in Live Oak, "No matter what time of the year you

¹ "History of Poultry Raising in Santa Cruz" 1919. Also, for a detailed description of this see "The 'Joad's' lived in Live Oak", an online posting at the Santa Cruz County Museum of Art and History's website, available at <http://researchforum.santacruzmah.org/viewtopic.php?t=123>.

visited it was pure mud from your car to the office door.”²Horses and livestock were common on undeveloped lots in Live Oak through the 1980s.

The growth of tourism and of UC Santa Cruz impacted Live Oak. Neighboring areas became incorporated and valued properties (such as the Capitola Mall) were claimed by cities. See the zigzagged border of Live Oak and Capitola for an interesting lesson in town planning. Due to its dense population and unincorporated status, questions about Live Oak’s future loom large, especially the consideration of whether Live Oak will one day become its own city or perhaps be incorporated by Capitola and/or Santa Cruz. However, both of these scenarios are unlikely because almost all of Live Oak is residential without a commercial center, meaning that its resulting low tax base does not generate enough to support a network of city services.

Its unincorporated status is perhaps one of the most defining characteristics of Live Oak. An unincorporated area is a region of land that is not a part of any city. Such regions are generally administered by default as a part of larger territorial divisions such as: township, borough, county, state, or province.³ As of 2000 almost one in every five Californians lived in an unincorporated area.⁴

As an unincorporated area Live Oak has just one governing and administering body: the County of Santa Cruz, whose responsibilities also include attending to many county-wide needs and issues. And while Live Oak has a similar population density of urban areas like the cities of Capitola and Scotts Valley (which have their own civic governments), all its social services, public safety, and public policy issues are managed and decided by the County of Santa Cruz. Live Oak’s unincorporated status means that many civic and governmental services and resources are under-developed for an area of its population size.

Politics and civic life in Live Oak has also been limited, especially compared to the neighboring community of Santa Cruz. While Santa Cruz has a thriving set of community centers, social services and multiple elected officials and appointed commissions, Live Oak – the third largest population area in the County - has only a scant number of elected positions – the school board and one elected county position, a single county supervisor.

The remainder of this report explores Live Oak’s changing demographics, its unique attributes as an unincorporated area, the challenges it faces, and the opportunities it presents. These positive feelings about Live Oak are often expressed by those who use the services at the LOFRC, showing that while Live Oak faces some significant obstacles, it is a neighborhood filled with many people who love where they live!

Demographics

² Dan Hazen, retired Soquel High counselor, Personal interview, (November, 2006).

³ For more on the definition of an unincorporated area, see: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unincorporated_area

⁴ Sokolow 2000.

Live Oak is home to 25,321 residents⁵:

- The neighborhood has the third largest population of any area in the County.
- Ten percent of all County residents live in Live Oak.
- The number of residents by 2020 is expected to increase by 2,300 according to projections from the Association of Monterey Bay Area Governments (AMBAG).⁶

According to Census (2000) figures, the Live Oak neighborhood is:

72% White,
20% Latina/o
2% African American
3% Asian Pacific Islander
4% "Other"

Live Oak is becoming a more diverse neighborhood over time:

- Between 1990 and 2000 the share of the White population decreased by 11% and the Latina/o population increased by 7%.

Live Oak has a larger share of elderly and disabled residents than other areas:

- Eleven percent of Live Oak residents are 65 years or older whereas just 8.4% of Santa Cruz City residents and 8.8% of Watsonville residents are 65 years or older.
- Almost 17% percent of Live Oak adults are disabled compared to 14% of residents in the City of Santa Cruz.

Live Oak has a growing immigrant population:

- In 2000, 14.2% of the residents of the Live Oak neighborhood were born outside of the U.S., a 4.3% increase since 1990.
- The percent of people who are linguistically isolated - meaning that no one in the household over the age of 14 speaks English "very well" - rose 2.4% from 1990 to 2000 in Live Oak, compared to the rate in the City of Santa Cruz which *declined* by 0.4% over the same time period.

The age distribution of Live Oak residents follows. With the exception of residents 65 years and older, this is similar to the age distribution of Santa Cruz County:

21% under 18 years old

⁵ All data in the *Demographics* section was calculated from the 1990 and 2000 Census, Summary Tape files 1 and 3.

⁶ AMBAG, 2004.

11% 18-24 years
35% 25-44 years
22% 45-64 years
11% 65 years or older

Live Oak has a larger share of elderly residents than other areas; and a number of eldercare facilities are located in the area.

Education

Children's Education in Live Oak

- Live Oak is a growing district. Enrollment increased by 2.8% from 1997-2007, the neighboring districts of Santa Cruz City Elementary and Soquel Union, respectively, decreased by 31.8% and 28.5%.⁷
- Compared to its neighboring districts, Santa Cruz City Elementary and Soquel Union Elementary, the Live Oak Elementary District has a larger and more rapidly growing Latina/o population and a smaller and more rapidly decreasing White student population.
- During the 2006-2007 school year the Live Oak Elementary District's student population was⁸:
 - 44% Hispanic/Latina/o
 - 44% White (non-Hispanic)
 - 5% Asian, Pacific Islander
 - 3% African American
 - 1% American Indian or Alaskan Native
 - 3% More than one race/ethnicity; or race/ethnicity not identified
- By 2006 the Hispanic/Latina/o portion of the Live Oak Elementary student population had *increased* by 15% since the 1996-1997 school year; and the White portion of the student population had *decreased* by 18% over the same ten year period.⁹
- County-level demographic trends from 1996 to 2006 were similar but less pronounced, with a 7% increase in the Latina/o student population and a 10% decrease in the White population.
- Private schools in or near Live Oak have significantly larger White student populations and smaller Latina/o student populations.

Demographics of the Largest Private Elementary Schools within 10 miles of the 95062 Zip code

⁷ Applied Survey Research 2007, pp. 54.

⁸ California Department of Education Dataquest 2007.

⁹ *ibid.*

	Total Students	White	Hispanic/ Latino	Asian	African American	American Indian
Holy Cross	271	82%	7%	4%	1%	6%
Good Shepherd Catholic	200	90%	5%	1%	1%	4%
Santa Cruz Montessori	178	79%	13%	4%	3%	0%
Twin Lakes Christian	226	95%	2%	0%	1%	2%
Baymonte Christian	445	88%	6%	3%	2%	1%

Source: National Center for Education, 2005-2006 (<http://nces.ed.gov>). Demographic information about Gateway School and Waldorf School in Santa Cruz is not publicly available.

- In the Live Oak Elementary District the number of students that are “English language learners” *rose* by 84% between 1997 and 2007. In neighboring Santa Cruz City Elementary District the number of English language learners *declined* by 22% over the same ten years.¹⁰
- The percentage of Latina/o teachers to Latina/o students is the lowest in the county amongst schools that serve large populations of Latino students. In 2007 there was approximately one Latino teacher for every *nine* Latino students in the Live Oak Elementary District. Comparatively, the Santa Cruz Elementary District had a ratio of one Latino teacher for every *three* Latino students and the Pajaro Elementary School District had a ratio of one Latino teacher for every *four* Latino students.¹¹
- While the Live Oak elementary schools’ API scores improved between 2001 and 2006 they are still considerably lower than schools in more affluent, White communities. In 2006 the Live Oak District’s elementary schools received the second lowest Academic Performance Index (API) rankings of all elementary districts in the County – the API is a measurement of school achievement and a low ranking signifies students’ low standardized (STAR) testing scores.¹²
- The Live Oak district established Cypress High, a small charter school in 2003 which enrolls students county wide. However, Live Oak has no large comprehensive high school in its district; teen-agers scatter and go to several different high schools throughout the County. This dispersion of students means that high school graduation rates for Live Oak students are unavailable.
- Very little is known about the educational outcomes of Live Oak’s high school and college students. Cabrillo College reports that about one in six Cabrillo students are residents of the 95062 zip code (of which Live Oak is one part)¹³ and that remediation rates for Cabrillo students from Santa Cruz County high schools are at or below average for high schools with Live Oak feeder schools¹⁴ but figures that are specific to Live Oak are unavailable.

¹⁰ California Department of Education 2007.

¹¹ Applied Survey Research 2007, pp.80-81.

¹² *ibid*

¹³ Fillman and Cassada 2006.

¹⁴ Fillman and Cassada 2006, pp. 19.

- The Live Oak Elementary District has the second highest percentage of school children eligible for free or reduced price lunches of all elementary schools in Santa Cruz County.¹⁵

Percent of Students Eligible for Free or Reduced Lunches at Santa Cruz County Elementary Schools by District, 2005-2006

	Total No. Elementary Students	No. Eligible for Free/Reduced Lunches	Percent Eligible for Free/Reduced Lunches
Pajaro Valley Unified	10,042	6,843	68.1%
Live Oak Elementary	1,459	690	47.3%
Santa Cruz City Elementary	2,114	865	40.9%
All other elementary schools combined	5,440	877	16.1%

Source: California Department of Nutrition Services, 2005-2006
<http://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/sh/sn/documents/free0506oselem.doc>.

Adult Education in Live Oak

- The Live Oak adult population has received fewer years of formal education than the adult population in the City of Santa Cruz. Yet, few adult education courses were offered in the Live Oak area, compared to many classes offered in the city of Santa Cruz.¹⁶

Education Levels for Males and Females over 25 for the City of Santa Cruz and Live Oak, 2000

¹⁵ California Department of Education 2007b.

¹⁶ Starting in 2003 an adult education course was offered in the Live Oak district but enrollment was limited to a small number of parents of Live Oak elementary students and was not open to public enrollment.

	Santa Cruz	Live Oak
Males older than 25	16,979	8,414
Percent with less than high school	12%	14%
Percent with high school degree	14%	17%
Percent with some college	24%	30%
Percent with A.A.	7%	9%
Percent with B.A.	25%	20%
Percent with M.A. and more	18%	10%
Females older than 25	16,917	8,860
Percent with less than high school	9%	14%
Percent with high school degree	15%	20%
Percent with some college	22%	29%
Percent with A.A.	8%	8%
Percent with B.A.	28%	21%
Percent with M.A. and more	17%	8%

- The 2000 Census estimated that there were 1,076 “linguistically isolated” residents in Live Oak and 2,071 in the City of Santa Cruz. As of 2007, the Santa Cruz Adult School only offers 6 of its English as a Second Language (ESL) courses in Live Oak and 25 in Santa Cruz. This translates into one ESL course for every 179 linguistically isolated residents in Live Oak compared to one for every 83 in Santa Cruz. While there’s a demonstrated need for additional adult classes, opportunity lags and courses are only set up on a case by case basis.
- The Santa Cruz Adult School has benefited from childcare provided by the district and has been able to utilize free classroom space in Live Oak schools for ESL courses. More of this kind of multi-agency cooperation needs to be fostered.

Economics

Live Oak has many assets including easy access to Highway 1 and beautiful beaches. At the same time, it lacks many basic neighborhood resources: there are no banks, post offices, major supermarkets, or pharmacies and few public facilities or gathering places.

Business and employment opportunities:

- Among nine Santa Cruz County jurisdictions (Aptos, Ben Lomond, Capitola, Live Oak, Rio Del Mar, Santa Cruz, Scotts Valley, Soquel, and Watsonville) Live Oak was the only jurisdiction whose unemployment rate increased from 1997 to 2006 (from 3.5% to 4.2%).¹⁷ Live Oak’s unemployment rate increase is especially

¹⁷ Applied Survey Research 2007.

noteworthy considering the county, state and national unemployment rates all decreased over the same time period: from 7.6% to 5.6% for the County, from 6.3% to 4.9% for the state, and from 4.9% to 4.6% for the U.S.

- Because no commercial core exists, retail space is relegated to small strip malls of limited size and variety that are often in very poor condition, such as the East Cliff Shopping Center at 17th Avenue and East Cliff. As a result, commercial and business activity is weak in Live Oak.
- Few employment opportunities exist. The Live Oak School District and Ledyards are the only employers of substantial size.
- The greatest job growth in the County is projected in tourism, health, and government; however Live Oak has no plans or civic mechanism to strategically interact with these market forces.¹⁸
- Sales tax revenue in Live Oak is relatively small. The City of Santa Cruz's sales tax revenue in 2006 was \$11.7 million. Live Oak sales tax revenue for the same year was just \$4 million.¹⁹

Planning and land use and growth:

- Currently formal opportunities for Live Oak residents are not in place for providing input into zoning and other economic decisions about their community because the Live Oak General Plan has not been updated since 1994 – yet, ten year updates are typical for areas of this size.
- Water, the single most important factor for major future residential or commercial growth, is a policy area controlled by the City of Santa Cruz with almost no input or strategy from Live Oak residents. Demands for the remaining meager water sources will be a competition between UC-Santa Cruz, fish and aquatic uses and all other development, both inside the city and adjacent to it. This could mean that once Live Oak seeks concentrated commercial or high density housing development, water resources may already be claimed.²⁰
- Live Oak's population growth may be underestimated. In a recent analysis of the County's economic and housing growth statistics, Live Oak was included in the "unincorporated" category along with areas like Davenport, Bonny Doon and La Selva. However, these areas, unlike Live Oak, have a significant amount of land that is restricted for agriculture. Citing the unincorporated areas' growth as "a meager 0.41 percent" (as it was listed on one report) misrepresents Live Oak because it does not take into account that much of that growth is occurring in Live Oak proper.²¹

¹⁸ Applied Development Economics, 2007.

¹⁹ David Reetz, aide to Santa Cruz County Supervisor Jan Beautz, personal interview, December 7, 2007.

²⁰ Bill Kocher, Director of Santa Cruz City Water Department, Personal Interview (December 3, 2007).

²¹ Bookwalter 2007.

- Live Oak may bear much of the County’s growth. According to one source, Measure J – which restricts some land for agricultural purposes only - has “directed developers to focus on urban areas, like Live Oak, one of the most densely populated areas of the county.”²²
- The lack of basic resources, such as a bank, is unusual for an area of this population size. However, possibilities for attracting new economic resources exist, especially in consideration of its dedicated county redevelopment agency with a five year budget of \$60 million.²³ Live Oak, and land adjacent to it, have several large commercial sites that are under-developed, but could be home to exciting mixed uses, or linked to workforce training. These sites include: the East Cliff Shopping Center, Capitola and 17th Avenue, 7th Avenue and Brommer Street, The Roadhouse, the former Skyview Drive-In and the O’Neil Ranch at the end of 41st Avenue (see summary version of this report in hard copy which includes map of these sites, available through the LOFRC.)

Income and Poverty

- More than 12% of Live Oak residents lived below the federally defined poverty line in 2000 (\$17,050 per year for a family of four in 2000) - a percentage that was slightly higher than the County as a whole.²⁴
- In 2000, 14.4% of Live Oak’s children (under 18 years old) lived below the poverty line. This is a higher percentage than both the county as a whole (13.3%) and the City of Santa Cruz (13.4%).
- In 1990, Live Oak’s median household income was just \$316 less than City of Santa Cruz’s. By 2000, Live Oak’s median household income was \$5,641 less than the City’s.

Median Household Income, 1990 and 2000

	<u>1990</u>	<u>2000</u>
Live Oak	\$31,541	\$44,964
City of Santa Cruz	\$31,857	\$50,605

- In Live Oak the median household income increased 43% between 1990 and 2000. During this same time period, income increased 59% in the City of Santa Cruz.

Community Health and Health Care

²² *ibid.*

²³ Santa Cruz County Redevelopment Agency, 2004

²⁴ All data in the *Poverty and Income* section is from the 1990 and 2000 Census, Summary Tape files 1 and 3.

Live Oak's health care resources:

- Despite a population of over 25,000 residents, Live Oak has only *one* health clinic – a clinic that operates just two hours per week. The RotaClinic, which nearly closed in September 2007 due to financial strain, is a nonprofit clinic operated by volunteer doctors and organized by the Rotary Club.²⁵ The RotaClinic serves an estimated 1,000 clients each year, 60% of which are Live Oak residents.²⁶
- While Dominican Hospital is located near the Live Oak neighborhood - like many hospitals - it faces the problems associated with an over-utilized emergency room.²⁷
- Children in the 95062 zip code (of which Live Oak is one part) were identified as being “vulnerable to child maltreatment, low literacy and challenges in the area of positive parenting”, according to a 2005 analysis by First 5 Santa Cruz County. Several high risk factors are present in Live Oak including: poverty, child abuse referrals, domestic violence referrals, and academic performance levels of public schools.²⁸

Very little information is available about the health of Live Oak residents:

- One key piece of information about a community's health - birth certificates – are collected by the Health Services Agency at the zipcode-level only, meaning that specific data about Live Oak is unavailable.
- Among the health indicators currently inaccessible to community centers that serve Live Oak residents are:
 - a. The prevalence and scope of mental health needs and adequacy of current services;
 - b. Teenage birth rates, an important indicator of poverty and life-chances;
 - c. The adequacy of prenatal care, which is often considered indicative of general family health care;
 - d. Child immunization rates, which are believed to be declining in the North County area of which Live Oak is one part.
- Cities in the region have access to data, such as birth certificate records, that are indicative of their residents' health allowing them to assess whether services match residents' needs. The population of Live Oak lacks this information.

²⁵ Brown 2007

²⁶ Norm Daley, manager of the RotaCare clinic, Personal Interview (October 5, 2007)

²⁷ Lynn McKibbin, Santa Cruz County Public Health Nurse, Personal Interview (August 28, 2007).

²⁸ Applied Survey Research 2005

Without basic health data, community leaders struggle to secure funding for essential services.

Community Safety

Live Oak is protected by the Santa Cruz County Sheriff Department and shares this service with all unincorporated areas (from Davenport to Freedom).

- In 2006 deputies responded to 23,154 calls in Live Oak, which was about 33% of all county calls to the County sheriff.²⁹
- Typically, only two deputies are assigned to cover Live Oak activity. This represents a low staffing level for officer-to-population ratio considering Live Oak has approximately 23,000 residents. While most police departments have about one officer per 600 people, the Sheriff's Office staffing ratio is less than officer per 1,000 people.
- In 2006, the two Live Oak patrol areas accounted for 28% of the total violent crimes for the entire unincorporated area in the county.
- In 2007, deputies responded to more than 23,000 calls from Live Oak, including 33% of total county violent crime categories, with aggravated assault representing the largest category.
- The area of Live Oak between Brommer Street and the coast had 35% more calls than the area closer to the freeway in 2006.
- The sheriff response time to calls in the unincorporated areas (such as Live Oak) are more than twice as long compared to surrounding jurisdictions. For example, on average calls about domestic disturbances are responded to in 4:07 minutes in Capitola, 4:25 minutes in the City of Santa Cruz and 8:38 minutes in the unincorporated areas including Live Oak.³⁰

Housing

Santa Cruz County is well-known for having high housing costs. According to the Santa Cruz Community Assessment Project report (2007), "The California Association of Realtors calculated that 20% of first-time buyer households in Santa Cruz County were able to afford a median priced home in 2006. This percentage decreased from 23% in

²⁹ Unless otherwise noted all figures were provided by the Santa Cruz County Sheriff's Office.

³⁰ Applied Survey Research 2007

2005, is lower than that of Northern California (37%) and is substantially lower than the United States (64%).”³¹

Renters also face high housing costs. When comparing rental prices in Santa Cruz County with the Fair Market Rents (FMRs), which are determined by the U.S Department of Housing and Urban Development to establish the maximum amount that the Housing Authority will pay for rental units--in 2007, the FMR for a studio apartment was \$883, while the average rent was \$953. They also report that, “In Santa Cruz County, FMRs were lower than average rents from 2001 to 2006 in Santa Cruz County.”³²

According to figures provided by the Santa Cruz County Planning Department:

- Live Oak has a high concentration of Section 8 housing, especially compared to the other unincorporated areas of the County.
- Live Oak is home to the highest concentration of mobile homes in the county. The total number of mobile homes exceeds 2,000, with many in poor condition or at risk of conversion from rent controlled to market rate.

Vacation rentals:

- While exact figures are hard to estimate, many Live Oak residents have observed that a growing number of Live Oak homes, especially along the beaches, are being converted to “second homes” that are used only part of the year by vacationers.
- Properties in the hands of absentee owners mean less commercial activity. Furthermore, wealth that is generated from renting and owning these homes does not remain in the neighborhood as many of the owners of these homes live outside the County.

Transportation

- Live Oak has the most residents traveling long distances to work: 14% of Live Oak residents travel one hour or more to get to work. This percent is higher than that of Santa Cruz (10%) and Watsonville (7%).³³
- The percent of residents that use public transit is 3.6% in Live Oak compared to 7.8% in the City of Santa Cruz.

³¹ *ibid*

³² *ibid.*

³³ All *Transportation* data from the 1990 and 2000 Census, Summary Tape file 1.

Next Steps

This report is intended to initiate and deepen conversations among residents, key stakeholders and policy makers. Below we suggest topics for some of these conversations. Specific recommendations for envisioning and improving Live Oak will emerge from the community conversations and meetings that follow the release of this report.

CONNECT: *Participate as a community in mapping the future of Live Oak.*

Live Oak is both a large population area and a demographically changing community yet few civic institutions exist for residents to come together to map out our future. For this reason we call Live Oak residents and others who care about this area to connect by coming across racial, class, gender and age lines and engaging with one another around common goals to improve the quality of life for all Live Oak residents. Come together for on-going “Live Oak 2020” seminars through the Live Oak Family Resource Center.

COLLECT: *Build capacity for collecting information about our community.*

As an unincorporated area that lacks its own zip code, data about Live Oak’s residents, businesses, schools, and growth is difficult and sometimes impossible obtain. In order to allocate and acquire public resources, to determine if resident’s needs are met by social services, to anticipate demographic trends and to inform policy and planning, it is essential to have access to solid data. Live Oak and the County of Santa Cruz must consider both expanding capacity for using existing data collection methods and developing innovative ways to collect new information about Live Oak. There are many challenges faced by Live Oak residents – for example poverty, language barriers in our schools, unemployment, slowing of household income growth, the lack of employment and business opportunities, and the limited affordable healthcare in the neighborhood – and without substantial data on our community Live Oak lacks the statistical information that is so crucial when planning for current and future needs.

ELECT: *Advocate for ourselves and for strong leadership to represent us.*

Currently Live Oak residents have little government representation, with just one County Supervisor for a larger area that includes Live Oak. Live Oak lacks the avenues for exercising democratic rights that many areas of our size enjoy. For this reason we must consider how we can best take advantage of the opportunities that are available to us to elect representatives we believe will best represent and advocate for our values and needs. Other opportunities for increasing our ability to self-govern must also be explored such as creating a

formal Live Oak community advisory commission that includes a variety of neighborhood stakeholders, or updating the Live Oak General Plan.

Let our diversity be our strength. Let our lack of information about our community be our first step in a long-term data collection and planning strategy. And let our lack of civic institutions be our opportunity for building community-level leadership and power.

For more information

CONNECT!

This report is part of “LIVE OAK 20/20” a larger initiative hosted at the Live Oak Family Resource Center. Together, with our community partners, we are working to increase Live Oak’s livability and improve resident access to public facilities, basic and higher education, and economic opportunity.

You are invited to join with others in discussing this report and identifying areas for action. A year-long series of community conversations, tours and planning sessions are scheduled through the Live Oak Family Resource Center.

To arrange a presentation for your neighborhood or group or to be involved in on-going research efforts call (831) 476-7284, ext. 105.

This report, with links to original data sources, can be found through the Community Bridges website at: <http://www.communitybridges.org/liveoak.html>.

A bi-lingual summary document was also prepared to compliment this report. The full color summary, including a fold out map was released during a public assembly on February 7, 2008. Plans for distributing the 5,000 copies of the report initially included more than 20 public presentations and several community organizing events during the spring of 2008. Copies are free and can be requested through the phone number above or by mail at : Live Oak Family Resource Center, 1438 Capitola Road, Santa Cruz, 95062.

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