



OPEN SPACE AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Access to open space improves health by promoting physical activity, decreasing stress, and mitigating pollution. Environmental Justice (EJ) communities—those that are low-income, English-language isolated, or predominantly people of color—have historically been under resourced and exposed to disproportionate environmental burden. Disparate access to open space is one such burden.

To measure open space access, MAPC calculated the total acreage of parks located within a five minute walk for every resident in the region. Across the region, the median acreage available to residents living in EJ areas is 32, while for residents outside EJ areas it is 59. The good news is that, in some suburban communities, the trend is reversed, and residents of suburban EJ areas have access to slightly more open space acreage (69) than residents of non-EJ areas (60).

Even though less than 10% of residents living in EJ areas are in these suburban towns, this insight amplifies the opportunity to plan and design open space and recreational facilities with the needs and preferences of EJ communities in mind. By law, the Massachusetts EJ Policy and the Open Space Planners Workbook require municipalities to conduct targeted outreach to identify specific needs of EJ communities and look for opportunities to enhance their access to these resources when preparing Open Space and Recreation Plans. MAPC helps many communities to prepare these plans, and we review them all prior to adoption by the state.