

FACT SHEET

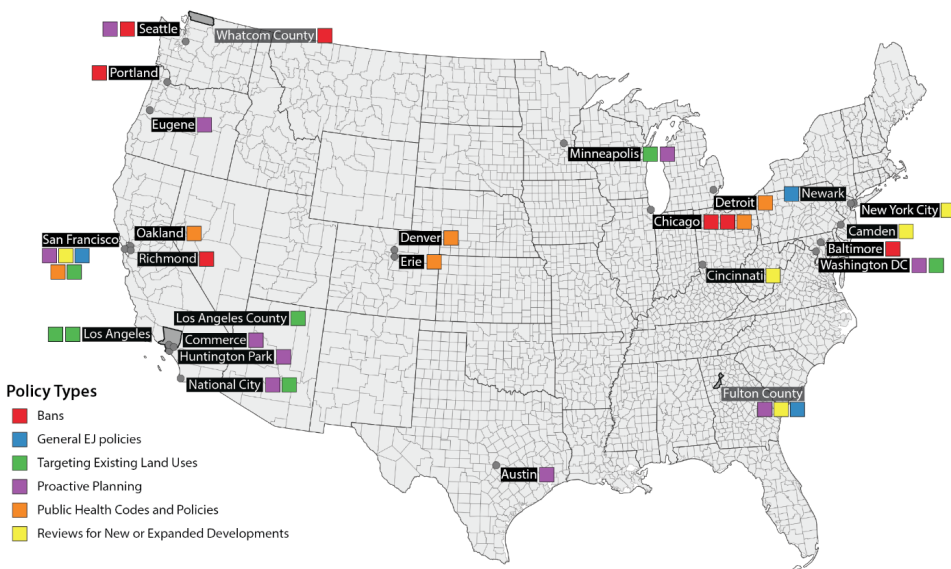
TRANSFORMING LOCAL POLICIES TO ACHIEVE ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Local Policies for Environmental Justice: a National Scan is a report by Professor Ana Baptista detailing how community advocates and their allies have transformed zoning and local land-use policies—historically tools for segregation and concentrating pollution in low-income communities and communities of color—into a means for addressing the cumulative burdens borne by environmental justice communities.¹

The report looks at recent community-driven efforts in over 20 cities, three counties, and two utility service areas across the United States.

It provides real-world examples of the processes that led to these environmental justice policies and key features of the policies themselves. As such, it can serve as a resource for advocates and policymakers interested in newly embarking on such efforts, as well as seasoned advocates looking to compare and continue to learn from/build on their peers' experience.

In addition to a review of the policies themselves, the report includes links to background materials, the text of the relevant ordinances, and other materials that might be helpful to such efforts.



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Environmental justice (EJ) communities are comprised of marginalized racial, ethnic, low-income, rural and/or indigenous populations who live in areas disproportionately burdened by environmental hazards, unhealthy land uses, historical traumas, and other sociodemographic stressors. These combined burdens have a synergistic effect, driving environmental health disparities that may exacerbate other burdens. EJ communities often are not delineated by official geographic boundaries, and may self-designate according to physical, social, cultural, and other characteristics. Such communities are underserved by public and private entities that create and perpetuate environmental hazards and are un- or under-represented in decision-making.

The report groups the policies into six categories:

1. Bans on specific types of polluting facilities typically located in environmental justice communities.
2. Broad environmental justice policies that incorporate environmental justice goals and considerations into a range of municipal activities.
3. Environmental review processes applied to new developments.
4. Proactive planning targeted at future development to address environmental justice via comprehensive plans, overlay zones, or green zones.
5. Targeted land use measures that address existing sources of pollution, like amortization policies.
6. Enhanced public health codes that reach both existing and new sources of pollution that impact public health.



CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

While the policies are driven by specific local conditions, a few key takeaways stand out:

1. Municipalities in many states hold significant authority and flexibility to address environmental injustices through their zoning, land use, and public health powers. At the same time, states can bolster or even mandate the use of such local measures to achieve environmental justice goals like reducing pollution and/or health inequalities, as well as incentivizing cleaner, more sustainable development that provides high quality jobs to local residents.
2. Broad coalitions—led and sustained by community-based organizations—are critical to convincing the government to adopt innovative, progressive policies to address environmental justice.
3. Community-based science—using both quantitative and qualitative methods—can be an important tool for documenting and addressing environmental justice problems at the local level. Some tools like ground-truthing (checking official agency databases against residents’ lived experiences) and cumulative impacts analysis (looking at a range of environmental, sociodemographic, and health factors to determine relative vulnerability of communities) can aid efforts to develop robust local environmental justice policies.

About the Author

Professor [Ana Baptista](#) is Chair of the Environmental Policy and Sustainability Management graduate program and an Assistant Professor of Professional Practice at the New School in New York.² She also serves as the Associate Director for the Tishman Environment & Design Center at the New School.

Ana’s research and professional practice focuses on environmental and climate justice. She works directly with impacted communities and coalitions to support the advancement of community-led, critical, and systemic alternatives to achieve environmental justice. Ana works on a range of related issues including environmental justice policies, zero waste systems, climate justice and resiliency plans, cumulative impacts tools, and mitigation strategies tied to goods movement. Ana’s professional practice is based primarily in community-engaged scholarship and critical participatory action research. Her current research focuses on the use of state policies and municipal land use tools to address cumulative environmental impacts in environmental justice communities.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Ana Baptista, *Local Policies for Environmental Justice: a National Scan*, Tishman Environment and Design Center, February 2019, available at <https://tishmancenter.org/local-land-use-policies-for-environmental-justice-in-collaboration-with-nrdc>.
- 2 The New School, “Environment Policy and Sustainability Management (MS), Faculty, Ana Baptista,” available at <https://www.newschool.edu/public-engagement/ms-environmental-policy-sustainability-management-faculty/?id=4d6a-5535-4e6a-6b79>