SPRING 2026

Changing Currents

PORT ST. JOE HEALTH EQUITY SCENARIOS FOR 2050



FULL REPORT

River of Life

This image illustrates the story of the journey that led to the scenarios in this report. This journey is illustrated by the metaphor of a river with its origins from the NPSJ PAC who initially filed an environmental justice complaint with the EPA due the mountain of NPSJ challenges which were the culmination of racism and segregation, contamination from the prolonged operation of a papermill, damage from Hurricane Michael in 2018, and the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. A collective response to the NPSJ PAC's EPA complaint came in the form of a collaboration between USF, UWF, and the FBA to assist the NPSJ CDC be awarded multiple EPA grants as well as funding from RWJF in the form of IRL fellowships which funded the three TSP workshops that facilitated the creation of the Living Waters, Murky Waters, and Cesspool scenarios.

RWJF SUPPORT (RESOURCES)

TSP 1

TSP 2

Research Grants

TSP 3

IRL Fellowships

Culture of Health Trainings

NPSJ PAC

EPA Complaint

USF

FBA Tech Assistance

EPA Grants

UWF

NPSJ MOUNTAIN OF CHALLENGES

Hurricane Michael

COVID-19

Papermill Contamination

Racism & Segregation

KEY
NPSJ - North Port St. Joe
PAC - Project Area Coalition
CDC - Community Development Corporation
RWJF - Robert Wood Johnson Foundation
IRL - Interdisciplinary Research Leaders
TSP - Transformative Scenario Planning
EPA - Environmental Protection Agency
USF - University of South Florida
FBA - Florida Brownfields Association
UWF - University of West Florida
LNG - Liquefied Natural Gas

NPSJ CDC

Community-based Leadership

Health Equity

Community Engagement

LIVING WATERS

Future scenarios that restore justice

Political Change

Equitable Development

Lack of Polictal Leader Engagement

Proposed LNG Facility

CESSPOOL

Future scenarios that deepen inequity and injustice

MURKY WATERS

Future scenarios that recognize an issue but take minimal action and/or maintain status quo

CHANGING CURRENTS:

Port St. Joe Health Equity Scenarios for 2050

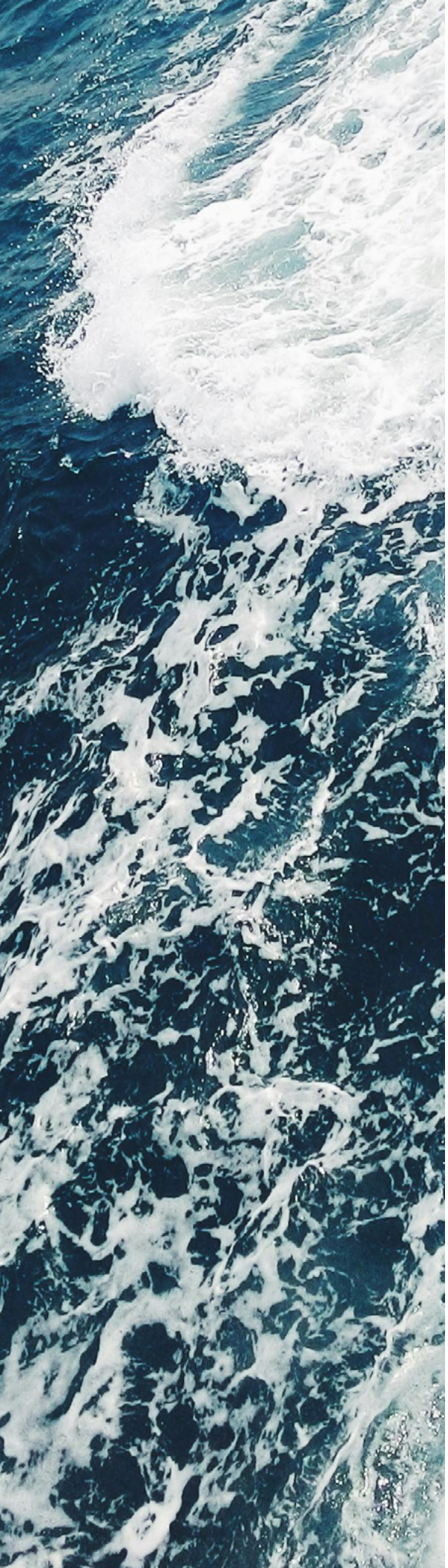
FULL REPORT

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The *Changing Currents: Port St. Joe Health Equity Scenarios for 2050* report describes and supports the future scenarios developed by stakeholders of the Port St. Joe community as part of a transformative scenarios planning project. Port St. Joe is a small coastal city in Gulf County, FL. The northern side of the city is home to the historically African American community of North Port St. Joe which has been exposed to persistent environmental pollution from adjacent chemical plants. By building upon the work of the transformative scenarios workshops, funded by the Interdisciplinary Research Leaders program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and the health assessment of the community, stakeholders were tasked with envisioning their community's future. This culminated in three broad outcomes for several dimensions of their community's health. A living waters future scenario would restore justice for the community. In a murky waters scenario, the community would recognize an issue but take minimal action or maintain the status quo. A cesspool scenario would entail a future where inequalities and injustice are deepened. For each of the seven dimensions of health identified in the health assessment (Community Voice, Neighborhood and Built Environment, Transportation, Education Access and Quality, Socio-Economic Context and Trends, Healthcare Access and Quality, Disease and Death) residents developed these three scenarios for many different components of their health system.

This report describes these scenarios (Appendix A) and provides academic research and real-world examples supporting the plausibility of each scenario as well as how different communities have reached or responded to those scenarios. By providing evidence for the claims of Port St. Joe residents, this report shows the concerns of residents about their future and provides a roadmap for achieving their desired future. However, the voice of Port St. Joe residents will ultimately decide the direction of their community for the future.



TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 5

CHAPTER ONE:
Overview 7

CHAPTER TWO:
Community Voice 10

CHAPTER THREE:
Neighborhood and Built Environment 25

CHAPTER FOUR:
Transportation 51

CHAPTER FIVE:
Education Access and Quality 65

CHAPTER SIX:
Socio-Economic Context and Trends 78

CHAPTER SEVEN:
Healthcare Access and Quality 86

CHAPTER EIGHT:
Disease and Death 100

CHAPTER NINE:
Conclusion 112

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS 113

APPENDIX A:
Full Scenario Table 114

APPENDIX B:
Scenario Outcomes Visualized 122

APPENDIX C:
Strategic Plan 123



CHAPTER ONE:

Overview

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BACKGROUND

Port St. Joe is a small coastal city in Gulf County, FL. In the northern side of the city, is the historically African American community of North Port St. Joe. This community is situated directly adjacent to a paper mill as well as three other chemical plants. These plants exposed residents to pollutants for roughly six decades leading to worse health outcomes for residents in North Port St. Joe compared to the rest of the city. This pollution combined with a legacy of residential segregation, discrimination in hiring practices, and land-use planning and management has created mounting environmental justice challenges. In response to these issues, a transformative scenarios planning project was initiated in 2022 with funding from the Interdisciplinary Research Leaders program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.[1] As part of this project, residents and stakeholders of Port St. Joe were asked to participate in a series of three workshops, starting in November 2023 and ending in November 2024. At each workshop, the stakeholders worked through three of the five stages of the transformative scenario planning project.

The first workshop was designed to build relationships among stakeholders and allow for discussion of the Health Equity Assessment. At the second workshop, residents developed the three key scenarios for Port St. Joe's Future predicting how the community might look in one generation, defined as 25 years in the future, from 2025. Additionally, while developing these scenarios, residents were asked to keep three driving trends in mind that could affect Port St. Joe's future: uncertainties in

1 More information about the project and its funding is available at: https://irleaders.org/team/using-transformative-scenario-planning-to-address-structural-racism-in-health-in-north-port-st-joe-florida/

technology, governance and structural systems, and changes in the biophysical environment. The technological trends described an upward proliferation of technology or a potential decline or intentional disengagement from technology due to advantages of or concerns about (respectively), the impact of artificial intelligence on our lives. The governance and structural trends described a political climate increasingly opposed to issues of health equity (structural racism denied and/or entrenched) or one supportive of equity issues (structural racism acknowledged and/or addressed). The environmental trends described concerns about climate change, the potential for another major hurricane, or another global pandemic.

As the workshops' and project's theme of Changing Currents developed, the futures envisioned at the second workshop were given water-quality based name reflecting the relative outcome of each scenario. A step forward for the community, attempting to improve the status quo, or address some of the concerns expressed by residents would be a living waters scenario. A future where some amount of action is taken, in a way that often does not address the root cause, that leaves only some concerns addressed would be a murky waters scenario. A future where little or no action is taken by the city or community, often resulting in very bleak outcomes, would be labeled as a cesspool scenario. A visual of these three core scenario outcomes is available as Appendix B attached to this report.

Later, the three core scenarios were separated out by the specific themes and topics they discussed. In total, seven themes concerning Port St. Joe's future were used to describe scenarios. These themes covered a variety of topics, both personal in impact and complex in their mechanism, including Community Voice, Neighborhood and Built Environment, Transportation, Education Access and Quality, Socio-Economic Context and Trends, Healthcare Access and Quality, and Disease and Death. Within each theme, the scenarios considered a multitude of topics that make up those themes. Each of these topics had three scenarios envisioned by stakeholders, reflecting the three possible futures envisioned for Port St. Joe's future. Due to the variety of topics covered, each section of this report features a great variety of topics and scenarios, each exhibiting the different ways Port St. Joe's community could change in the future. Furthermore, many of these scenarios include the specific actions leading to the outcomes they describe. The sum of all these scenarios is a complete table, available as Appendix A to this report, which contains all the scenarios developed by stakeholders organized by their specific themes, topics, and outcomes. This allows the scenarios to act as both a possibility of Port St. Joe's future and a roadmap for how the community might reach those futures.

METHODS

In this report, our team elaborated upon the different scenarios developed during the Port St. Joe Health (In)Equity transformative scenarios workshops and found sources to support the possibility of each scenario's occurrence. The sources used to support the transformative scenarios are derived from the Port St. Joe Health (In)Equity Assessment (Johnson et al., 2024), among other reputable sources. Sources from other articles are also included to compare similar challenges other communities face or provide context/prior examples of what the transformative scenarios discuss.

Our research team found a useful first step in constructing this report was to read about the current realities of Port St. Joe. Understanding some of the background behind these scenarios can give a clear idea what the scenarios and concerns expressed by residents are grounded in. Large-scale reports about the specific city of interest, like the Health (In)Equity Assessment for Port St. Joe conducted by Johson et al. (2024), were invaluable to this process. Such reports provided current and well-researched information into the current trends and the impacts those trends have had on the city. In this case, the Health (In)Equity Assessment also informed the residents as part of the initial Transformative Scenarios Workshops, where the scenarios were developed. This meant that this assessment provided a double benefit for this report. The assessment provided not only research about the current status of Port St. Joe but also provided key insights into the minds of the residents while they were developing the scenarios. The scenarios were developed based on categories matching those of the assessment, which made it significantly easier to break the scenarios into categories based on their focus.

From here, our team found it most helpful to split the individual scenarios for each category into individual sections. This facilitated a more focused research effort for each section and allowed for more detailed discussion of each scenario. When researching each scenario, identifying the key concerns and themes present in the scenarios was useful as it provided good launching points for research. For example, rather than try to research the entirety of the specific scenarios, our team found that splitting the research into the primary concerns expressed in the scenario yielded better results. By researching individual concerns, available research not only became easier to find but was often of better quality. Academic or governmental research on each concern was not always available, so sometimes supplemental examples, like news stories, were used to illustrate that the concerns in each scenario expressed were actual real-world possibilities. To find examples of places with similar circumstances to those expressed in the scenarios, our team found it was easier to research the specific outcomes expressed individually, rather than as a whole. When expressed as a whole, the outcomes of each scenario were sometimes too specific to the context of Port St. Joe to provide meaningful results. Instead, showing that each outcome expressed existed in the real world could provide equally compelling evidence of the residents' scenarios. Even when research was available, real-world examples were still useful ways to illustrate the outcomes expressed in the scenarios. Once there seemed to be enough research or examples to sufficiently illustrate the real-world potential of each scenario, linkages had to be established between these examples and Port St. Joe. The easiest way of accomplishing this was to demonstrate the similarities between the research or examples and the specific scenarios as expressed by Port St. Joe residents.





CHAPTER TWO:

Community Voice

Authors: Natja Melendez Nieves, Max Scroth, Zayden Thompson

INTRODUCTION

This chapter delves into the pivotal role that community voices play in shaping the local dynamics of a region, focusing on Port St. Joe. The power of citizen engagement, whether expressed through social media, public forums, or grassroots movements, has a significant impact on addressing health inequities, environmental issues, and social challenges. As communities evolve due to new residents, industrial changes, and environmental factors, the collective voice becomes a vital tool for driving equitable outcomes. The chapter draws a clear connection between public involvement and improved health and social outcomes.

This chapter will explore how community voices influence health equity under three different future scenarios, Living Waters, Murky Waters, and Cesspool. The focus is on the ways dissenting ideologies, new residents, awareness and/or spread of contamination, impact of disaster or collective community concern, a welcome committee, current generational involvement, and citizen engagement can shape the community's ability to advocate for health equity. Each section will analyze the three scenarios, providing real-world examples applicable to the betterment of Port St. Joe.

ENCOURAGEMENT OF DISSENTING IDEOLOGIES

This section explores the potential impact of dissenting ideologies on a community's social fabric. When individuals or groups hold opposing viewpoints, it can lead to tension, division, and even conflict. The ability of a community to navigate these differences and foster constructive dialogue is directly linked to the strength of its collective voice and shared values.



Living Waters

"Dissenting ideologies are encouraged while only obscenity is filtered on community social media accounts. This encouragement reaches a wider audience of citizens potentially resulting in outcomes such as increased voter turnout and engagement on official community accounts."

In this scenario, community voices are empowered through open social media platforms that encourage a diverse range of viewpoints. This freedom of expression increases voter turnout and active participation in local governance, ultimately fostering a robust dialogue around health equity. The City of Boulder, Colorado, has a strong tradition of civic engagement and open dialogue. Their social media platforms actively encourage diverse perspectives and foster healthy debate. This has led to a more informed and engaged citizenry, resulting in higher voter turnout and increased participation in local government. The city has developed six strategies for community engagement success: learn together, help people know what to expect, cultivate relationships, be transparent, use the right tools, and evaluate and evolve. Boulder's commitment to civic engagement and open dialogue is not just a tradition, but a deliberate strategy implemented through various channels, including social media. This approach has resulted in a more informed and active citizenry, contributing to higher voter turnout and increased participation in local government. (City of Boulder, 2017)

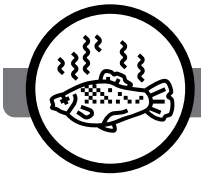


Murky Waters

"Individual voices and social media posts are tolerated instead of a community social media handle or account. Multiple accounts spreading fake news and also suppression of voices that provide points of departure or new lines of questioning."

In this scenario, misinformation and the spread of fake news via social media pose significant challenges to community cohesion. Fragmented discussions and a lack of unified direction weaken the community's ability to address health equity issues effectively. In the aftermath of the 2016 US presidential election, many social media platforms became breeding grounds for misinformation and disinformation. The proliferation of fake news and conspiracy theories on these platforms led to increased polarization and distrust in institutions. This environment made it difficult for fact-based discussions to take place, and dissenting voices were often drowned out. These

challenges highlight the need for increased media literacy, critical thinking skills, and platform accountability to address the negative impacts of misinformation and disinformation on social media. (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017)



Cesspool

> "Community social media accounts which do not tolerate dissenting opinions. Community voice slowly stagnates or dissipates over time, and eventually disappears due to a lack of diversity of opinion."

In this scenario, social media is tightly controlled, and dissenting opinions are actively suppressed, leading to stagnation in public discourse. The community's collective voice, once a powerful tool for advocacy, becomes silenced, allowing inequities to deepen and reducing opportunities for meaningful change.

Some authoritarian regimes heavily censor social media and other forms of online communication. In these countries, dissenting voices are silenced, and critical opinions are suppressed. This leads to a stagnant and uncritical public discourse, where citizens are afraid to express their true thoughts and beliefs. These regimes use social media censorship to maintain control over their populations and to prevent the spread of dissent. This censorship can have a devastating impact on freedom of expression and on the ability of citizens to participate in public discourse (Albert, 2017).

NEW RESIDENTS' IMPACT

This section delves into the potential impact of new residents on a community's dynamics. As newcomers settle in, they can bring fresh perspectives, diverse skills, and potentially new ideas for development. However, our considering how these changes might affect existing residents and their voices within the community is crucial. The ability of the community to adapt to and benefit from this influx is directly linked to its capacity to integrate new voices and maintain a strong sense of collective identity.



Living Waters

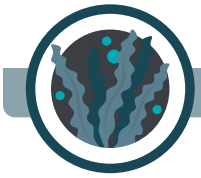
> "Influx of new residents leads to the breaking down of the "Good Ole Boy" network[2]."

The influx of new residents brings fresh perspectives, challenging outdated norms and encouraging a more inclusive and dynamic approach to community health. As diverse ideas are welcomed, the local population

2 A situation in which power is hoarded by a small group of wealthy men with similar social and educational backgrounds who act in the best interest of one another's business and personal matters. For example, a job position which allows whoever fills the role to make a large impact on their community will most often be given to an applicant who bears a familial or social relationship to other members in the informal network.

collaborates to address long-standing health disparities, such as access to quality healthcare and reducing structural racism. Community-driven initiatives, bolstered by new voices, push for systemic changes that improve overall quality of life and contribute to a healthier, more resilient society.

The rapid growth of cities like Austin, Texas, has led to a significant influx of new residents from diverse backgrounds. This influx has challenged the traditional "Good Ole Boy" network, which was once dominant in local politics and business. The diversity of perspectives and experiences brought by new residents has forced the old guard to adapt or become marginalized. Some members of the old guard have embraced the city's new diversity and have worked to build relationships with new residents. Others have resisted change and have become increasingly marginalized. As cities become more diverse, it is important for local leaders to be open to new ideas and perspectives. By doing so, they can help to create more inclusive and prosperous communities. (Gibson, 2023)

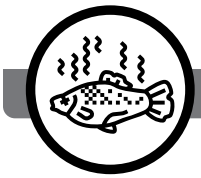


Murky Waters

"Influx of new residents could suggest different ways of relating and establish a new order - or these residents could find their places in the existing order and continue with "business as usual."

New residents may either contribute positively by questioning the status quo or inadvertently reinforce harmful patterns of exclusion. While there are efforts by some residents to challenge existing health disparities, the risk of corporate influence over local discourse threatens to suppress these voices. The result is a community struggling to maintain progress on health equity, with activist efforts often undermined by confusion and a lack of collaboration.

When a tech company moves into a small town, it can bring both opportunities and challenges. On the one hand, it can create jobs and stimulate the local economy. On the other hand, it can also lead to gentrification, increased housing costs, and social tension. The outcome often depends on how well the new residents integrate into the existing community and whether they are willing to collaborate with local leaders. By fostering open communication and working together to address challenges, both the tech company and the local community can benefit from the influx of new residents and economic opportunities (Radevski, 2024).



Cesspool

"Influx of corporate interests or influence/power could lead to silencing of community voices. New residents come with the same race or socioeconomic class separatist agenda or their own agenda. Members of the "Good Ole Boy" network pass the mentality and mindset on to their children causing the network to persist."

The arrival of new residents does little to improve the situation, as many share separatist or exclusionary views that align with the existing "Good Ole Boy" network. Health equity is no longer a priority, with structural racism and other forms of inequality persisting unchecked.

In many rural communities, the arrival of large corporate interests, such as mining or logging companies, can disrupt the social fabric and silence local voices. These interests can often have significant political and economic influence, and they may use these resources to suppress opposition or promote their own interests (Rich & Tsitsos, 2016; Millar, 2015). In promoting their own interests, these companies can push out residents and their voices, replacing them with like-minded individuals who share their goals. Without the ability for residents to push back, this process can lead to environmental degradation, social injustice, and a decline in community well-being. Although not all large corporations have a negative impact on rural communities, the influx of new residents or corporate interests this scenario would result in a stifled community voice, a continuation of the status quo, and the continuation of the "Good Ole Boy" Network.

RESPONSE TO CONTAMINATION

This section examines how the community might respond to the contamination of local land and water, which has been a long-standing issue in the region. The ability of residents to advocate for remediation and protection is directly linked to the strength of their collective voice.

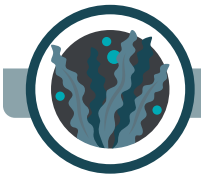


Living Waters

"Leaching contaminants into the bay may force more community voices into action."

In this scenario, after existing contaminants in North Port St. Joe have leached into the adjacent St. Joseph's Bay, the community takes a proactive role in advocating for the remediation of contaminated sites. Residents collaborate with environmental experts and local authorities to address the legacy of pollution left by past industrial activities. Through social media and community forums, they hold regular discussions, raising awareness about the dangers of contaminated soil and groundwater. The influx of new residents, many of whom are passionate about environmental justice, strengthens these efforts. Together, the community pushes for more rigorous cleanup efforts, ensuring that health risks are minimized and that future industrial projects adhere to higher environmental standards.

The Love Canal disaster in Niagara Falls, New York, is a well-known example of how environmental contamination can mobilize a community. When residents discovered that their neighborhood was built on a toxic waste dump, they organized and demanded action from government officials. Their activism led to a major cleanup effort and increased public awareness of environmental hazards. The Love Canal disaster had a profound impact on environmental policy and public awareness. It led to the creation of the Superfund Act, a federal law designed to clean up hazardous waste sites. The incident also sparked a nationwide environmental movement, inspiring countless individuals to fight for a cleaner and healthier future (US EPA, 2018).

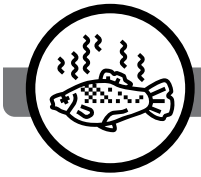


Murky Waters

"Remediation of land without resident displacement may satisfy some resident voices but may also give governance an opportunity to claim no one has any cause for complaint."

In this scenario, efforts to address contamination are fragmented. While some residents are vocal in their demands for better remediation, their efforts are hampered by misinformation and a lack of consistent messaging. Social media becomes a battleground where competing narratives—some advocating for cleanup, others denying the severity of contamination—cause confusion and delay progress. The community's ability to unite behind a common cause is weakened, and government efforts to remediate the land are perceived with skepticism. As a result, contaminated sites remain only partially addressed leaving lingering health concerns for residents.

In many cases, governments and corporations offer remediation plans that clean up contaminated sites without requiring the displacement of residents. While this may seem like a positive outcome, it can also be used to silence concerns and avoid more significant changes, such as relocating the affected community. It is crucial to ensure that remediation plans are comprehensive, transparent, and prioritize the health and well-being of affected communities. Community members should be empowered to participate in the decision-making process and hold responsible parties accountable (US EPA, 2019).



Cesspool

"Awareness of contamination leads to residents moving away and a diminishing of community voice."

In this scenario, the community's voice is largely absent in discussions about contaminated sites. Corporate interests and political indifference dominate the landscape, leaving residents with little recourse to advocate for their health and safety. The contamination worsens over time, with no significant remediation efforts taking place. New residents either align with the status quo or leave the area, further isolating those who remain. The result is a community that has lost its ability to influence decisions about its environment, leading to long-term health and environmental degradation.

The Flint water crisis is a devastating example of how environmental contamination can have far-reaching consequences for a community's health, economy, and social fabric. When the city of Flint, Michigan, switched its water source to the Flint River in 2014, the corrosive river water leached lead from aging pipes into the drinking water supply. This exposed thousands of residents to dangerous levels of lead, a neurotoxin that can cause severe health problems, particularly in children. Many residents, fearing for their health and the health of their children, chose to leave Flint. This exodus accelerated the city's economic decline, as businesses closed and tax revenues dwindled. The loss of population and the erosion of the social fabric further hindered the city's recovery (Denchak, 2018).

EFFECTS OF DISASTERS

This section investigates the potential impact of disasters on a community's resilience. Events such as disasters or human-made crises can significantly disrupt the social, economic, and environmental fabric of a region. The ability of a community to recover and rebuild is directly linked to the strength of its collective voice and its capacity for collaboration and innovation.



Living Waters

"Education and community activism is available without a crisis to induce action."

In this scenario, there is the potential for the community to advocate for their own well-being and recovery without a crisis occurring first. In this scenario, residents unite to demand swifter and more robust rebuilding efforts following a disaster and better resilience for future disasters. They organize community meetings, leverage social media, and collaborate with local and national organizations to amplify their voices. These efforts lead to increased government funding, expedited disaster relief, and the implementation of more resilient infrastructure, ensuring that the community is better prepared for future emergencies.

The environmental justice movement, which emerged in the 1980s, is a prime example of community activism driven by education and awareness-albeit as the result of slow onset or cumulative crises. Communities of color and low-income communities, often disproportionately affected by pollution and other environmental hazards, have organized to demand clean air, clean water, and a healthy environment. This movement has led to significant policy changes and improved public health outcomes. This event, along with countless others, led to increased public awareness and a growing understanding of the disproportionate impact of pollution on marginalized communities. (US EPA, 2019a)



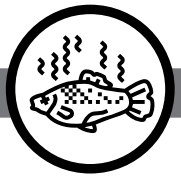
Murky Waters

"Hurricane Michael or another significant event such as opposition to an Liquified Natural Gas (LNG) plant brings the community together. However, post the event, the community remains divided/separate."

This scenario highlights the potential for disaster-stricken communities to become fragmented and divided in the aftermath of a crisis. The spread of misinformation and conspiracy theories can exacerbate tensions and hinder recovery efforts. Misleading information about relief efforts, safety protocols, and the long-term impacts of the disaster can sow distrust and confusion. As a result, communities may struggle to coordinate their response, leading to delayed recovery and increased vulnerability to future disasters.

Hurricane Katrina devastated the Gulf Coast region, bringing communities together in the immediate aftermath of the disaster. However, the long-term recovery process was marked by division and inequality. Some communities, particularly low-income and marginalized

communities, struggled to rebuild, while others recovered more quickly. The storm also exposed deep-seated social and economic disparities, exacerbating existing tensions. The recovery process further widened the gap between wealthy and poor communities. Wealthier neighborhoods were able to rebuild more quickly and attract new investment, while low-income neighborhoods faced significant challenges in accessing resources and rebuilding their infrastructure. This led to increased gentrification and displacement of long-time residents. (Neff, 2024)



Cesspool

"A community never recovers after a hurricane or extreme weather event. Pollution of the biophysical environment due to opposed developments, causes an exodus of residents and discourages settlement of new residents to the area."

In this scenario we see a potential for a disaster-stricken community to experience a decline in civic engagement and social cohesion. In the aftermath of a major disaster, residents may feel overwhelmed and disempowered, leading to a sense of apathy and resignation. As government and private aid efforts wane, the community's ability to rebuild and recover diminishes. A lack of community involvement can result in poorly planned and executed recovery projects, exacerbating long-term social and economic problems. In the absence of a strong community voice, the area may become increasingly vulnerable to future disasters and other challenges.

The Fukushima nuclear disaster in Japan had a devastating impact on the local community and the surrounding region. The nuclear meltdown led to widespread contamination, forced evacuations, and long-term health concerns. The affected areas have struggled to recover, and many residents have chosen to relocate permanently. The environmental damage has also made it difficult to attract new residents and businesses. The contaminated areas have been designated as restricted zones, and many people are hesitant to return due to concerns about radiation exposure. The economic impact of the disaster has been significant, with many businesses closing and jobs being lost. (IAEA, 2018)

WELCOME COMMITTEE

This section delves into the role of a welcome committee in fostering a sense of belonging for new residents. By providing support, information, and social opportunities, a welcome committee can help newcomers integrate seamlessly into the community. The effectiveness of a welcome committee is directly linked to its ability to create a warm and inclusive environment that encourages participation and engagement.



Living Waters

"A welcome committee exists to encourage residents to be involved in activities."

This scenario suggests a proactive approach to community integration. New residents are greeted with open arms and provided with essential information and resources. Community members volunteer their time to organize social events, cultural activities, and volunteer opportunities. This fosters a sense of belonging and encourages newcomers to actively participate in the community's life. By building strong social connections and creating a welcoming environment, the community can thrive and grow.

Many colleges have active welcome committees that organize orientation events, social gatherings, and volunteer opportunities for new students (Harvard College, n.d.). These committees help newcomers feel connected to the campus community and foster a sense of belonging. Some key activities of welcome committees include orientation programs, social gatherings, volunteer opportunities, and mentorship programs. By creating a warm and inclusive environment, welcome committees contribute to the overall success and satisfaction of new students. Their efforts help shape positive first impressions of the college experience and lay the foundation for a fulfilling college journey.

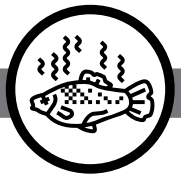


Murky Waters

"A welcome committee struggles to find members willing to spend time encouraging residents."

This scenario highlights the potential for a community to become divided and fragmented, even in the face of positive change. While initial efforts may bring people together, a lack of members could hinder the committee's effectiveness. This can result in a less welcoming environment for newcomers, hindering their integration and potentially driving them away.

In cities, it can be challenging to recruit and retain members for welcome committees. Since many local committees, including welcome committees rely on volunteers, they can struggle to find members willing to dedicate their free time to the project. Existing residents may be overwhelmed with their own commitments and less willing to dedicate time to welcoming newcomers. Many communities are also struggling with a more general lack of interest in local government and committees (Baker, 2024). Several factors contribute to this challenge: increased demands on time, changing demographics, and competition for volunteers. To address these challenges, welcome committees may need to adopt innovative strategies to recruit and retain volunteers, such as flexible volunteer opportunities, skill-based volunteering, clear communication and recognition, partnerships with local businesses, and leveraging technology. By implementing these strategies, welcome committees can continue to provide essential support to newcomers, even in the face of rapid urban growth.



Cesspool

"With no welcome committee at all, residents are disconnected with the activities and issues prevalent in their community. Causing difficulty in the ability to use community voice for enacting change."

This scenario highlights the potential for a community to become stagnant and decline. A lack of enthusiasm and commitment from existing residents can create a hostile environment for newcomers. Poorly organized and underfunded welcome initiatives can lead to a lack of support and resources. As a result, newcomers may feel isolated and unwelcome, hindering their integration into the community. Over time, this can lead to a decline in population, economic activity, and overall vitality, leaving the community vulnerable to future challenges.

In some rural communities, there may be a lack of formal welcome committees or organized community events. This absence can lead to social isolation and a decline in civic engagement. Other times new residents may even be shunned by long-term residents, isolating them and hampering their voices. In either case, new residents may feel disconnected from the community and struggle to enact change, even if it benefits the community. This can be seen rural Queensland, Australia communities where incoming residents were met with hostility instead of a warm welcome (Ham, 2023). Following her interviews, Saleena Ham concluded that it is crucial of communities to properly welcome and induct new members, otherwise they risk those residents disengage from the community (2023). In this scenario, rather than being united, the residents, new and old, are divided. Because of this situation, all residents are not as aware of the issues in their community and are less capable of addressing them.

CURRENT GENERATION'S INVOLVEMENT

This section explores the potential impact of the current generation's involvement in community affairs. As young people become increasingly engaged in local issues, they can bring fresh perspectives, innovative ideas, and a renewed sense of energy. The ability of a community to adapt to changing times and address future challenges is directly linked to the strength of its youth voice and their willingness to participate in shaping the community's future.

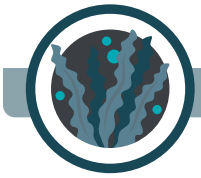


Living Waters

"The current generation is continually involved with the movement to instill change in their community, and increases the quality of life in their community by addressing the historical and localized structural racism and health inequities."

This scenario suggests a potential for a renewed sense of civic engagement and social responsibility. Young people are increasingly passionate about making a positive impact on their communities. They are organizing grassroots movements, volunteering their time to local organizations, and advocating for social and environmental justice. By empowering the next generation, communities can foster a sense of ownership and pride, ensuring a brighter future for all.

The Black Lives Matter movement has mobilized a generation of young people to address systemic racism and police brutality. Through protests, activism, and community organizing, they have raised awareness, influenced policy, and inspired social change. While BLM has made significant strides, the fight for racial justice is far from over. The movement continues to address systemic racism in areas such as housing, education, and employment. By raising awareness, mobilizing communities, and advocating for policy change, BLM is shaping a more equitable future for all (Black Lives Matter, 2023).

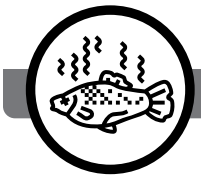


Murky Waters

"While the current generation is actively involved, they are unable to cause meaningful change in spite of their best efforts. The movement remains but numbers dwindle and the current generation struggles to maintain the movement."

This scenario highlights the potential for apathy and disengagement. Despite the desire for positive change, many young people may feel overwhelmed by the challenges facing their community. A lack of clear pathways for involvement, coupled with competing priorities such as education and career advancement, can hinder their participation. This lack can lead to a sense of disillusionment and a belief that individual efforts are insufficient to make a meaningful impact.

The environmental movement has faced numerous challenges, including setbacks and periods of decline. Despite the best efforts of activists, it can be difficult to maintain momentum and achieve lasting change, especially in the face of powerful opposition from corporations and politicians. In spite of these challenges, the environmental movement continues to adapt and evolve. New technologies, such as renewable energy and electric vehicles, offer promising solutions to environmental problems. Additionally, a growing number of young people are becoming involved in environmental activism, bringing fresh energy and ideas to the movement. (Weyler, 2018)



Cesspool

"The current generation is not actively involved, causing stagnation of momentum and progress and the continuity of the movement to address localized structural racism and health inequities in the community."

This scenario highlights the potential for a lack of intergenerational connection and mentorship. Without opportunities to learn from older generations and contribute to the community's legacy, young people

may feel disconnected and disillusioned. This can lead to a decline in civic engagement, as young people may not see the value in participating in local affairs. As a result, communities may struggle to address emerging challenges and adapt to changing times, hindering their long-term vitality and sustainability.

In many communities, there is a lack of youth involvement in local politics and civic engagement. This can lead to a decline in community vitality and a failure to address pressing social and environmental issues. Without a new generation of leaders, it becomes difficult to sustain progress and create a better future. When young people are not involved in local politics, they are less likely to vote, to volunteer, or to donate to local causes. Additionally, when young people are not involved in local politics, they are less likely to have their voices heard on the issues that matter to them. This can lead to a failure to address pressing social and environmental issues. (Office of the New York City Advocate, 2024)

CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT AND GOVERNMENT INTERACTION

This section delves into the importance of citizen engagement in government decision-making processes. By actively participating in public hearings, town hall meetings, and other forums, residents can influence policies that impact their community. The effectiveness of citizen engagement is directly linked to the government's willingness to listen to public input and respond to the needs and concerns of its constituents.

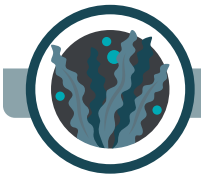


Living Waters

"Citizen engagement through collaboration becomes the norm due to support from the local government. The local government is responsive to the needs voiced by citizens and makes steps to implement change based on citizen input."

This scenario suggests a potential for a more collaborative and responsive government. Citizens actively participate in the democratic process, engaging in public hearings, town hall meetings, and elections. They form advocacy groups, lobby for policy changes, and hold elected officials accountable. This increased civic engagement leads to more effective governance, improved public services, and a stronger sense of community. By working together, citizens and government can address pressing social and environmental issues and create a more equitable and sustainable future.

The City of Portland, Oregon, has a strong tradition of citizen engagement, with numerous neighborhood associations, community councils, and advisory boards. The city government actively seeks input from residents on a wide range of issues, from zoning and land use to transportation and public safety. This collaborative approach has led to innovative solutions and improved quality of life for Portland residents. Portland's commitment to citizen engagement serves as a model for other cities. By fostering a culture of collaboration and empowering residents, Portland has created a more vibrant, equitable, and sustainable community (City of Portland, 2024).

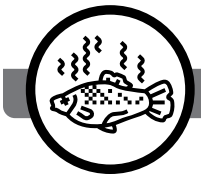


Murky Waters

"Citizen engagement increases as a result of grassroots efforts. However, this increases experiences setbacks due to either local governance intimidation/retaliation, apathy or pressures of life."

This scenario suggests the potential for a decline in civic participation and a loss of faith in government. Despite initial enthusiasm and activism, citizens may become disillusioned by the slow pace of change and the perceived lack of responsiveness from government officials. This can lead to a decline in voter turnout, a decrease in volunteering, and a general apathy towards public affairs. As a result, communities may become less resilient and less able to address pressing social and environmental challenges.

The Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) protests were a powerful example of grassroots activism, with thousands of people from across the country coming together to oppose the pipeline's construction. However, protesters faced intimidation tactics from law enforcement, harsh weather conditions, and other challenges. Despite these obstacles, the movement raised awareness about environmental justice and Indigenous rights. While the DAPL was ultimately completed, the movement at Standing Rock had a significant impact on the broader struggle for environmental justice and Indigenous rights. It inspired similar protests against fossil fuel infrastructure projects and highlighted the importance of Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination (Smithsonian, 2015).



Cesspool

"Residents who speak up are threatened. State workers and some categories of residents cannot speak out because of their roles, or feel the need to stay politically neutral instead of taking an explicit stance on issues. Hence the community voice is stifled."

This scenario suggests the potential for a decline in civic participation and a loss of democratic accountability. Apathy and disengagement among citizens can lead to a lack of oversight and scrutiny of government actions. This can result in corruption, inefficiency, and a decline in public services. As citizens become less involved in the political process, elected officials may become less responsive to the needs of their constituents, further eroding trust and hindering progress.

In many authoritarian regimes, citizens who speak out against the government face severe consequences, including imprisonment, torture, or even death. This fear of reprisal silences dissent and prevents the formation of a vibrant civil society. In some cases, government officials may also use intimidation tactics, such as surveillance and harassment, to discourage citizen participation. By silencing critical voices, these regimes can prevent the emergence of opposition movements and maintain a facade of popular support. However, the long-term consequences of such repression can be severe. A society that lacks a vibrant civil society and free expression is less likely to be innovative, prosperous, and just (Thomas, 2021).

CONCLUSION

Across these scenarios, the strength and cohesion of community voices play a crucial role in shaping the future of Port St. Joe. Whether advocating for health equity, or responding to environmental challenges, the ability of citizens to engage, organize, and influence local policy determines the community's trajectory. In the Living Waters and more optimistic parts of the Murky Waters scenarios, a strong community voice fosters resilience, collaboration, and meaningful progress. In the Cesspool and more pessimistic parts of the Murky Waters scenarios, the suppression of dissent and the fragmentation of public discourse leads to stagnation, inequity, and environmental degradation. The choice of which scenarios to pursue stands with the same people whose voices are at a crossroads.



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CHAPTER THREE:

Neighborhood and Built Environment

Authors: Gillian Bruce, Sarah Detzel, Amber Eells, Jeff Jean Philippe, Cade Retherford, Josh Simmons, Samantha Strack

INTRODUCTION

This chapter will discuss the many different aspects of Port St. Joe's neighborhood and built environment envisioned for Port St. Joe's future, under three scenarios. Due to the vast and interconnected nature of this chapter, residents considered a significant variety of topics and drafted scenarios for each and categorized them as either Living Waters, Murky Waters, or Cesspool. The topics discussed by residents include: the Identification of Brownfield Sites, the Cleanup of Brownfield Sites, Housing and Development in PSJ, future Government Revitalization Initiatives, Crime in Neighborhoods, the Sidewalks, Lighting, and Speed Limits in PSJ, Public Funding, Water Supply, Community Gardening, and Homeownership Education. These scenarios envisioned by PSJ residents represent the many concerns of PSJ residents about their community's future urban environment.

IDENTIFICATION OF BROWNFIELD SITES

The United States EPA defines brownfield sites as any "property, the expansion, redevelopment, or reuse of which may be complicated by the presence or potential presence of a hazardous substance, pollutant, or contaminant." (2017, para. 2). Because of this contamination, these properties often remain unused and can be difficult or costly to remediate (USEPA, 2017; Haninger & Timmins, 2017). These brownfields can have adverse effects on both the community's health and economy (Haninger & Timmins, 2017). This impact makes the identification of such sites crucial for any community's future. This necessity is especially true in a community which has previously had issues with pollution like PSJ (Johnson et al. 2024).



Living Waters

"Identification of brownfield sites and increased environmental regulation will lead to improved environmental management and thus to improved neighborhood conditions due to the discovery of contaminants and the liability to clean up."

In this scenario, proactive measures are consistently taken to prevent contamination, ensuring a cleaner and safer environment. This approach not only frees up contaminated land for reuse but also helps lift property values, benefiting the entire community. Regular monitoring and community involvement are key components, ensuring that environmental health is maintained long term. By repurposing existing infrastructure, taxpayers can save money, making these improvements both economically and environmentally beneficial. Such measures lead to a higher quality of life, as cleaner environments promote better health and more vibrant, livable communities.

The Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) Kingston Site is a wonderful example of a bad situation turned good. After the power plant containment area for coal ash failed in 2008, the negative effects for the community were immediate. These included the failure of major infrastructure and the evacuation of residents following a state of emergency declaration. TVA invested billions of dollars in the span of 6 years on ecological restoration, a comprehensive cleanup effort, and on a broader community revitalization. "Funding was used to build new public schools, a wastewater treatment plant and to rehabilitate a historic theater. Areas have been planned for a sports complex, emergency response center, and a volunteer fire station for this community" (USEPA, 2025c, para. 10).



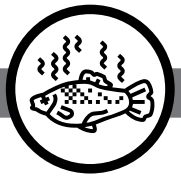
Murky Waters

"The knowledge of past and possibility of more contaminated sites could also either cause further blight, thus leading to more socio economic downturn; or provide more funding for clean-up, thus creating opportunities for redevelopment."

In this scenario, some, but not all, contamination issues are addressed. This lack of comprehensive response results in a mixture of clean and contaminated sites, present particularly in poorer areas. The presence of contaminated sites increases overall maintenance costs, especially for older infrastructure. Revitalization efforts are often stalled until contamination is fully removed, delaying economic and social benefits. The inconsistency in addressing contamination can create opposite outcomes at the sites. Ultimately, the cleanup can lead to ongoing health risks and a less stable community environment, with disparities between clean and contaminated areas, or to a stimulated economy resulting from diverse and equitable reuse of the site.

The Jacksonville Ash Site is an example where efforts have been put forth for cleanup and rebuilding resulting in an economically stimulated area. The former site of incinerators and an ash dump was cleaned up for residential, retail, public, and mixed uses (USEPA, 2025c). The site remediation has been so successful, that several projects in the city have been awarded "Excellence in Site Reuse" awards (USEPA, 2025c). While there has been strides for cleanup and reuse for this site over the past 15 years, it has been an incredibly slow process.

Alternatively, a community's history of contamination may lead directly to economic downturn for the community. Unlike the Jacksonville Ash site, a history of environmental contamination would discourage investment in the community and worsen existing environmental and economic issues. Flint, Michigan is a community that has struggled to stimulate its local economy because of its well-known lead contamination (Mahoney, 2024). Some research has also suggested that the presence of brownfields themselves are indicators for communities suffering from economic disinvestment (Bjelland, 2004). With communities with identified brownfields already impacted by economic disinvestment, further disinvestment would likely put the local economy at further risk.



Cesspool

"More contaminated sites are identified, reducing gardening potential. Buildings will have to be destroyed and rebuilt at St. Joe's cost since they sold the land, or people will continue to live on contaminated land."

In this scenario, high levels of contamination persist with little to no effort to address the issues. The brownfield sites are left vulnerable to flooding, erosion, and infrastructure damage. Community health suffers severely, particularly in low-income areas where residents have fewer resources to cope with environmental hazards. The contamination directly impacts air quality and water resources, exacerbating health problems and reducing the overall quality of life. These conditions continue to hinder economic development and perpetuate social inequalities, making it difficult for affected communities to thrive (Talyor, 2022).

A site in Houston, TX is an example of such an outcome. Although the site was polluted and contaminating the nearby area, it was not designated as a superfund site (Taylor, 2022). Despite the city of Houston being aware of issues at the site in 2019, little to no action had been taken by the EPA to improve the affected community concerns. "East Houston's Fifth Ward and Kashmere Gardens are located near three toxic waste sites and an old rail yard that, although not officially designated as a Superfund site, is leaking creosote and other carcinogenic chemicals into the groundwater and soil" (Taylor 2022, para. 8). The Houston Department of Health's IMPACT health survey has shown that 43% of households in areas surrounding superfund sites reported a cancer diagnosis, in comparison to Houston's average cancer rate of 6.1%. Negative health effects are shown in residents that live within a 1.8 mile radius of a toxic waste site (Taylor, 2022). It was not until after several lawsuits were almost initiated in 2022 and a settlement agreement that the EPA stepped

in and agreed to start an investigation into the site on February 27, 2023. The results of that investigation are going to be used to determine whether a cleanup effort is necessary (USEPA, 2025a).

CLEANUP OF BROWNFIELD SITES

Brownfield cleanup refers to the process of rehabilitating former industrial sites to make them suitable for reuse or redevelopment, presenting both challenges and opportunities for urban renewal. The cleanup of these areas can be complex from both environmental and social perspectives. Ongoing cleanup efforts aim to transform these once-neglected properties into valuable community assets that enhance economic activity, environmental health, and social well-being (USEPA, 2017).



Living Waters

"The cleanup of brownfields allows for better land reuse through the improvement of infrastructure."

This approach offers numerous advantages. Firstly, it generates jobs in construction, environmental assessment, and urban planning. These projects not only provide immediate employment but also stimulate long-term economic growth by attracting new businesses. Secondly, revitalizing brownfields helps curb urban sprawl by making better use of existing land, thus preserving undeveloped areas and natural landscapes. Thirdly, turning brownfields into green spaces or community centers fosters healthier, more vibrant, and safer neighborhoods, creating spaces for interaction, recreation, and community building.

An example of a successful brownfield development project is the Atlantic Station project in Atlanta. Once a fenced-off industrial wasteland, this site has been transformed into a vibrant mixed-use development. It serves as a prime example of how extensive cleanups can revitalize urban neighborhoods, create jobs, and enhance community spaces (USEPA, 2024a).



Murky Waters

"Brownfields will be cleaned up yet remain unused, allowing the possible return of industry-which may either bring increased economic activity or further drive health inequity."

In this scenario, sites are rehabilitated while still undeveloped, impeding community growth. Many of these neglected sites may be developed by industry which can pose risks to human health but bring the economic and social benefits of redevelopment.

One such example of an outcome can be seen in the Escambia Wood Superfund site in Pensacola, Florida. The location had contaminated soil and groundwater resulting from an industrial wood treating company. Despite the EPA's cleanup, the site has remained unused (EPA, 2025b). Like in the scenario envisioned, the site is safe for both commercial and industrial making the future of the site uncertain.



Cesspool

"Brownfields will remain uncleaned (i.e. contaminants completely removed instead of capped) causing leakage into soil and groundwater."

This scenario carries serious repercussions. Without adequate remediation, brownfields continue to pose health and environmental hazards, jeopardizing resident safety. The presence of such dangerous sites stifles the development of housing, businesses, and public spaces, perpetuating social and economic inequalities that disproportionately affect low-income communities.

A case in point is Love Canal in Niagara Falls, New York, where inadequate cleanup led to severe health issues and the relocation of residents (Gibbs, 1982). Love Canal became notorious when Hooker Chemical Company buried 22,000 tons of hazardous waste, which later leaked into local homes, causing long-term illnesses among residents. This incident, and the subsequent public outcry, were ultimately responsible for the enactment of the Superfund Act. This Act was created to avoid another outcome, like the one in the Love Canal, in the future by allocating funds to clean up similarly contaminated sites across the United States (USEPA, 2024b).

HOUSING AND DEVELOPMENT

Proper housing and development should have a focus on promoting both sustainability and affordable housing. From renewable energy sources to energy-efficient building materials, and from green spaces to community gardens, history has shown that affordability and environmental sustainability can occur in housing simultaneously (Moore & Doyon, 2023). Promoting social equity within new housing developments can benefit everyone by allowing more families access to quality and affordable housing, especially low- and moderate-income households, although there are still some significant concerns about the potential for displacement and gentrification (Levy et al., 2013). The current landscape of housing in the U.S. is bleak within this context. With limited supply and growing cost, many cities are struggling to reach these lofty ideals (Leon-Moreta & Totaro, 2022). Like any city, the city of Port St. Joe and its residents have their own concerns about their future of housing and development. Throughout the scenarios they developed, restrictions in housing policy and planning, as well as their influence on development, are the central focus of PSJ's future.



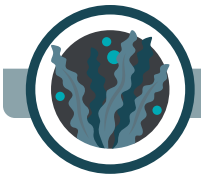
Living Waters

"New housing development with less restrictions allows for new housing to be built quickly."

Meeting high environmental and social standards in new housing projects can yield substantial economic benefits (Oyetunji et al., 2022). By incorporating sustainability into these developments, communities can achieve long-term benefits that minimize environmental impacts while promoting social equity. However, overly

restrictive housing policy can have the opposite effect by limiting the available supply of housing (Mottleson, 2023; Leon-Moreta & Totaro, 2022). This scenario would avoid such policy resulting in more rapid development.

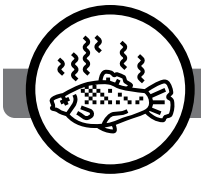
By removing some restrictions while still prioritizing sustainable housing, PSJ could improve the supply of quality, affordable housing for the community without compromising residents' quality of life (Marsh et al., 1996).



Murky Waters

"Less restrictions for new housing development and the ability for faster building results in poor planning and design."

Similar to the Living Waters scenario, this scenario sees reduced restrictions for new housing developments. However, the goals of sustainable and intentional housing design would be lost. In doing so, the city would struggle with rapid expansion that is not properly planned for. This lack of preparation would cause well-developed areas, ones that receive new investments, to continue to thrive, while struggling neighborhoods fall further behind, perpetuating social and economic inequities. This scenario is widespread across the U.S. Historically, limited restrictions and poor planning have contributed to significant urban sprawl throughout the country (Cullingworth & Caves, 2014). This sprawl has worsened the health of residents and the environment while simultaneously gentrifying the city center. A similar scenario in PSJ would likely create similar outcomes for residents and deepen existing housing inequalities.



Cesspool

"New housing development is not governed by federal regulations leading to public health and safety concerns as developers operate without regulations. Greater likelihood that developments will have adverse impacts on the environment e.g. new development causes stormwater runoff to carry sediment into neighboring lands and bodies of water."

A lack of regulation on new development can lead to deteriorating conditions in both existing and new housing stock, resulting in inadequate amenities and poor living environments. The costs associated with poor planning and oversight in affordable housing development can be significant. As described in the Murky Waters scenario, these negative environmental and health effects from this poor planning are clearly visible in the harms demonstrated by urban sprawl (Cullingworth & Caves, 2014). This scenario would go even further than poor planning. In addition to reduced restrictions on new development, many housing regulations would also be ignored. Many of those regulations were developed in direct response to the impacts unregulated housing had on both human health and the environment (Marsh et al., 1996). These outcomes can still be seen today, even without outright disregarding existing regulations.

The example of stormwater sediment pollution provided by residents can be seen clearly in Harford County, Maryland. In the county, the developers of a housing project repeatedly ignored and violated environmental regulations regarding sediment pollution which has resulted in widespread mud pollution of the local river

systems (Tim Wheeler, 2024). This pollution has caused tremendous environmental damage and has directly contributed to a significant decline in aquatic plant and animal populations (Time Wheeler, 2024). By blatantly disregarding the rules and regulations in place, the developers have caused potentially irreparable harm to the county's ecosystems. Although the developers are now being sued by the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) in an effort to minimize further harm and fix some of the environmental issues, the damage to the local environment has already been done (Tim Wheeler, 2024). Although the MDE was aware of the violations, the lack of serious pushback or punishment was crucial in allowing this scenario to occur. In PSJ, a housing development project could similarly disregard or skirt the boundaries of regulation without pushback. In doing so, the health of PSJ's community and the health of their environment would be put at great risk.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Affordable housing is a critical issue in growing areas where development decisions significantly impact quality of life. Affordable housing is generally defined as residents paying for housing costs based on a portion of their overall income, usually around 30% (Thomas, 2017). According to the National Low Income Housing Coalition, roughly 580,000 people are currently identified as "extremely low income" (ELI) in Florida alone (NLIHC, 2024). Those recognized as ELI have financial troubles and earn less than one-third of their area median income. Additionally, the NLIHC states "Only 34 affordable and available rental homes exist for every 100 extremely low-income renter households" (NLIHC, 2024, para. 1) These statistics indicate that there is currently an affordable housing shortage, and many individuals are not having their needs met by their community and government leaders. Although there are stigmas surrounding affordable housing, many of these assumptions are not based in fact. Affordable housing not only benefits disadvantaged families, but the overall community as well. Affordable housing initiatives elevate overall quality of life and create opportunities for diverse populations (Thomas, 2017). The goal of affordable housing is to improve the current living situations for those who need it the most. Housing policies are created with the intention of enhancing the current housing quality by upgrading "indoor environment quality, air quality, proper insulation, and reduced overcrowding" (Thomas, 2017, p. iii). Parents benefit from affordable housing policies in that they are less likely to be stressed, and as a result, more likely to contribute to the workforce and be a productive member of the community if they are not worried about facing possible eviction. Mental and physical health have been known to improve following the implementation of affordable housing programs. The "additional household budget alleviated by rent reduction can lead to improved diet as funds are made available for better quality food" (Thomas, 2017, p. iii). An improved diet can improve one's physical and mental health and reduce the risk of catching harmful diseases. A direct result of affordable housing policies enhancing people's well-being will reduce "health costs for both the individual and the state along with a lessened demand on healthcare services" (Thomas, 2017, p. iii). Less burden on healthcare workers will allow them to provide better quality care. The money saved on health can also be utilized to improve the local economy and provide more spending opportunities.



Living Waters

"Affordable housing is built with ample availability for residents who are surviving on fixed incomes/living paycheck to paycheck. Housing is located in a central area with access to resources such as groceries, hospitals, etc."

Having access to affordable housing is important for an abundance of reasons, sometimes even beyond helping the housed family. Children in stable living conditions are more likely to have improved classroom success. Several studies observed the relationship between housing situations and their direct impact on a child's performance academically.

One study was able to identify that "children living in overcrowded houses had a lower probability of completing secondary education and had an increased tendency to be absent from school" (Pillay, 2017, p. 1).

Individuals who obtained a high school diploma in Florida earned on average $5,803 more than those who did not graduate high school (Boser, 2020). Unemployment rates improved with a high school education, with their overall unemployment at 3.9%, in comparison to a non-high school education which has an unemployment rate of 5.6% (US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2024). The earning potential of a person improves the more educational levels and opportunities they complete. By having affordable housing options available to those designated as ELI, children will not have external factors negatively influencing their classroom success and future success.



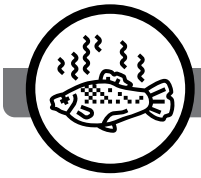
Murky Waters

"Community supportive Commercial & Residential Development happens but is slow - still reducing Quality of Life from unavoidable increases in costs of living for current residents due to neighborhood improvements."

One of the vital aspects of affordable housing is the creation of job opportunities. In order to construct and maintain housing structures, workers will need to be employed. The construction and upkeep of the housing facilities will employ a steady stream of diverse workers that will contribute to the improvement of the NPSJ economy. The National Association of Home Builders projects that manufacturing a 100 new Low-Income Housing Tax Credit developments (LIHTC) will net 80 jobs as a result of the construction, with 30 of these jobs being designated as long-term (Wardrip, 2011). Maintenance and upkeep of these newly constructed housing options will continuously provide job opportunities and stimulate the local economy simultaneously.

However, the costs for purchasing a house in Florida have skyrocketed in recent years, pricing out potential home buyers. Many corporations and families have migrated to Florida to benefit from their friendly economic policies. For PSJ, 16.1% of their population have moved from their previous residence since the previous year, a rate 20% higher than the rest of Florida (Census Reporter, 2023). A report drafted by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development in 2023 (as cited in Chen, 2024, para. 3) found that 5 million children under the age of 18 are living in households that are "at or below 50 percent of area median income and paying more than one-half of their income toward rent, living in severely inadequate conditions or both." The housing competition directly

harms ELI renters as they struggle to find affordable housing options. According to Redfin (2024), Florida home prices have increased 1.5 % compared to last year, with the median price being $ 410,400. The influx of new residents suggests that current residents are being forced to relocate in search of cheaper housing options. These findings highlight the need for accelerating the provision of affordable housing options in areas such as NPSJ, because children are the ones who suffer the most from a lack of such housing.



Cesspool

"Volatile market could lead to worsening housing crisis, influx of new residents, causing gentrification and continued segregation."

Lack of affordable housing options can negatively affect the overall community. The negative stigma and misconceptions surrounding affordable housing from the local community causes housing initiatives and development to be slow to process or accepted. A quote by sociologist Erving Goffman in 1963 (as cited by Phelan, 2008, p. 358) coined stigma as "the situation of the individual who is disqualified from full social acceptance."). Much of the resistance and reluctance towards supporting affordable housing initiatives stems from antiquated or uninformed lines of thinking. The negative stigma, described by Koebal et al (2004) (as cited by Tighe, 2012, p. 963), "is rooted in several interrelated factors that contribute to the NIMBY [Not In My Backyard] reaction: fear of adverse impacts on property values, anti-government sentiment, anti-poor sentiment, and racial prejudice and segregation."). Their perspective is often not based on the fact that affordable housing has numerous positive impacts on the social and economic aspects for a community like NPSJ.

Modern ideals, such as social justice, are directly connected to the idea of affordable housing. This viewpoint aims to create equal opportunities for multiple avenues. Under this view, resources would be evenly distributed among the community to reduce favoritism and create equal opportunity. As a result of a volatile housing market, the housing crisis can worsen for residents. The lack of housing options forces fixed-income families to remain stuck in their current situation and settle with the reduced quality of life associated with their living situation. Relocation to the outskirts of the city would be the only other viable option available to those designated as low income or ELI. Although housing prices might be reduced further away from the central part of NPSJ, hidden costs from other related fixtures would increase dramatically. Travel costs would be one of the many aspects that would increase due to the extra commute time associated with their new dwelling.

A lack of affordable housing can also prevent the diversification of neighborhoods. This blocks cultural enrichment opportunities, which prevent people from learning and being exposed to previously unfamiliar cultures. The main deterrent is the negative stigma associated with affordable housing. A study conducted by Horgan (2020) explored this stigma and the impact on the individuals and neighborhoods of a community. They claimed that stigma is contagious between places and persons, by association or proximity. It appears that "a neighbourhood's stigma can also rub off on housing units located within it, and from housing units to individuals" (Horgan, 2020, p. 13). A lack of diversity politically, socially, and culturally can lead to the creation of echo chambers. These are dangerous and can lead to a line of thinking known as 'reasons-undermining', where the blocking of alternative views, and people's reasons for holding them, limits the ability of someone to recognize faults within their own view (Ranalli, 2023). This feature of echo chambers ultimately "promotes epistemic deprivation and inhibits epistemic agency" (Ranalli, 2023, p. 38). In other words, the echo chambers tend to limit both the understanding of the group as well as their own personal agency in that understanding. The lack of diversity will prevent alternative perspectives and opinions from being voiced or heard. The contagious aspect of neighborhoods will spread these close-minded attitudes and increase overall ignorance towards issues such as affordable housing, despite their benefits.

GOVERNMENT REVITALIZATION INITIATIVES

Government revitalization initiatives are programs that have the goal of assisting communities or neighborhoods in bouncing back socially and economically.

Often, these initiatives aim to improve affordable housing options, develop better education opportunities, enhance public safety, and create sustainable commercial growth (Pendall & Hendey, 2016). The assistance can come in numerous forms, such as historic preservation, capital access programs, or community development block grants. Careful planning and execution are essential towards a successful government revitalization initiative (Pendall & Hendey, 2016). Unfortunately, this careful planning and execution is not always the case and negative outcomes have occurred. Gentrification, discriminatory practices, displacement, and historical patterns have all transpired as a result of ineffective government revitalization initiatives (Mehdipanah et al., 2018).



Living Waters

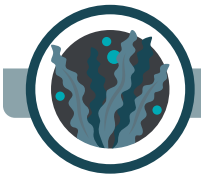
"The government issues revitalization initiatives, giving grants to those who renovate historical and dilapidated homes."

There are frequent accounts of government revitalization initiatives that have been considered successful. Some programs are on a small-scale, neighborhood level. Others are community wide, with large-scale ramifications. Florida was hit by two major hurricanes in 2024, Helene and Milton. One specific program created by the state of Florida is called the Rebuild Florida Housing Repair and Replacement Program (HRRP). Their goal is to repair, rebuild, or replace homes after natural disasters. Funding is granted by the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity, and the program is designed to give back to low-income families (Rebuild, n.d.). Priority is granted first to those with children, seniors, or those living with disabilities. Another additional benefit of this program is its aid in alleviating unemployment, simultaneously helping the economy. The HRRP creates jobs by employing contractors, construction workers, and other opportunities. By improving existing housing options, the quality of life for local residents is enhanced.

Disasters are not the only way that government revitalization programs can improve one's home situation. A program known as the Section 504 Home Repair program is available in Florida for homeowners designated as extremely low income and who are 62 years or older (US Department of Agriculture, 2023). For North Port St. Joe residents, that is less than $20,000 for a four-person household (Florida Housing Finance Corporation, n.d.). The program was created to repair or modernize homes that contain health and safety hazards. Renovations of these dilapidated homes are costly, and individuals living in those homes do not possess the financial resources to improve their living situation. Programs such as the Section 504 Home Repair program provide the resources to aid those who need the assistance most.

Other government revitalization programs are focused on rewarding individuals who wish to clean up contaminated brownfield areas. Florida passed the Voluntary Cleanup Tax Credit (VCTC), with the goal of encouraging public or private groups to restore run-down sites. The Florida state government allocates $10 million annually for the Department of Environmental Protection which can be awarded to people and groups that work to help clean contaminated sites (Florida Department of Environmental Protection, 2023). By revitalizing these locations, the government is investing into the local community's

economy and future growth potential. Not all government programs are economically based, some are created to appease the culture of the local community. A sign of a quality government is that they listen to the needs of their local community members.

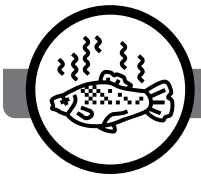


Murky Waters

"The government uses power of eminent domain to buy individuals out of their foreclosed or defaulted property, but such a buyout may cause mass displacement and possibly lead to gentrification."

Although the initial intention of government revitalization initiatives are hoping for a positive outcome, as these initiatives sometimes do not result as planned. One of the more complex and controversial programs, which does not require unanimous agreement, is eminent domain. This is a government power that allows the government to purchase private property for public use (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2024). Often these purchases result from buying out foreclosed or defaulted properties. This purchase can have some positive outcomes as a result, including infrastructure development, revitalization of local industries, and decreased unemployment. New housing options can also become available along with repaired roads.

Despite positive intentions, governments have used eminent domain in ways that produce multiple negative outcomes. Sometimes there are equity issues at play which the government can take advantage of. Residents in low-income neighborhoods may not know all of their legal rights and may accept an offer for their land significantly under the market price (Wain, 2024). This unfair compensation does not reflect the property's true value. When individuals have their property bought out, they are forced to relocate out of their neighborhood (Wain, 2024). Construction of new developments can override the cultural and social ties that the community once possessed. With the influx of new residents, current residents may become priced out of their neighborhood. The former inhabitants are displaced in a process known as gentrification.



Cesspool

"Taxes not paid and properties condemned and a loss of property due to non-cleared titles leading to blight, further economic downturn, and a further loss of community vitality."

In this scenario, the government revitalization initiatives are not successful, or the location is already deteriorating beyond repair, something known as blight. Blight is where there are multiple vacant, abandoned, or poorly maintained properties (Carpenter, 2015). The infrastructure is not attractive to richer residents and the overall area suffers socioeconomically. The poor conditions, declining housing market, and people's inability to afford their housing are all causes for the economic downturn within a community. One vacant property soon becomes two, then three, until the entire area is designated a brownfield. The current state of NPSJ is classified as blight, with government revitalization programs and initiatives unable to restore the former prosperity of the region (Johnson et al., 2024).

CRIME IN NEIGHBORHOODS

In many places around the world there is an area that people will try to avoid. These areas are referred to by many names (slums, projects, ghettos), but a common denominator of these places is that they are said to be “sketchy”, “unsafe”, or even “dirty”. This stigma plagues many communities worldwide and it only perpetuates the conditions in these communities even further. When a community develops a reputation, it can be difficult to shake the allegations. These allegations often stem from prejudice or racism. The reputation then begins to manifest the very problems that are being warned against, an increase in crime, poverty, or garbage. Many of these negative factors can be directly linked to the stigmas set against the community. Surely, it is no surprise that not many are willing to develop in areas with such negative descriptions. What follows is a lack of opportunity and resources in these communities. This scenario is a possible culprit for the troubles of NPSJ, as racism has been a major factor in the community in recent times. Crime trends can develop and continue to impact communities now and into the future.



Living Waters

“Low crime rate could help increase integration of neighborhoods by slowly decreasing the stigma associated with living on “the other side of the tracks.” if higher income individuals moving into NPSJ are respectful and honoring of the community’s history.”

In an article written by Sarah Story, titled The Power of Labeling, she details the effects that stigmas can have on a neighborhood. Sarah, who grew up in the “white burbs” of Philly, now resides in North Charlotte, an area of historically black communities where she works to push back against the stigmas built against these communities. In her article Sarah describes North Charlotte, “It’s an area with rich history, with neighbors and community leaders who are a lot of things…smart, strong, proud, resilient, mentors…” (Story, 2017, para. 13). These traits exist in many black communities, and it is testimonials such as Sarah’s that help to challenge the notion of a neighborhood being ‘sketchy’.

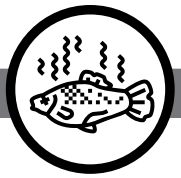


Murky Waters

“Low crime rate could influence an increase in the integration of city neighborhoods and could bolster the local economy, in turn increasing business trade in NPSJ. However, some current residents could be priced out of their homes, becoming displaced due to gentrification of their community as a result of an improved local economy.”

Crime can become so integrated into a community that it can appear to be the defining factor of that community. Not the sandy beaches, amazing art, and breathtaking architecture, but crime-ridden streets. There is no

guarantee that the crime rate in NPSJ will decrease in the coming years. Yet, under this scenario, PSJ would be able to overcome this stigma. There is a significant research body supporting the idea that lowering crime rates can create economic booms for communities. The findings of an article from the Journal of Urban Economics suggest that rising crime rates are an important factor in driving private investment decisions (Lacoe et al., 2018). NPSJ reducing its crime rates in this scenario could make the area more attractive to economic investment. Should this be the case, NPSJ's economy would be likely to see an economic boom. However, this scenario also comes with some challenges. In making the area more attractive to more businesses and higher-income individuals, there is the potential for current, lower-income residents to be priced out. This is a major concern among some researchers whose findings suggest that reduced crime rates in city centers may encourage more rapid gentrification (Ellen et al., 2019). Within this overall scenario of revitalization, the level of gentrification would be relatively limited. Some residents may be priced-out, but the overall community would remain. For this scenario, PSJ would have to balance policies aimed at reducing crime and inviting economic growth in NPSJ while trying to minimize the rate of gentrification.



Cesspool

"Low crime rate brings influx of higher income individuals from outside the community. Resulting in displacement and gentrification of long-term Black residents and thus a disintegration of the primarily Black neighborhood."

Worse than no change, is too much change, too fast. The citizens of NSPJ can no doubt benefit from decreasing crime rates, but there lurks an even greater threat in the form of gentrification. As discussed in the Murky Waters Scenario, there is a growing body of evidence that suggests lower crime rates may invite gentrification (Ellen et al., 2019). However, unlike that previous scenario, the rate of gentrification is much higher in this scenario. The rapid decrease in crime would encourage a rapid migration of higher-income people without the time for the populations to adequately integrate together. This concern is not unusual, with some authors finding almost this exact trend in their research. Falling crime rates encouraged higher-income individuals to move to the region and, in doing so, displaced and price-out predominantly low-income and black households (O'Sullivan, 2005). By displacing such a significant portion of the population, there is the potential for the entire neighborhood and its identity to be lost. If the citizens of NPSJ are pushed out of their community, then the Cesspool scenario has been realized. The stories, history, and struggles that the community has faced will surely go with them.

SIDEWALKS, LIGHTING, AND SPEED LIMITS

It is impossible to separate a neighborhood and its built environment from the presence and maintenance of local sidewalks, lighting, and speed. These three elements are key factors in ensuring the safety and well-being of a community. By considering potential shifts in these factors and their outcomes, the future of Port St. Joe can shift from a Living Waters Scenario to a Cesspool scenario. Throughout these scenarios, residents will express several important concerns about how their community will grapple with these factors in the future. Broadly, these scenarios discuss the maintenance and distribution of sidewalks and lighting as well as the enforcement of speed limits on local roads. The different scenarios below explore these shifts in more detail and demonstrate how Port St. Joe's future might shift as a result of these variables.



Living Waters

"Improved sidewalks, lighting, and also legally enforcing speed limits (on Avenue A which is a divert road for Highway 71) could lead to a higher quality of life by increasing access to necessities for residents in addition to providing a sense of security when walking through the town. Thus, improving quality of life through increased access and pedestrian/cyclist safety on roadways."

When improvements are made to the restoration of the sidewalks and pedestrian lighting there will likely be an increase in citizens walking or biking. This improved accessibility in this scenario would breathe life to North Port St. Joe during both the day and the night. The citizens will feel more secure knowing they can safely walk outside without being struck by a vehicle and residents will be able to clearly see where they are going. With speed limits being enforced, there will be more police officers patrolling the area. With more police officers patrolling the area, police could respond to accidents faster. According to the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), long-term and sustained enforcement is necessary to move driver behavior toward following the speed limit (FHWA, 2024). That long-term enforcement requires both constant management and adequate reasons to keep up maintenance. Well-maintained pedestrian walkways allow for more social citizens who are able to know their neighbors better. "Sidewalks are active sites of socialization and allowing for open interactions and accidental encounters; they also serve as conduits to easily connect people to their communities as well as create spaces of contention and conflict" (Abrams, 2021, para. 1). There are many ways to be sociable, being out and active in the community is just one of them, but sidewalks are crucial to that process. This scenario also sees some improvement to resident safety from the enforcement of speed limits. Research has consistently shown that the introduction and enforcement of 30 km/h speed limits has both health and environmental benefits, including reduced fatalities and increased use of alternative transportation methods (Yannis & Michelaraki, 2025).

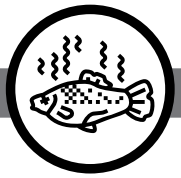


Murky Waters

"Speed limits are enforced but no maintenance or improvement for sidewalks leads to increased health risks for residents and lack of access to necessary resources such as medicine, groceries, and general health services."

Consistent upkeep of sidewalks can improve safety for pedestrians. The Federal Department of Transportation says that roadways with sidewalks and pedestrian crossings are less likely to have accidents than roadways without sidewalks (NHTSA, 2024). However, this scenario has no such upkeep. Instead, the roadways with poorly maintained sidewalks will discourage pedestrians, which dwindles the need for maintaining the sidewalks. Most sidewalks are public property which means that they are owned and maintained by either municipal entities or the state (Morgan Law Group, 2024). Since most sidewalks in North Port St. Joe are public property, the city has a

responsibility to take care of the sidewalks rather than the owner of the house in front of a sidewalk. With the loss of properly maintained sidewalks and other street infrastructure, goes the ability of community residents to pursue their daily needs that will support the economic growth of the city. Despite these harms, the city does see some improvement from the enforcement of speed limits. As described above, slow speed limits can have numerous health and environmental benefits (Yannis & Michelaraki, 2025). These benefits would also exist for this scenario but would likely be hampered by the lack of sidewalk and lighting improvements.



Cesspool

"No improvement in sidewalks and no speed limit enforced. Quality of life continues to diminish."

With the sidewalks in disrepair, there will be less activity in the northern part of Port St. Joe. Accessible walkways can lead to livelier communities, more open businesses, and a rapidly developing community (Abrams, 2021). When the sidewalks are maintained, it brings pedestrians in, allowing businesses to thrive. Streetscape enhancements can also add value to an area, bringing in higher rents and attracting new businesses (Quednau, 2018). There is also strong evidence supporting the idea that improvements in pedestrian and cycling infrastructure raise private property values, with some reports estimating an increase of $500 to $3,000 in property values associated with improved walkability (Quednau, 2018). Sidewalks also mediate the risk of pedestrian crashes, which increases the safety of the community and decreases the risks associated with accidents (Abou et al., 2022; Department of Transportation and Federal Highway Administration, 2024). The City of Port St. Joe Competitive Florida Asset Mapping Report (2014) describes several cracks or uneven joints present in the sidewalks in North Post St. Joe. The report further describes that such cracks and joints are hazardous to pedestrians and cause the area to be unsafe for pedestrians to walk. This is especially a cause of concern for handicapped citizens, as it hinders their ability to navigate around the city to see the sights and limits their daily exercise. The history behind Port St. Joe has the potential to brings in tourism, which brings in a large economic boost to the city, which may provide funding for sidewalk repairs. Alternatively, this tourism industry may be hindered by the lack of sidewalk improvements. Additionally, the many health and environmental benefits associated with enforced and slow speed limits would not be present in this scenario. Properly enforced speed limits are crucial for improving the quality of life of Port St. Joe residents, and the lack of enforcement in this scenario would greatly diminish that quality of life.

PUBLIC FUNDING

All city projects require city funding. This is especially the case for the neighborhood and built environments since they tend to be owned by the city. However, public funding goes beyond the simple construction and maintenance of city infrastructure. Proper use of public funding has the ability to greatly improve a communities quality of life, but the opposite is also true. Without proper use of public funding, community well-being may suffer. Throughout these scenarios, residents discuss the various ways public funding could influence the future of Port St. Joe with key concerns regarding the input of community voices.



Living Waters

"Justified appropriation of public funding is delegated to programs which community members have been vocal about their desire for. Leading to an increase in the quality of life and access to resources."

From the Health (In)Equity Assessment of PSJ came the conclusion that a comprehensive approach to addressing health equity, that is one which acknowledges the interconnected social determinants of health, requires equitable funding of healthcare access, transportation improvements, and other city programs. In order to ensure that the funding is equitable, a large portion it should be from public, rather than private, sources. The use of public funds is important for the growth and sustainability of a community. When these funds are used properly, it can improve the equity and inclusion of a community, the local economy, access to resources of community members, social cohesion, and the overall connectedness of the city. "Public spending to a large extent is responsible for equitable development in different areas under common governance" (Gupta, 2015, p. 473). With the use of adequate public funding for programs on issues or concerns voiced from the community members, the city of PSJ can begin to rebuild both trust and hope within the community. As stated by Kavanagh et al. (2022), a key variable in influencing community trust is in the ways community resource allocation is designed and implemented. They go on to state that the city and community should be constantly aware of the ways the funding is implemented, taking care to ensure its allocations are both efficient and effective. Kavanagh et al. concludes by noting that the use of public funding should not only aim to achieve program specifications but should also be used foster a network between its staff and local residents in a way that allows communities to continue to thrive in a more autonomous way and encourages their participation in future zoning and planning (2022). By involving the community, public funding would be put toward programs that represent community goals and which would lead to increases in the quality of life of residents.

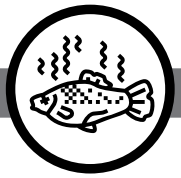


Murky Waters

"Public Funding is hoarded by local government sitting on their hands rather than working to distribute funding appropriately by listening to community members input."

With support from the local government and increasing community participation and input for future planning, community members would feel empowered. They would believe that their opinion matters and could influence public funding goals. Citizen participation would also help city planners and the local government to learn more about what concerns their citizens have. When the community does not feel empowered and their concerns are ignored, funding goals may not be consistent and long term. One source noted the effects this inconsistency has on the community sector, noting that the constant threat funding loss for programs was akin to bullying (Kavanagh et al., 2022). If the local government is not effectively utilizing its public funds and/or not taking initiative, then the quality of life could continue to degrade in NPSJ. A study conducted by Gupta, (2015,

p. 473) on regional disparities concluded that “Inclusive and equitable development is necessary in today’s society as persistence of regional disparities may create social discontentment”. Every community is affected by different regional disparities and listening to community member is crucial to recognizing and understanding these disparities. In this scenario, by not listening to the residents of NPSJ, the government could continue to inequitably neglect the most critical issues to the community causing discontentment among residents and lowering their overall quality of life.



Cesspool

> “Public funds are misused by local governments and benefits outside industry/entities who displace locals/local businesses.”

Within this scenario, public funds are not used to better the community and are instead provided to outsiders who ultimately use the funds to displace locals, further contributing to the ongoing gentrification of the community. As stated above, cooperating with locals is crucial in identifying fundings goals that benefit the community. By ignoring local voices, many issues may be unaddressed and allowed to fester which would worsen the quality of life for residents. Concerns about the use of funding in ways that might undermine the community have often been cited as key concerns from residents (Kavanagh et al., 2022). This outcome is very common for communities with sports venues. Communities often heavily subsidize the construction of stadiums and arenas, with the hopes of seeing economic returns. Despite this, research has continuously concluded that there is little if any economic benefit, without the considering the broad subsidies, for the community where such facilities are constructed (Bradbury et al., 2023). These large construction projects also have the potential to displace many residents and businesses (Bradbury et al., 2023). With public funds being misused for purposes outside of what NPSJ needs, the community could continue to suffer the consequences of disinvestment.

WATER SUPPLY

The Health (In)Equity Assessment (HEA) for Port St. Joe documents many residents experiences with the poor and dangerous quality of their public water supply, as well as suspected contamination of the groundwater supply from the operation of the paper mill in the past (Johnson et al., 2024). Safe drinking water is a necessity for a community and its health equity. This section will highlight this need and, through the work of Bond (2021), describe the ways contamination can symbolize persistent inequality. As discussed in the Health (In) Equity Assessment (Johnson et al., 2024), the neighborhood of Millview, which was built right across from the papermill that previously operated and housed many of the workers, now acts as housing to community members of NPSJ. However, these community members’ health is at risk as this housing sits in a place where industrial waste was dumped nearby. This action proved to be a direct source of groundwater and soil contamination for the residents water supply (Johnson et al., 2024). Contaminants in drinking water can pose various dangerous health risks to individuals and should be taken seriously when considering PSJ’s future.



Living Waters

"Water supply system is fixed without an inordinate rise in water bills."

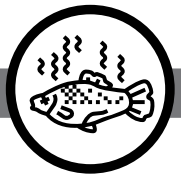
So many iterations of contamination remain painfully located in the political present. In the United States, this includes industries such as waste sites, paper mills, and petrochemical facilities in communities of color (Bond, 2021). It is a basic necessity to have access to safe drinking water. Clean and safe water is a basic human right to all people, regardless of nationality, religion, color, or wealth. A study by Fu et al. (2020), using the US EPA's Safe Water Drinking Act as a standard for safe drinking water, assessed multiple public water systems (PWSs) and found that municipal-level heterogeneities explain a substantial amount of variation and violation among PWSs. This suggests water supply quality depends crucially on location-specific regulations and local economic conditions. Under this scenario, the water in NPSJ would be assessed and any and all contaminants would be addressed – possibly with the support of non-municipal funding in order not to add stress to the community through increases in the water bill. The parties responsible for the contamination under such a scenario would also be held accountable for their actions.



Murky Waters

"Water supply cleanup reveals more issues with groundwater contamination. Cleanup could lead to increased water bills."

"Although the United States has among the safest drinking water supplies in the world, harmful contaminants that are detrimental to public health may still be found in public water supplies, as most recently demonstrated by the Flint water crisis" (McDonald, 2019, p. 1401). Several studies researching injustice have found that minority populations are more affected by drinking water violations than are other populations (McDonald, 2019). Due to water remediation being extremely expensive, sometimes the company responsible cannot afford to pay for all the cost. Other circumstances show difficulty in determining who is responsible for the cost. In such cases, expenses may fall to the consumer in the form of increased water bills or they may fall to the community in the form of public funding. This outcome is not uncommon and could very well be the case for residents of NPSJ under a murky water's scenario.



Cesspool

"Residents leave the community as a result of their health impacts from a poor water supply. Those who stay develop health issues. Difficulty bringing new residents to town due to water quality issues. Town faces further blight, and the economy suffers without a workforce."

Scholars addressing environmental racism are exploring how the pathways and accumulation of toxins intersect with historical inequalities and how this intersection can reinforce lasting differences related to race, class, and citizenship in significant ways (Bond, 2021). In the case where the water quality of NPSJ is not resolved, residents who decide to stay could continue to face degradation in their health and a continued diminishing of their quality of life Unfortunately, the adults who make the choice for their families to remain in NPSJ are not the only ones living with these consequences. Studies have shown that children are even more sensitive to contaminants and are therefore facing higher health threats due to drinking water contaminants (Li & Wu, 2019). Additionally, with the loss of residents and difficulty bringing new residents to the town, the city of PSJ could see an economic downturn due to a loss of taxpayers, workers, and privately owned businesses.

COMMUNITY GARDENING

Due to economic inequities, North Port St. Joe (NPSJ) has less access to healthy food options compared to the rest of Port St. Joe (PSJ). Contaminated land from the abandoned paper mill, coupled with a lack of financial support, has hindered implementation of community gardens. A Respondent to the Health (In)Equity Assessment (HEA) complained the NPSJ community had been trying to create a community garden for five years but were impeded by numerous compounding factors (Johnson et al., 2024). In 2018, the Port St. Joe Garden Club and community leaders, such as City Commissioner Eric Langston, organized a community garden on the site of a former failed garden (Maddox, 2022). As noted by the Respondent, momentum for the garden was stalled by impacts of Michael and COVID. The ground broke on the project in March of 2022, with plans for raised beds for fruit and vegetables and plots for citrus and corn (Johnson et al., 2024). More recent activities have included the addition of an herb garden, trellises, and new beds. Plans for the Fall 2024 garden involved soil enrichment and additional raised beds and trellises (Gulf Community Gardens, 2024).



Living Waters

"External community voices and internal voices of new employees at the St. Joe Company propel the Company to give out more land to the community, enabling the expansion of the community garden. Community gardens also receive more financial support from others. A Farmacy also returns to the community (i.e. a fresh fruit and vegetables store)".

The benefits of community gardens include more than just produce. These projects connect neighbors, offering a sense of place and belonging. Cooperation among residents facilitates knowledge sharing, access to information, and strengthened community pride (Food Well Alliance, 2024). Financial support for a garden could come from city, county, or state grants. Funding could also come from non-profitt organizations that provide guidance and grants to secure land, tools, seed, and other necessary materials, as well as educational resources for both community gardens and personal home plots. Food Pharmacies, or Farmacies, provide access to nutritious food in an effort to prevent or manage health conditions such as obesity, diabetes, and hypertension. A Farmacy may be focused on supporting a specific demographic such as seniors, those with specific medical conditions, or low-income families (Nutrition and Aging Resource Center, 2024). Several such organizations exist in Florida including Tampa Well Food Pharmacy (2024), Feeding Tampa Bay (2024), and the Urban Health Alliance of UF Health in Jacksonville (2024).

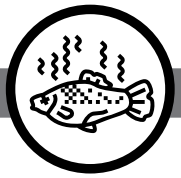


Murky Waters

"More residents become involved with the community garden. However, the community garden may not be able to become self-sufficient from a lack of funding which will minimize the ability to increase garden acreage. Residents will attempt backyard gardening as a support to small community garden acreage. However, soil from backyard gardens is still contaminated and residents may be unaware. Over time, residents consuming the food they grow will develop adverse health effects resulting from eating contaminated food."

Even a successful community garden can fail to meet the needs of its people. Interest in the garden can outgrow its yield. Without proper funding for expansion, community members may seek out other alternatives. Some people are returning to home gardens in an effort to access healthy, affordable produce. A lack of historical knowledge about the property can turn deadly as soil contaminants such as lead, arsenic, and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons may exist from previous land use (U.S. EPA, 2011). Exposure pathways for these contaminants include accidental ingestion, inhalation, or even skin contact. It may take some time before the effects of contaminated soil are noticed and even longer to realize the connection between illness

and source. Trading of backyard garden produce may spread ingestion of contaminated food outside of the primary property owner (U.S. EPA, 2011). Combined with the already present soil and groundwater contamination in parts of PSJ, residents may be putting their health at increased risk from the construction of a home garden.



Cesspool

"Community Garden becomes abandoned due to a lack of financial and volunteer support, increasing the cost of fruits and vegetables for residents, and worsening the current food desert; which will be exacerbated by the closure of the fresh fruit and vegetables stores - the Farmacy."

This scenario sees an abandonment of local community gardens. Many disadvantaged neighborhoods benefit from community gardens by increasing access and reducing costs of fresh produce. The 1996 World Food Summit defined Food Security as, "...when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy lifestyle" (World Bank, 2023, para. 1). This definition means foods must be physically available, financially accessible, and properly utilized i.e., prepared, consumed, and biologically processed (World Bank, 2023). Communities suffering from economic hardship lack the financial resources to independently secure and maintain community gardens. Compounded by a lack of knowledge of financial assistance opportunities and agriculture training, these gardens may fail, exacerbating an already fragile food system.

HOMEOWNERSHIP EDUCATION

Health disparities in housing are a significant issue of concern to PSJ residents. These disparities can be driven by a number of factors including housing affordability, housing quality, residential stability, and neighborhood opportunities (Swope & Hernández, 2019). According to one study, half of African American households in the United States are rent-burdened, meaning they spend more than 30% of their income on housing (Swope & Hernández, 2019). A lack of access to affordable housing is linked to hypertension and mental health issues. Additionally, rent-burdened households are more likely to reside in lower-quality housing. This difference in housing quality is associated with severe health impacts which include structural defects such as exposure to outdated materials (lead paint, asbestos, etc.) and increased pathways to pollutants, mold, and pests through poor barriers to the outside environment. Even after adjusting for income, African American households are more likely than White households to live in older, depreciating areas (Van Zandt, 2010). The feedback loop of affordability and housing quality perpetuates a situation that additionally burdens finances due to increased costs of repairs and energy bills and less money for healthcare.

The Health (In)Equity Assessment (HEA) analyzed the connections between homeownership and health equity. For the purposes of the HEA, affordability and housing quality were selected to evaluate social determinants of health (Johnson et al., 2024). The HEA obtained demographic, economic, and population data from the U.S. Census Bureau. The neighborhood of North Port St. Joe (NPSJ) is within Census Tract 9602 Block Group 3. Census Tract 9603.02 Block Groups 1 and 2 were selected to

cover the downtown and southern portion of the rest of Port St. Joe (PSJ). The study found that 28% of the occupied housing units within NPSJ were constructed between 1980-1999, 7.4% more than that of the rest of PSJ. Census data also revealed that there were no African American homeowners in Tract 9603.02 (PSJ) suggesting segregation by race. The HEA also reviewed data from the 2023 Home Mortgage Disclosure Act and found that African Americans are more likely to be denied housing loans. Some of these disparities are also driven by a lack of homeownership education. Proper homeownership education is crucial in addressing some of the housing and health inequalities in PSJ.



Living Waters

"Increase in homeownership as a result of empowerment of community on home ownership, title/taxes and how to acquire housing financing."

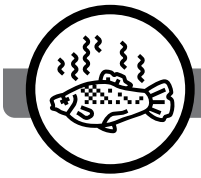
Low-income, minority, first-time home buyers in Chattanooga, Milwaukee, New Orleans, Richmond, Sacramento, Salisbury, and Santa Fe participated in a homeownership education program through NeighborWorksAmerica's Homeownership Pilot Program. The program provided education and counseling to help participants understand budgeting, credit, mortgage lending, neighborhood selection, and fair housing laws. Those who completed the program and had qualifying income and credit were offered financial assistance for home purchase. The Pilot Program provided training to over 86 thousand participants and provided grant funding to 17, 367 qualified participants (Van Zandt, 2010). A program similar to this one could move PSJ toward a Living Waters Scenario.



Murky Waters

"Increase in home ownership education and access increases development and property values, attracting new residents. However, this increase could lead to gentrification."

Homeownership education and financial assistance can increase ownership by African Americans. Improvements in the built environment in NPSJ can increase development and property values. The HEA found that over 85% of housing units were owned by White residents compared to 10% by African Americans (Johnson et al., 2024). Should the built environment of NPSJ improve with an attendant increase in homeownership for black residents, the current 8.5:1 White to Black homeownership ratio could attract additional White residents due to the relatively newer and/or cheaper infrastructure. Current African American residents of NPSJ who are unable to financially keep up with this trend that the influx of new wealthier residents might bring, could be displaced in a process known as gentrification. This socioeconomic phenomenon occurs when a historically disenfranchised neighborhood undergoes a change in race demographics due to an influx of more affluent residents (Urban Displacement Project, 2024).



Cesspool

"Decreased education and motivation for home ownership leads to younger people exiting the community. This exodus could lead to a further loss of a sense of community."

The Pew Research Center found that economic issues such as homelessness, poverty, and taxes, are the most important issues among 18- to 29-year-old African Americans (Cox & Tamir, 2022). As noted previously, African Americans feel a strong connection to their community (Van Zandt, 2010) but this is variable among age demographics with young people placing less significance on their community attachment. Between 59-63% of African Americans over 50 say that the location where they live is extremely or very important to their personal identity compared to only 39% of those aged 18-29 (Cox & Tamir, 2022) who may leave their communities in search of better economic opportunities. This difference in community identity coupled with a surge in mortgage rates and low income leads young people to believe they cannot afford to be homeowners. Without homeownership education, young African Americans might seek out more affordable cities with better economic opportunities leading to an exodus of young people from NPSJ. This change in resident demographic will also impact future population replacement.

CONCLUSION

Neighborhoods and their surrounding environments are essential and a part of everyday life. Effective urban planning, that moves the city toward a Living Waters Scenario, requires collaboration between residents, local businesses, government agencies, and community organizers to improve their neighborhoods and surrounding built environment. Identifying potential problems and allocating resources towards sustainable solutions is integral to this process. By outlining their scenarios, residents have also outlined the many concerns they have for their city's future. In order to reach their preferred future, residents and stakeholders should use these scenarios and the accompanying research as both a guideline and support for achieving their goals. Regardless of which scenario they choose to pursue or prevent, it is crucial that the process involves the collaboration of both residents and stakeholder.

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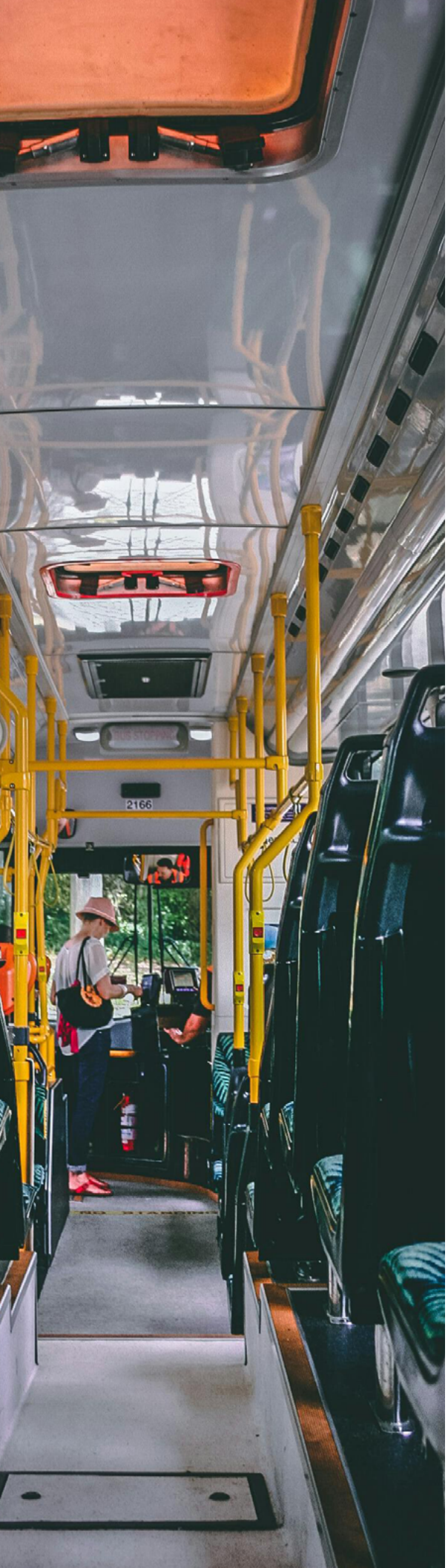
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CHAPTER FOUR:

Transportation

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INTRODUCTION

This chapter of the report details the scenarios for the future of transportation in Port St. Joe and some of the linkages between the future envisioned for Port St. Joe and similar real-world scenarios. The citizens of Port St. Joe had five topics relating to transportation that they considered in their scenarios. The first topic the residents considered was how the state of the transport system could shift in the future. This included concerns about the city meeting many of the broad needs of its residents. The second topic envisioned how the availability and affordability of public transport might be affected in the future. The third topic pictured the ways Port St. Joe's transportation might develop from a more environmentally conscious perspective, like incentivizing a move to greener vehicles. The fourth topic described how the busing for students could change in the future, with concerns about a shortage of bus drivers. The final topic depicted outcomes based on how or for who a regional airport is constructed in Port St. Joe. Each of these topics addressed very different parts of transportation in Port St. Joe, representing a variety of concerns from residents about transportation. The inclusion of the specific actions that lead to each scenario provides the foundations for a roadmap on reaching each scenario described by the residents.

STATE OF TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM

Transportation in Port St Joe has become a central issue, especially maintaining and improving the infrastructure as a whole to boost the local economy and quality of life. The transportation infrastructure improvements would not only help daily commuters and businesses but also play a critical role in mitigating the effects of hurricanes or other disasters. This section will highlight Port St Joe's transportation issues, from rising fuel costs and a shortage in labor, to improper infrastructure and lack of citizen involvement, as well as the future envisioned for Port St. Joe's transportation system.



Living Waters

"Involvement of the city improves transportation to meet the needs of the city - connected to the amplification of citizen voices, the economic activities and Hurricane Emergency and Traffic Management plans like rerouting of vehicular traffic."

In this "living waters" scenario Port St Joe has a key focus set on upgrading its transportation system to meet the needs of its citizens. Being a small city, the community would consider larger road networks and improved infrastructure to help both the locals and tourists. The transportation improvements would focus on the actual need of the people and would help positively impact the local economy by creating jobs and attracting business. Because Port St. Joe is also in a hurricane prone region, under this scenario the city would also have a strong emergency management plan to ensure safe evacuations and to protect its citizens if a disaster occurred. Corpus Christi, Texas is a hurricane prone city with a strong emergency traffic management plan, including designated maps to ensure smooth evacuations during disasters. These measures integrate local input and focus on infrastructure improvements to meet community needs, all while enhancing economic activities and safety (City of Corpus Christi, 2024).

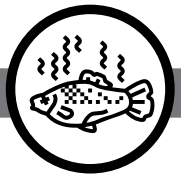


Murky Waters

"Transportation is vulnerable due to rising fuel costs and inadequate (number of) personnel. This stalls any possible attempts to improve transportation such as a public shuttle service or changes to infrastructure."

In this "murky waters" scenario, Port St Joe faces rising fuel costs which increase public and private transport expenses. These financial strains make it hard for the city to allocate more funding toward transportation projects, like expanding shuttle services. The city also has difficulty with labor shortages, making efforts to maintain services already available even more difficult. Without enough workers to manage and keep the transport system running, the city is further limited on its ability to expand or improve services. This limitation can be seen through the case of the St Louis Metro, where a lack of personnel forced the city to suspend six Metrobus routes and reduce

the Metro's route frequency. The Metro also offered Lyft rides to those affected by cancelled trips, taking funding that could have instead been used towards raising the wage of drivers and filling out the gaps in Metro drivers (Hemphill, 2024).



Cesspool

"Transportation system may get worse, and people may not even patronize. The Gulf Transportation system ceases to exist."

A "cesspool" scenario shows the consequences of an underfunded transportation system. If fewer and fewer citizens rely on public transport due to these concerns, they will swap over to their private vehicles or other means of transportation, placing more stress on the city's finances to sustain an unprofitable public transportation system. Cities in Gulf County, FL (in which Port St. Joe is located) are currently without a public transport system (Johnson et al., 2024). Unreliable means of transportation can lead to loss of access to jobs, education, and services needed for health. It can also be correlated with isolation, causing mental conditions such as depression (Syed & Sharp, 2013).

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

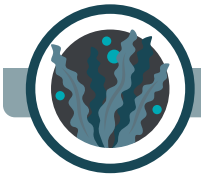
The United States is a country inextricably linked to cars, evident by the widespread presence of interstates, parking lots, and gas stations. However, many Americans *do not* have cars and must rely on public transportation for their daily needs. According to the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), approximately 8% of the U.S. population is transit dependent; in other words, "28 million people rely on buses, trains, ferries, and streetcars to get where they need to go" because they have no other option (FTA, 2022, para. 12). Port St. Joe is reflective of the U.S. in this way. While many PSJ residents own cars, many do not; those who do not own cars must find other ways to conduct their daily travel. This is where public transportation becomes important for PSJ.



Living Waters

"An affordable and accessible public shuttle service that makes rounds/loops around and through PSJ to improve upon the Gulf Transportation system which is only for health-related appointments. Broaden it to address transportation needs. Example: resident desire to be able to get to Panama City (beyond just monthly service for senior citizens) - would help determine demand."

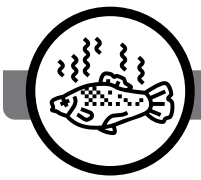
In this "living waters" scenario, there is a great public shuttle service that is affordable and accessible to residents. Community shuttle services, being "flexible, customized, emerging transportation means, have the potential to improve the last leg connectivity of the transportation system and fill the gap of sparse public transport services" (Zhao et al., 2022, p. 2). The shuttle makes trips around and through PSJ, which is an improvement from the Gulf Transportation system which is solely for health-related appointments. Residents can use this service for purposes beyond their most basic necessities. Once the need of the community is determined, the service can expand accordingly to satisfy the residents (i.e. transport to Panama City beyond just monthly service for senior citizens).



Murky Waters

"Increased quote for Gulf County Transportation, will depend on taxes and number of residents, because currently, due to scheduling issues, people have to wake up early to be picked up and also have to wait long hours to be picked up."

In this "murky waters" scenario, the only public transportation system remains the Gulf County Transportation. An increased quote for the system will be influenced by taxes and the number of residents. The system is not strong because, with scheduling issues, people are required to wake up early to be picked up. Moreover, they have to wait long hours to be picked up. The system is not convenient to residents and does not work around their schedules. This inconvenience can make it difficult for people to travel to their second and third shift jobs and night classes. Additionally, the inconvenience "creates a feedback loop for dependent riders that prevents them from maximizing their economic potential, which they could use to purchase a car" (Institute for Child Success, 2019, para. 4). Convenience and cost are critical factors in determining if public transportation will be utilized. If the "barriers to access service are too great at either the trip origin or destination, then it is unlikely to be utilized as a mode of travel. Similarly, if the cost is either too expensive (i.e. cheaper modes exist) or unaffordable then utilization of the service is also unlikely" (Murray et al, 1998, p. 320). It is important to note however that the murky waters scenario still allows residents to get their most basic necessities.



Cesspool

"People are continually forced to depend on friends and family for their daily transportation, even for the most basic necessities."

In this "cesspool" scenario, no strong public transportation system is implemented whatsoever. The residents must indefinitely rely on other people for their daily transportation needs, even for simple necessities (i.e. health needs). A resident without a car that cannot afford taxi services or enlist the help of a friend or family member, is not able to retrieve their basic needs outside their home. The lack of access to public transportation has a disproportionately harmful impact on "those who rely on it, including older adults, individuals with disabilities, and commuters. Among the latter group, women, younger adults, Black workers, and low-income workers are overrepresented to various degrees" (Heaps et al., 2021, p. 1).

ENERGY TRANSITION

In general, energy transitions are shifts from using and providing energy from fossil fuels to alternative sustainable options that emit little to no carbon emissions. Enel Green Power even states that energy transition is the main tool for achieving the goal of neutral carbon emissions by 2050 (Enel Green Power, 2022).



Living Waters

"An energy transition (improved and environmentally friendly energy sources) will result in improved transportation. With such a transition, there will be an E-bike voucher program with ADA accessible bikes for residents to apply for and economic opportunity for a bike shop."

In this living waters scenario, an energy transition is highly considered by the community. This consideration leads to greater alternative fuel usage among vehicles. Florida, generally, has considered energy transition in terms of transportation for years. Between 2011 and 2015, registration for electric vehicles in the state increased by 3,000 automobiles a year. The trend has since increased to 11,000 vehicles a year between 2015 and 2019 (Smith et al., 2020). Since Port St. Joe is a smaller community, residents could potentially participate in this trend by utilizing smaller devices, like bikes and e-scooters, as alternative transportation. This concept is called micromobility and was explored in South Florida. Some surveys concluded that South Florida has the potential for increased micromobility through infrastructure investment, flexible pricing, and integration with existing transportation systems (Frolich et al., 2024). Port St. Joe could reach this point in the future if the environmental benefits of micromobility are introduced through education.

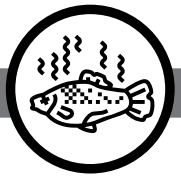


Murky Waters

"Tax incentives to switch to eco-friendly cars and fuels or an increased tax for using fossil fuel but with very little options for public transportation, this may likely burden residents that cannot switch."

In this murky waters scenario, energy transition is only partially encouraged through tax incentives, and non-renewable energy sources are still used daily. Florida is one of the highest consumers of fossil fuels, and much of these fossil fuels are used in the transportation sector. Approximately 489 bbl/day of gasoline and 134,000 bbl/day of gasoline and diesel gas are used by vehicles respectively, while 89,000 bbl/day is used as jet fuel (Porter & Hal Knowles, n.d.). Port Joe could very well still regularly rely upon non-renewable energy sources for transportation for years to come. Since this transition may be funded through taxes on fossil fuels, there could be an increased tax-burden for low-income residents (Le Billion & Kristofferson, 2020). Such residents already have a limited ability to afford a switch toward more energy efficient or green vehicles, and the increased taxes could further prevent their transition away from fossil fuels (Kime et al., 2023). Additionally, the lack of public

transportation in this scenario would push these residents to rely upon their current, non-green vehicles more, which would further increase their emission. This would create a feedback loop of increasing financial burden for low-income residents.



Cesspool

"City does nothing about electric vehicles, energy efficient options, family members continue to have to provide transportation for family/friends."

In this cesspool scenario, any consideration toward an energy transition is ignored by the city, and therefore no alternative fuel choices are promoted in the community. Polluted environments, such as those resulting from an overreliance on cars, could create health risks for residents who transition to alternative forms of transportation, like walking or biking (Johnson et al., 2024). If Port St. Joe were to reach a future where air pollution is high, the ability of residents to consider alternative transport options would be even further limited. For many cities, energy transitions are often ignored by communities. This trend is evidenced by Florida's current and significant reliance on fossil fuels. Fossil fuels generated about 80% of Florida's electricity in the summer of 2024, which also marks the highest fossil fuel usage in the state for a summer period in over three years (Maguire, 2024). A similar trend in Port St. Joe could also lead to an increase in emissions of CO2 and other pollutants into the atmosphere, which would result in hazardous health effects for the citizens.

SCHOOL BUSING

Port St. Joe is a member of the Gulf County School District. The Gulf County School District only has four schools serving a population of roughly 1,900 students, with two of those schools located directly within Port St. Joe (Johnson et al., 2024). Of the 1,928 students enrolled in Gulf County School District in fiscal year 2022-23, 753 students were transported to school by 17 buses in daily circulation (Florida Department of Education, 2024). That represents 39% of the enrolled student population in the county that academic year being transported by bus. Given the large number of students traveling by bus, it is no wonder that school busing represents a crucial aspect of PSJ's transportation system.

Throughout the scenarios developed for school busing, there are two clear concerns among PSJ residents. The first concern is the number of buses and the availability of bus drivers for students. The scenarios specifically distinguish between whether or not there are enough buses to allow different age groups to be bused separately, rather than having different age groups ride together on the same bus. The second concern among the residents is the potential for safety improvements for students while they wait for the bus. The specific safety improvements described in the scenarios would include the addition of more sidewalks and better shading for students as they wait for the bus.



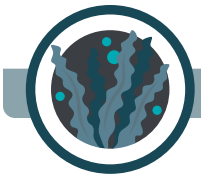
Living Waters

"Enough bus drivers and buses for students of all ages, where busing is separate between age groups so young students aren't on the same bus as older students. Safety for students insured while they wait for the bus (shade coverage and sidewalk)."

Under this living waters scenario, the city takes action to ensure enough bus drivers and buses are available for students in PSJ, allowing age groups to be bused separately. Safety improvements for students are also implemented, expanding and improving the sidewalks as well as the availability of shade for students as they wait for the bus. There have been a variety of attempts to address each of these concerns individually from many counties across the country, though seemingly no county has been able to solve all of these concerns at once. In an effort to tackle the school bus driver shortage, like expressed in the scenario, some districts and researchers have started to implement staggered start times for schools. This implementation reduces the maximum load at any given time on the school bus system (Bertsimas et al., 2019; Solochek, 2021). Other districts have been offering sign-on bonuses, higher starting pay, waived requirements for certification, and/or free or accelerated commercial driver's licenses in an effort to attract new drivers (Cody, 2023; Keithley, 2024; Sieder, 2023a). Such changes have shown some promise and could improve the number of available bus drivers for all age groups. It is important to keep in mind, though, that many of the attempts to solve the bus driver shortages are recent in their implementation and thus have not had a full chance to develop and be studied over time. This means that the actual effectiveness of these programs in future is still uncertain. Another method that could be taken to address the shortage of bus drivers is shown in Tuolumne County, California. In this district, a plan to share buses among its schools has been introduced which would, if the School District implemented in Gulf County along with staggered start times, would create enough flexibility for each age group to be bused separately without overlap, like expressed in the scenario (McCarthy, 2024). This separate busing could alleviate or completely avoid some of the safety concerns expressed about mixed age busing, like bullying or misbehaving. There was one such case in a New Hampshire school district when an altercation occurred between elementary and high school students riding on the bus together (Tranchemontagne, 2018).

Sidewalk expansion and improvements would also be implemented in this scenario, as has been seen in many parts of the country (Santa Maria Times, 2024; Sudhir, 2024; Whelan, 2024). Although many of the projects aim to address pedestrian safety concerns more broadly, these sidewalk improvements would no doubt help students as well. There are also some projects specifically targeting bus stop safety. The Biden-Harris Administration revealed over $30 million dollars in grants for school transportation safety improvements. Some of the safety improvements outlined included expanded sidewalks near schools and bus stops in addition to other pedestrian focused street improvements, all to allow for better student safety (U.S. DOT, 2024). Numerous cities have also implemented new bus stop improvements to increase the available shade for those waiting for the bus (Klepp, 2024; Sanchez, 2024). Phoenix, Arizona has made some headlines for the 613 new and improved bus stops implemented since 2015 as part of a public program titled "Transportation 2050" (Caltabiano, 2024). These bus stops are part of the program's goal "have shade at each of the 4,000 bus stops in the city" (City of Phoenix, 2024). These bus stops are generally for public buses, but their engineering and style could easily be adapted for school bus stops in this scenario. Some districts have implemented shade improvements while considering the future influence of climate change. Santa Barbara's Unified School District implemented a significant number of solar panels at its schools with concerns about both climate and disaster resilience (Smith, 2020). Though

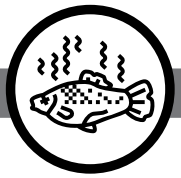
these panels currently only shade school parking lots, this scenario could have the city expand this system for school bus stops in a similar fashion to public transit bus stops. Each of these individual improvements are naturally interconnected and would easily be combined together as part of a wider transportation enhancement project for the PSJ community under this scenario.



Murky Waters

"Increased number of personnel. However, not to the point where they can separate students of all ages because school bus drivers are also community bus drivers."

Under this murky waters scenario, only the concerns about the number of buses and drivers would be addressed. The number of personnel would increase in this scenario but remain at levels insufficient to have different age groups bused separately. To supplement the number of bus drivers, community bus drivers would double as school bus drivers under this scenario. This scenario might be accelerated by the school district attempting to address the bus driver shortage through the provision of commercial driver's licenses in an effort to attract new bus drivers. This would result in a situation similar to that in Georgia, where new school bus drivers often join for the commercial driver's license before leveraging the license for a better position elsewhere (Sieder, 2023b). Some districts have already started to bus mixed-aged groups together to cope with a lack of drivers, similar to the description of this scenario (Hoar, 2016; Tranchemontagne, 2018). Although not an uncommon practice, many parents have still expressed safety concerns, and some incidents have occurred like the New Hampshire one previously described (Tranchemontagne, 2018). On the other hand, using community bus drivers as school bus drivers is not a common practice. This could partially be attributed to the public transit bus driver shortages resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic (Andrade, 2023; Phox, 2024). A more common solution, which is similar in result to the one in the scenario, is having students transported by public transport means other than school buses. If this were the case for this scenario, students might be bused by community drivers or other public transit drivers but not on school buses. The specific alternative mode of transportation varies by county and school district. The Saint Louis Public School District has high school students taking local public buses and trains, while also encouraging as many parents as possible to drive their children to school. The district is also using vans as transport for routes with smaller numbers of students (Barczewski & Coronel, 2024). Other schools have begun using taxi services to transport some students (Hays, 2024; Ordonez, 2024). If PSJ is forced to rely on the alternative transport methods without adequate planning, the schools, like those in New York City, would have lengthy backlogs of reimbursements that the schools would likely struggle to settle (Zimmerman, 2024). Each of these outcomes are similar to the scenario expressed in the sense that they supplement a bus shortage without truly resolving the underlying issue: a lack of sustained school bus driver personnel. Another slightly different outcome for some districts, similar to the scenario described, has been to rely on community volunteers and carpooling to transport students (Broxton, 2024; Thomas, 2024). The superintendents of at least two separate districts have started volunteering as bus drivers and a recent change in Wisconsin law now allows school board members to volunteer as bus drivers as well (Heubeck, 2023; Kaster, 2023; Leone, 2024). Ultimately, many of these outcomes have been only mildly effective and tend to only act as band aid solutions that do not solve the districts' school transportation issues.



Cesspool

"Current situation where bus drivers are declining, and students of all ages are grouped together on school buses continues and only gets worse. School bus transportation system may get worse, because it has reduced this school year (2023/2024) from 4 to 3 buses. No safety improvements for students waiting and riding on the bus in this scenario."

Under this cesspool scenario the current school busing conditions in Port St. Joe would continue to worsen. This would result in continued and worsening bus driver shortages in the district as well as a total lack of safety improvements for students both waiting for and riding the bus. The residents specifically cite the recent change from four to three buses for Port St. Joe this past school year (2023/2024) as a potential catalyst that might accelerate this scenario. Although the residents make no distinction as to whether these three buses are for each school or for the entire city, both scenarios represent a poor outcome for residents. The two schools in Port St. Joe had a combined enrollment of 1,046 students in the 2022-23 school year (National Center for Education Statistics, 2024a, 2024b). Even under a more charitable interpretation of three buses per school and a ridership similar to the rest of the county, Port St. Joe's bus system would still be underserved with an average occupancy of 67.6 students per bus, compared to the county's average of 38.18 students per bus (Florida Department of Education, 2024). A cesspool scenario would be the result of no action in changing the school transportation system from busing multiple age groups of students together. As stated above, bus shortages have led some districts to bus multiple ages together and there are some legitimate concerns about the practice (Hoar, 2016; Tranchemontagne, 2018). Bus shortages in general have led to some students no longer being eligible for busing, sudden cancellations of bus routes, long commute times for students, very early pickup times, and confusion for both parents and students concerning how they should get to school (Blad, 2023; Dindak, 2024; Genovese, 2024; Vargas & Grassi, 2024). The increased commute times are also linked to other negative effects for students like increased stress and fatigue, lack of sleep, a tendency to skip meals, and more limited afterschool time (Johnson et al., 2024). The lack of improvements in this scenario for busing could worsen each of these issues. Many residents in other districts are dealing with such a cesspool scenario. Many parents and districts have also expressed concerns about a lack of sidewalks near their school bus routes, forcing students to cross busy intersections to reach their assigned bus stop (Jaramillo, 2024; Wainwright 2024). These concerns were heightened after a student was hit by a car at a bus stop that lacked any forms of bus stop or pedestrian infrastructure in Lee County School District, Florida (Iraola, 2024). A lack of shade for the bus stops is especially concerning for areas with a warmer climate, like Florida, where heat stress is more likely. Such heat stress is expected to get worse as heat waves become more prolonged and more frequent resulting from a changing climate (US EPA, 2024). There are already many examples of students getting heat stroke from prolonged bus rides without air conditioning (Garland, 2024; Keeya, 2024; Patton, 2016; Root, 2023). In such a cesspool scenario, where no improvements to A/C availability or bus maintenance are made, PSJ buses poorer riding safety for PSJ students could worsen. Poor shading improvements for students waiting for the bus could also create similar outcomes of heat stress in students. Broadly, reaching a cesspool scenario would require little effort and funding from the city, ultimately boiling down to simply not doing anything. However, such a scenario would have adverse effects on the health and outcomes for students in the city.

CONSTRUCTION OF A REGIONAL AIRPORT

In Port St. Joe, the construction of a regional airport could have a significant impact on both the local community and economy. The nature of that impact depends on the approach that is taken by the city and residents. In one scenario, the airport would boost tourism and create opportunities for economic growth. However, in another scenario, the access to the airport would only serve wealthy millionaires, marginalizing visitors and residents leaving them with limited options for transportation.



Living Waters

"Construction of a regional airport could improve access to and from PSJ for all residents and bring people and business to all parts of the city."

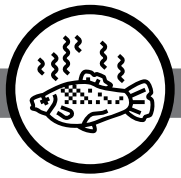
In this living waters scenario, the city Port St. Joe has a chance at changing the tide of their situation. Constructing a regional airport could have several positive impacts on Port St Joe. Not only would it improve access to the city, making it easier for both residents and visitors to travel in and out of the area, but it could attract new residents and visitors, boosting tourism. This boost could potentially lead to an increase in the local population. A larger population, combined with more visitors, would increase the local economy through the addition of new businesses. Companies that involve themselves or who operate off tourism would also benefit, as the airport would provide them with greater opportunities to expand their services and a larger customer base. In the long term, this development would create jobs, make the local economy more diverse, and make Port St. Joe a more appealing place for tourism and business. Northwest Florida Beaches International Airport (ECP) near Panama City, Florida opened in 2010 and was seen with success. This airport improved connectivity for residents and visitors, significantly increasing tourism and attracting businesses to the region. Its presence supported job creation in industries like hospitality and retail while enabling companies to expand their reach (Raa News, 2024).



Murky Waters

"Construction of an airport - but, far from NPSJ, not accessible for everyday people who want to take a flight."

In this murky waters scenario, the construction of a new airport has begun, but access is not available for all residents, with NPSJ residents most affected. This lack of availability is problematic for the residents who are restricted from using the airport. It is stated in the Health (In)Equity Assessment that Port St. Joe already lacks any city-wide transportation services for residents (Johnson et al.,2024). Having an airport that benefits all residents could provide many transportation benefits outside the community, but having a private airport will limit this potential benefit. In addition, it has been confirmed that airplanes launched by private airlines cause severe environmental damage. In general, private planes produce ten times more carbon emissions per passenger than commercial planes and private emissions have risen to 23% since 2019 (Talib Visram, 2023). If a private airport was established in Port St. Joe, it could lead to more CO2 pollution and increase inequality in air travel access for residents.



Cesspool

"A private airport is constructed, with millionaires being the predominant users as properties are bought up and developed by transplants or 'snowbirds' who leave their properties vacant a majority of the year. The cost of living becomes unaffordable for longtime residents. Structural racism continues through the gentrification of NPSJ."

In this cesspool scenario, instead of a regional airport or one that serves the needs of the NPSJ residents, a private airport is constructed with millionaires as the predominant users. Airports are a crucial means of transportation in the United States and PSJ alike. Results from a survey show that, in 2022, 44% of Americans "flew commercially, and almost 90% had taken a commercial flight in their lifetime" (Airlines for America, 2023, para. 2). For non-millionaire, long-term NPSJ residents, who do not own cars and cannot travel to other airports in the Florida panhandle, their air transportation needs are completely forgotten. Additionally in this scenario, properties will be bought up and developed by snowbirds whose houses are empty most of the year. Consequently, the cost-of-living increases, driving out long-time residents who can no longer afford housing– accelerating the gentrification of NPSJ via other processes that are explored more thoroughly in the Neighborhood and Built Environment chapter.

CONCLUSION

Each of the scenarios developed by the residents of Port St. Joe represent a fundamental choice about the direction of their town's future. While these scenarios might seem unlikely at first glance, none of them are unattainable nor are they improbable. There is an inextricable link between transportation and the lives of the citizens who rely upon it. As of now, it is clear that the current transportation system is not capable of properly serving its residents. Maintaining the current status quo and ignoring the concerns expressed by residents will no doubt lead to a cesspool scenario for transportation. Such a scenario would inevitably lead to a feedback loop where the system only descends into further disrepair. Such a feedback loop would be devastating for the lives of Port St. Joe residents of all ages and backgrounds. This is not to say there is no hope for the future. These scenarios and their outcomes provide a clear roadmap for Port St. Joe's future. If swift and decisive action is taken, PSJ and its community absolutely have the potential to divert their otherwise bleak future toward more hopeful scenarios.

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CHAPTER FIVE:

Education Access and Quality

Authors: Kaylee Beasley, Kayla Jacobson, Kirgan Roberts, & Avi Williams

INTRODUCTION

Education is a core pillar of society, serving as one of the primary drivers for personal development and societal progress. Research has consistently shown that access to quality education can significantly impact an individual's life, reducing poverty, enhancing social mobility, and fostering civic engagement (Zajacova & Lawrence, 2018). In the United States, disparities in educational access and quality, particularly within K-12 public schools, remain a pressing concern (Norris et al., 2024). These inequities can undermine the very benefits that education is supposed to provide. This section will explore scenarios of education infrastructure, online education, school board governance, mentorship, and representation and truth-telling in education: exploring the possible states of educational equity. By articulating these possible scenarios, we can work towards a future where every student has the opportunity to thrive and contribute to society.

EDUCATIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Infrastructure is the framework of a system, often thought of only in terms of physical objects like buildings or roads, but infrastructure also encompasses organizational and technological frameworks necessary for function (Hopkins & Woulfin, 2015). Within the context of education, infrastructure refers to the structures integral to the effective delivery of education. This begins with the physical infrastructure like school buildings (Filardo et al., 2019), but continues with organizational infrastructure (Cohen & Bhatt, 2012). This organizational infrastructure includes curricula, assessment methods, and support for both students and educators (Cohen & Bhatt, 2012). Broadly, the United States education system has "been a patchwork of local school systems that share no common curricula, student examinations, teacher education, or means of observing and improving instruction" (Cohen & Bhatt, 2012, p 117). This decentralized format of the United States education system, where national standards often take a backseat to local leadership, has hindered the development of a unified and sturdy education infrastructure in the United States (Cohen & Bhatt, 2012). The transformative scenarios below discuss different outcomes for educational infrastructure in the Port St. Joe area.

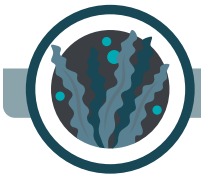


Living Waters

"Education disparity gap will close due to more educational opportunities for current K-12 students and their parents leading to greater educational attainment for all."

How might this scenario look? Beginning at the most basic interpretation of educational infrastructure, improving the state of school facilities has been shown to improve student outcomes (Filardo et al., 2019). In addition to improving student academic performance, better school facilities also improve educator performance and attainment and improve overall school climate (Filardo et al., 2019). When students attend school at facilities that are well-maintained they tend to feel more comfortable and achieve higher academically (Filardo et al., 2019).

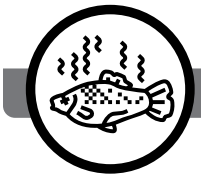
In this living waters scenario, the physical design of schools will be intentionally restructured to foster collaboration among educators, overcoming the traditional disconnect created by isolated classrooms (Stephens et al., 2022). Schools may adopt open-plan spaces or shared work areas, promoting spontaneous interactions and collective problem-solving among teachers. Professional development opportunities will evolve to become more collaborative, with job-embedded learning, peer coaching, and communities of practice becoming standard approaches. These structures will allow educators to grow together, share expertise, and work collectively on instructional challenges (Cohen & Bhatt, 2012). Furthermore, teacher voices will be integral in the policy-making process, with educators having a direct role in shaping decisions that impact curriculum, assessment, and classroom practices. This involvement will ensure that policies are informed by the real, on-the-ground experiences of teachers, leading to more effective, relevant, and equitable practices (Stephens et al., 2022). Ultimately, a culture of collaboration, combined with teacher agency, will create a support system that enhances educator retention and better addresses the needs of all students, particularly those from historically marginalized communities (Stephens et al., 2022).



Murky Waters

"Based on talks of a high school being built between PSJ and Wewahitchka, a new high school could reduce class sizes because the new school is projected to exceed the capacities of both current high schools. However this new school could imply the closure of both current high schools and cause social unrest."

This 'murky waters' scenario is one of uncertainty - while educational infrastructure might slightly improve, some changes may have overall negative impacts on students and the community. There have been talks of building a new high school between the two pre-existing schools in the Port St. Joe area, Port St. Joe High School and Wewahitchka High School. This new building would exceed the current capacity of both high schools combined and improve educational infrastructure, possibly leading to greater student achievement (Filardo et al., 2019). Another potential benefit of such a new school would be the reduction of class sizes. Reduced class size has proven to have a positive influence on student outcomes, creating conditions for increased student engagement, strengthened student-teacher development (Konstantopoulos & Shen, 2023). However, the construction of this school could imply the closure of the current schools. Such closures could cause some students to decline academically as they are faced with change (Harter et al., 1992). Even considering other changes to organizational infrastructure like new curriculum, students could struggle without proper support (Harter et al., 1992).



Cesspool

"Educational infrastructure does not improve, and current conditions persist."

This 'cesspool' scenario assumes that no action is taken to improve the state of educational infrastructure in Port St. Joe. Port St. Joe High School boasts a high school graduation rate of 82.6%, that is slightly below the state average of 89.7% in the 2023-2024 school year (Florida Department of Education [FDOE], n.d.). However, a disparity is evident where black students graduate at a rate 10.5% lower than their white counterparts (FDOE, n.d.). This trend is consistent with previous years, but graduation rates for 2023-2024 are overall down almost 17% from the 2021-2022 school year (FDOE, n.d.). A great predictor of educational achievement is third grade reading proficiency (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2013). Analyzing the percentage of 3rd grade students who passed the English Language Arts (ELA) portion of the Florida Assessment of Student Thinking (FAST) can provide insight into this statistic in Port St. Joe. The results from the 2023-2024 FAST tests show that in Gulf County, only 48% of 3rd grade students scored a 3 or above (Florida Department of Education [FDOE], 2024]. Compared to the 2022-2023 school year, Gulf County's pass rate has dropped 4%, from 52% (FDOE, 2024). The overarching trend compared to the state average shows a significant drop from 2023 to 2024, the Gulf County pass rate was the same as the state average in 2023, but 2024 results are 7%below the state average (FDOE, 2024). This is a concerning trend of decline for the future of the Gulf County School District. In a cesspool scenario, these trends will persist.

ONLINE EDUCATION

Online education in K-12 settings presents a transformative opportunity to enhance learning experiences, accessibility, and engagement for students. With the integration of numerous digital tools and platforms, educators and education officials can offer personalized learning paths, accommodations for diverse learning strategies, and provide extensive resources that transcend traditional classroom environments and teaching techniques. This flexibility allows students to learn at their own pace, grip a deeper understanding of the information, and thoroughly enjoy learning fostered in an inclusive environment.



Living Waters

"The advent of online education dramatically increases education access. Mentors and educators have a higher quality of life due to their ability to work remote/hybrid in order to reach more students than they previously were."

In this living waters scenario, online education would flourish and would be characterized by high-quality resources, supportive communities, and effective teaching practices. Technology would enhance the learning experience, promote collaboration, and engage students in meaningful ways, which lead to improved academic performance outcomes and a more enriched educational experience. Learning online also offers many opportunities for students of all backgrounds to receive a good education regardless of economic status, disability status, or social differences (Black et al., 2019; Robinson, 2024). Online learning could also help society to become more culturally interconnected (Black et al., 2019).



Murky Waters

"The advent of Online education may increase access. However, this access may not ensure the quality of education provided due to a difference in quality control compared to in-person education."

In this murky waters scenario, some students might thrive while others might struggle due to an inconsistent quality of learning, lack of engagement, and a lack of support. Teachers may also struggle and face many difficulties with adapting to digital learning platforms, resulting in disproportionate experiences for their students (Robinson, 2024). Robinson (2024) makes particular note of the impact that technical difficulties can have on the experience of students in online education. When forced to use unwieldy online programs without proper technical support available, students can become disengaged from their learning experience and be less innovative (Robinson, 2024).



Cesspool

"Online education causes students to feel disengaged, and they mentally check out as they feel they are not able to engage with fellow students or teachers in a truly meaningful and personal experience. Student grades drop and the amount of students finishing high school diminishes."

In a cesspool scenario, online education becomes ineffective and even detrimental to the learning experience of the students and teachers. Poorly designed courses, lack of interaction between students and teachers, and an overwhelming number of distractions lead to disengagement and a loss of learning. Students may encounter significant challenges which result in the undermining of the potential benefits of learning through a digital platform environment. In cases "When the organization...of the course content is developed by a third party, teachers have, little to no control over the [course] content" (Dietrich, 2021, p. 64).

SCHOOL BOARD GOVERNANCE

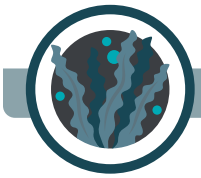
An effective school board can be very important to children's education. The goals of a school board are to be clear on decision making and to prioritize student achievement. School boards focus on the strategic use of resources and communicate updates or problems as they arise to the community. Issues school boards discuss range from school improvement plans and teaching styles to more serious topics like budget management, especially as schools are often low on funds for improvement. (Gore, 2024)



Living Waters

"The community sees an overhaul in the school board, providing the opportunity for new members who want to instill change in the quality of education with student needs coming first."

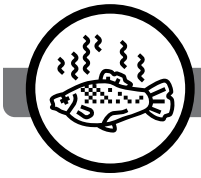
In a living waters scenario for school board governance, the school board places higher priority on overall student achievement along with the creation of an environment which promotes learning quality. A strong correlation exists between higher responsibility for student achievement and a higher school performance profile (SPP) score (Maurer, 2017). In this scenario board members have high expectations for themselves and high expectations of students. By taking steps to attain these goals, the school board will improve the overall educational achievements of students by putting the needs of those students first.



Murky Waters

"Even though the current school board composition changes, members who wish to enact change are impeded by the status quo and management above them. Some changes are made but the quality of education is still less than it could be."

In this scenario, there is an effort to enact change in the school board governance from the city and its residents. Despite new members being elected, actual change is slow, limited in scope, and hampered by the status quo and management above the board. This has been the case for the Chicago board recently. After decades of slow and steady progress in improving the quality of education in Chicago, the 2023-2024 mayoral policies have heightened tensions with the board and threatened to undo that progress (Claypool, 2024). One of the most publicized disputes from October 2024, resulted in the resignation of the entire Chicago Board of Education (Claypool, 2024; Feurer et al., 2024). The dispute stemmed from a disagreement over the mayor's push for high interest loans to pay for teacher raises, which the CEO of Chicago Public Schools and the board opposed (Claypool, 2024; Feurer et al., 2024). Like the scenario described above, the ability of the board to govern is being impeded. The mayor has been able to, with some success, overwrite the wishes of the board. A similar outcome is possible in PSJ where, despite the board attempting to enact positive changes, officials above the board step in to maintain the status quo. This ultimately would hamper the ability of the new school board members to improve educational outcomes in the district.



Cesspool

"Current school board composition and ideology that is not supportive of equity stays the same and very little to nothing changes for educational outcomes. The board also censors those who seek change."

With school board governance that is not supportive of equity, problems would continue to arise and there would be nothing done to put an end to these problems (Westberg, 2016). Race and class-based problems are a result of school boards not enforcing equity amongst classmates. This lack of support and enforcement might lead to some students experiencing worse educational outcomes like lower graduation rates or more students dropping out or repeating grade levels. A lack of communication and diversity among school boards often results in such outcomes for their schools.

MENTORSHIP

This analysis explores how urban planning, infrastructure, and funding directly impact mentorship and educational access in communities. Equitable city design, supported by well-integrated public transportation and community-centered infrastructure, can significantly enhance opportunities for mentorship, allowing young people across diverse neighborhoods to connect and access educational resources. Inconsistent or limited urban planning often creates discouragement, with prosperous areas gaining better access to mentorship while underserved neighborhoods face challenges such as insufficient public transportation and poorly maintained infrastructure. In the absence of community-focused planning, educational gaps widen, leaving many young people without essential support systems.

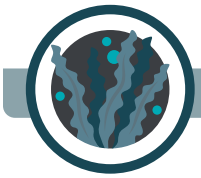


Living Waters

"Mentorship and educational programming will increase due to increased funding opportunities."

In this scenario, a city prioritizes equitable urban planning, ensuring that educational institutions, community centers, and mentorship programs are easily accessible to all residents. There is a focus on well-designed public transportation, safe pedestrian pathways, and the strategic location of schools and mentorship hubs. Partnerships between schools, universities, and community organizations flourish, leading to a supportive ecosystem for mentorship and education. "Giving play to the role of social infrastructure, especially health facilities and education facilities, is an important means to compensate for regional deficiencies and promote community development." (Wang 2022, p. 44). In a Living Waters scenario, mentorship programs are easily accessible with public transport networks connecting underserved communities with educational institutions and mentors. Urban planners design spaces that foster and promote community interaction, such as parks and libraries, where formal and informal mentorship happens organically.

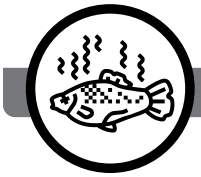
Additionally, the increased funding in this scenario will be used to expand and improve mentorship programs. Costs and funding are often important concerns when communities consider implementing mentorship programs (Guetzloe, 2010). With these concerns addressed, the mentorship programs in this scenario would be highly tailored to individuals. Successful programs like the Kennedy Kids/Adults Together program have demonstrated the effectiveness of individualized mentorship programs in improving educational outcomes for students (Ryan et al., 2010). The KK/AT program makes use of its funding to carefully outline program goals before screening both mentees and mentors. By carefully matching mentees and mentors together and continuously educating mentors, the program is able to meet the individual needs of its mentees in a way that is crucial in helping the youth develop and attain higher educational outcomes (Ryan et al., 2010).In Port St. Joe, a similar program could make use of the funding in this scenario to implement a similar program to benefit its students. If additional mentors are needed, high school and college students can mentor younger students in well-supported after-school programs. The mentorship programs flourish due to government support and private sector investments, including grants for mentorship activities, increasing the funding to the community.



Murky Waters

"Mentorship and educational programming receives some funding but is still not enough to create a meaningful change."

In this scenario, the city attempts to improve access to education through mentorship and educational programs but still faces several obstacles such as inadequate public transportation, poorly maintained infrastructure, and limited funding. Funding is a constant concern for mentorship and educational programs, being cited as a major barrier facing many programs across the U.S. (Gustafson et al., 2024). In this scenario, there are some mentorship opportunities, but they are unevenly distributed, often favoring more wealthy neighborhoods while leaving underserved areas with fewer resources. Access to the programs described in the scenario has been shown to be influenced by income level (Buabeng & Amo-Darko, 2024) While mentorship programs exist in some parts of the city in this scenario, those from lower-income areas find it harder to participate due to transportation challenges and the long distances to education facilities. Thus, the city fails to connect mentorship centers with public transportation lines effectively. Schools in wealthier areas attract mentors, but those in disadvantaged communities struggle to maintain sustainable mentorship programs due to limited urban investments. As a result, many students in underserved areas miss out on crucial mentorship opportunities and educational programs that could bridge educational gaps.



Cesspool

"Mentorship and educational programming receive no additional funding and may even see funding cuts, causing a downward spiral in educational quality and impedes the next generation's ability to realize their true potential."

In this scenario, urban planning is disjointed, and policies favor real estate development over equitable access to education. Mentorship programs are rare, and the absence of community spaces leaves young people without safe environments for educational development and mentorship. Research has shown mentoring programs to be important aspect of development for young people, even beyond educational outcomes (Mentor, 2024). The scenario described by residents is visible across the country, where mentorship and educational programs constantly battle insufficient funding (Gustafson et al., 2024). One recent example can be seen by the $3 million dollar cut in funding for the Youth Mentoring Program grant in 2024 (Mentor, 2024). Such a cut significantly hampers the abilities of those programs to provide the necessary services that set young people up for success. In this Cesspool scenario, mentorship programs are virtually non-existent in low-income areas due to the lack of community resources, infrastructure, and transportation options. Local government priorities isolate these communities, creating a lack of educational stimulation where students have minimal interaction with potential mentors. Many youths are left without support systems that could guide them through academic and personal challenges. The divide between affluent and disadvantaged communities widens as the urban planning practices continue to favor gentrified areas, leaving mentorship initiatives concentrated only in select parts of the city.

REPRESENTATION AND TRUTH-TELLING IN EDUCATION

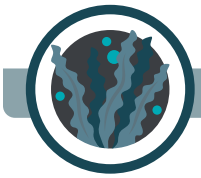
The term diversity has been extremely controversial in recent years, many demonizing the concept without knowing what the term means nor what its benefits are. In education, having a diverse community of educators has been linked to improvements in student outcomes for all students, school climate, and educational attainment (Norris et al., 2024). Like many issues, finding solutions to these complex problems is not easy. With the United States already struggling to fill teaching positions, there are some barriers to achieving the goal of a diverse teacher force (Norris et al., 2024). Some reasons America is struggling to fill those positions include, but are not limited to, financial constraints, working conditions, and a lack of support (Norris et al., 2024; Stephens et al., 2022). These challenges are exacerbated in the case of educators of color (Norris et al., 2024). In the United States teaching workforce, people of color are underrepresented in relation to the racial diversity of students (Egalite, 2024). Only 44% of students in the United States are white while white teachers make up nearly 80% of the workforce (Egalite, 2024). In addition to these barriers to entering the workforce, teachers of color are also facing challenges regarding racism and microaggressions (Norris et al., 2024). Each of the following scenarios describe outcomes depending on the actions taken to address racial disparities within the educational system of Port St. Joe.



Living Waters

"Requirement, support, and inclusion of more African American teachers in major (decision-making) educational roles provides increased motivation and role modeling for students leading to higher graduation rate."

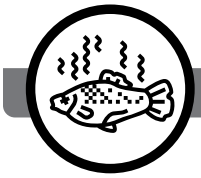
In a living waters scenario, the inclusion and support of African American educators in Gulf County schools would create an overall improvement in student outcomes. Students of color in Port St. Joe graduate at a rate lower than their white peers and the inclusion of diverse educators could serve to close this gap (FDOE, n.d.; Norris et al., 2024). Studies find that having a Black teacher in elementary school increases the likelihood that a Black student will graduate by 13% and the likelihood that they will seek higher education by 19% (Norris et al., 2024). This combination results in increased educational attainment for those students. If sustained, this increase can also lead to a growth in the number of students of color seeking to enter the teaching profession (Norris et al., 2024). This idea is the basis for Grow Your Own (GYO) initiatives. GYO initiatives can create an avenue for the school district to bring in educators from the community and resolve some of the barriers to beginning a career in education (i.e. cost of education and certifications) (Norris et al., 2024). These programs foster a sense of community leading to higher teacher retention, generating a stable environment for students (Norris et al., 2024). The start of one of these programs would be a great way for the Gulf County School District to gain diversity in educators.



Murky Waters

"There is an increased recruitment of African American teachers into qualified positions and roles. However, these teachers are not supported and not retained - creating a revolving door system."

In the 'murky waters' scenario for this topic, the school district increases the share of its African American teachers through an intentional and collaborative recruitment drive. However, a lack of support for these teachers results in a 'revolving door', where these teachers do not stay for long, creating an unstable environment for students (Hur et al., 2023). Teachers lacking support tend to have higher rates of burnout, causing motivation loss and decreased job satisfaction, which may lead them to leave the profession altogether (Hur et al., 2023). High rates of teacher turnover can negatively impact student outcomes. Students thrive in stable environments, changes in the learning environment can negatively impact students' mental wellbeing and lower academic performance (Locklear, 2017). Looking outside of the classroom, the revolving door created by teacher turnover can create distrust between schools and families (Pestaner et al., 2023). There is evidence to suggest that student's perception of the relationship between school officials and their parents may impact their academics (Pestaner et al., 2023).



Cesspool

"Historical truth of racial differences manipulated to further racial divide by teachers who deny structural racism."

This cesspool scenario is characterized by the widening of the racial disparity as structural racism is ignored. Dismissing the idea that there is racism within the structure of society can cause pre-existing educational inequities to persist and grow (Stephens et al., 2022). Historically, addressing these issues has created tension between people of color and white educational leaders as no changes are made (Wall, 2024). An example of the dangers of ignoring racial disparities is seen in Salt Lake City Schools in Utah (Wall, 2024). In Utah, the efforts made by people of color to make strides towards addressing these inequities were blatantly ignored and met with a paternalistic attitude (Wall, 2024). A paternalistic attitude is characterized by false generosity and a sense of saviorism, leading to the specific needs voiced by people of color to be ignored in favor of ineffective and misaligned solutions to be put in place (Wall, 2024). Another barrier to addressing these issues is the need to stay comfortable instead of facing the harsh realities of racial inequities (Wall, 2024). Ignoring the needs of people of color within the community only makes racial divides grow creating a negative environment for all.

CONCLUSION

This document explores critical themes shaping educational equity through three scenario types: Living Waters, Murky Waters, and Cesspool. Each scenario highlights potential outcomes in the areas of educational infrastructure, online learning, school board governance, mentorship, and diversity in education. In the Living Waters scenario, robust investments and strategic planning create opportunities for student success and societal advancement. Murky Waters depicts partial progress tempered by persistent challenges, while the Cesspool scenario shows the risks of stagnation or regression due to systemic neglect.

These scenarios offer a spectrum of futures, each reflecting different levels of commitment to equitable education. As stakeholders—educators, policymakers, parents, and community members—it is essential to consider the type of future we aim to support. Will we strive to close opportunity gaps and empower students from all backgrounds, or will we allow disparities to persist? The decisions we make today will shape the educational landscape for generations to come.



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CHAPTER SIX:

Socio-Economic Context and Trends

Authors: Lauren Justice, Megan Pastorious, Alexandria Thomas

INTRODUCTION

In the socio-economic landscape of Port St. Joe, there is a compelling argument for increased funding aimed at revitalizing the community for its residents. The impact of public funding on community programs can be both positive and negative. Research proves that stable funding is crucial for success. When social programs receive consistent financial support, they can drive economic growth by expanding their services (Jiao et al., 2022). This expansion could lead to increased investment in training, educational initiatives, and greater community involvement. Three scenarios have been proposed to explore these contexts and trends, specifically Living Waters, Murky Waters, and Cesspool. These scenarios will be fully explored to provide information about what types of outcomes can be expected in each scenario to provide citizens with information about how they might like to proceed.

PUBLIC FUNDING

Public Funding is a crucial aspect of any community and PSJ is no exception. It is an integral policy tool which can be used to address community concerns and stimulate the local economy. This section details the ways in which these resources may be allocated as part of PSJ's future, with a focus toward how the funds may be distributed for cleanup activities and jobs training. How the community and city choose to utilize these funds will greatly influence PSJ's future, determining the future socio-economic status of its residents.



Living Waters

"Increased funding to support cleanup activities and also to provide jobs training for the residents of NPSJ which would reduce employment inequity in all of Port St. Joe."

In this scenario, increased funding provided by the government (from all levels) would benefit the residents of Port St Joe. This funding could be used to establish cleanup activities as well as offer job training for the residents. Blighted areas, as defined by Cullingworth and Caves (2014, p. 191), are areas that contain "substandard, slum, deteriorated, or deteriorating structures" as well as poor layouts and those that are just generally economically distressed. There are numerous reasons that blighted areas are of concern and Port St. Joe residents would benefit from increased funding to repair them. One such benefit is a reduction of firearm violence associated with urban blight. In a journal article written by Branas et al. (2016), the authors studied the relationship between reparation of blighted areas and gun violence. What they discovered was a significant reduction in firearm violence in the areas that were repaired. In fact, they even stated that it was extremely cost effective to utilize blight repair to reduce firearm violence (Branas et al, 2016). It is reasonable to conclude that if funding were provided to the city of Port St. Joe to work on remediation efforts, the same effect could be seen there. Additionally, the reparation of these areas can lead to overall happier citizens as well. It is reasonable to assume that citizens who have to view dilapidated buildings would experience more unhappiness and stress than those living in a revitalized area.

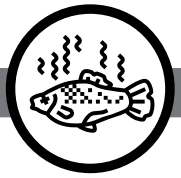
In addition to addressing urban blight, funds could be used to provide jobs training for citizens. According to Krumholz et al. (2019) low socio-economic status often goes hand in hand with decreased access to job training and skills. Providing additional funding to citizens for job training improves their chances of landing higher paying jobs. In turn, they may improve their own land use by cleaning or upgrading things that might improve urban blight. In this scenario, it is directly beneficial to provide funding for cleanup activities and jobs training for residents.



Murky Waters

"Some funding from the state/city to support jobs training but apathy among residents may cause the loss of some of that funding to support jobs training."

In this scenario, there would be some funding, but it would be limited. As discussed by Branas et al. (2016,) there may be a little bit of violence reduction. However, it is likely that once the funding runs out this reduction could be negated by a return of blight due to a lack of maintenance. With less funding, fewer citizens will be able to access the job skills training that could further improve their outcomes for economic success. It is possible that in this scenario there would be short-term gains, but it might not create sustainable long-term improvement.



Cesspool

"No community support and widespread apathy. The North Port St. Joe Community Development Corporation gets no further funding to support jobs training."

In this cesspool scenario, there would be zero support or funding provided for the aforementioned activities. In this scenario, it is unlikely that any improvements would be seen. It is also possible that things could continue to deteriorate and become even worse than they were before. For example, the North Port St. Joe Community Development Corporation (NPSJ CDC) currently runs jobs training workshops in NPSJ. One of these workshops, the EcoWorkforce Training Program, relies on funding provided by the US EPA (NPSJ CDC, n.d.). However, there is no guarantee that such funding will continue to be available from the federal government. In this scenario, such funding would no longer be available to the community. Without adequate funding, the jobs training programs in the community would struggle to continue. The loss of these programs would deny residents the benefits expressed in the above scenarios while simultaneously heightening the economic inequality of the community.

ECONOMIC GROWTH

Economic disinvestment is traditionally considered by scholars as the continued and systemic depression of capital investment (Gibson, 2007). This can come about in many ways, with the decline of infrastructure, deterioration of housing, and the abandonment of commercial spaces. As this decline happens, it is difficult to entice new business into the area - they do not see a benefit in investing in an area where the market is already in a steep decline. This disinvestment can exacerbate the already obvious issues in a community, like social and economic inequalities. As businesses leave, so do job opportunities and access to resources, continuing a cycle of poverty in the area and making it impossible for people to leave. The impact of this departure is often felt disproportionately by marginalized communities. The problems in the area can snowball, leaving residents to face declining property values, reduced access to healthcare, and a lack of community engagement. If residents believe that a government does not care about their quality of life, residents themselves are unlikely to get involved in revitalizing their communities, perpetuating a cycle of miscommunication and distrust.



Living Waters

"Economic growth (return of sustainable and equitable industry, business, and jobs) in which all sections of the city benefit equally, coupled with increased representation in decision making, investment in innovation."

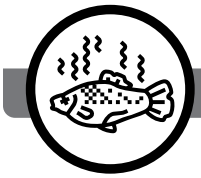
In this living waters scenario, the PSJ government will try every avenue to work with the public to get them to attend local meetings. Getting opinions on issues that directly affect the residents is essential for a cooperative government. This requires expanding the available avenues for residents to attend local meetings – this is essential to gaining or winning back public trust. A report by the National League of Cities (NLC) indicated that 75% of cities had transitioned to virtual or hybrid meeting models, leading to higher levels of public participation and improved community satisfaction with local governance (Volz, 2022). Allowing access for the community to zoom into meetings will make them more accessible. Changing the hours of the meeting to outside normal working hours has similar advantages. In 2020, the state of California passed legislation (Assembly Bill 361) to allow public agencies to meet virtually and continue to provide remote access to meetings. This effort was initially triggered by the pandemic but has been extended as a permanent fixture in many jurisdictions (Cal. Stat. 2019). This scenario also sees an increase in economic growth. Offering grants and loans for new, small businesses will bring entrepreneurs into the area, making the capital investments more unique, while benefitting all areas of the city. The City of Chicago has a program called The Neighborhood Opportunity Fund, which provides grants to small businesses in economically disadvantaged neighborhoods to help them build and grow (City of Chicago, n.d.).



Murky Waters

"Equitable but Unsustainable economic growth, therefore not all residents can continually benefit from economic growth, and workplace inequality will persist."

In this murky waters scenario, the local government will make small efforts to engage the community but will not offer alternative attendance options. They will give minor weight to the opinions of the community but will ultimately do what they feel is right. Giving encouragement to larger box stores and general dollar stores will slightly improve the economy, but it will not encourage any sort of tourism or new growth. The financial hierarchy will likely stay the same creating a situation no better or worse than the previous one. Cities in the American Rust Belt, such as Detroit, Cleveland, and Pittsburgh, have historically relied on single industries or large retail chains to boost their local economies. As these industries decline, job displacement and economic stagnation set in. In many of these cities, efforts to revive the local economy have resulted in minimal lasting improvement. These cities struggle to create diverse, high-skill industries that would offer sustainable, higher-paying jobs for residents, especially those who have been economically disadvantaged for decades (Reese et al., 2017).



Cesspool

"Inequitable economic growth further divides the community and discrimination persists."

This cesspool scenario results from no changes to the area, creating a further divide within the community. Buildings will continue to be abandoned, and the area will deteriorate in a way that might not be salvageable. The government will continue to do what they feel is in their best interest, and ignoring interests of NPSJ, allowing for its further deterioration. A 2017 report by the Reese et al. discusses how Detroit's "uneven" post-recession recovery disproportionately benefited wealthier neighborhoods, exacerbating divisions within the city. While areas like downtown and midtown saw revitalization, neighborhoods in the outer areas of Detroit continued to suffer from abandoned homes and unemployment. Detroit has faced high levels of inequality, with poor neighborhoods suffering from disinvestment, high crime, and abandoned buildings. (Reese et al., 2017).

SOCIAL CAPITAL

Social capital focuses on the relationships within a community, fostering strong and resilient communities that benefit all residents of the Port St. Joe area. It involves equipping a community with the knowledge and skills they need to move forward and bring growth into their community. Education on home ownership and financial discipline is essential in empowering residents. When focused on building social capital, citizens can create environments where communities come together to create accessible and valuable resources. Communities can create a supportive framework that will uplift all individuals, bringing a collaborative approach to building a long-term plan of success (Klapper et al., 2023). In doing so, the PSJ government can create a more equitable community where everyone has the opportunity and ability to thrive.

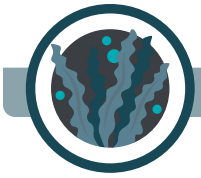


Living Waters

"Social capital building that benefits all segments of the society. This social capital building will include a focus on homeownership education and financial discipline."

In this living waters scenario, the community works together with the local government to bring education to the residents, providing individuals lessons on home ownership and home maintenance. For a person to maintain a household, they need to learn the basics of repair. Knowing how to fix simple things can make home ownership a less daunting task. Financial literacy is also a learned skill; understanding how to manage finances in a household is an essential part of life. The PSJ government in partnership with the NPSJ community leadership will have the ability to expand educational opportunities, equipping individuals with the ability to grow their own

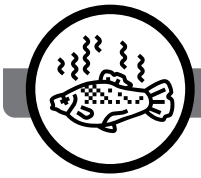
capital, enriching the community. In cities like Atlanta and Minneapolis, Habitat for Humanity offers classes on everything from basic home repairs to budgeting and debt management. These classes have helped participants gain confidence in their ability to maintain their homes and manage finances, thus improving long-term homeownership success (Atlanta Habitat for Humanity, 2024). Habitat for Humanity has been a leader in integrating social capital building with homeownership education. Habitat offers programs that focus not only on the construction of affordable housing but also on preparing future homeowners through workshops on home maintenance, budgeting, and financial management (Atlanta Habitat for Humanity, 2024). This educational approach ensures that homeowners can sustain their homes over time and avoid financial pitfalls that can lead to foreclosure.



Murky Waters

"Residents benefit from economic prosperity but are unable to make good financial decisions because of a system structured to prevent black and brown individuals from accessing resources which could improve their financial literacy. With technological improvements or in case businesses fold up again, residents are back to being impoverished."

In this murky waters scenario, the community will continue as is. Residents will stay in rent owned buildings, not being able to move to build their own financial safety net, but not homeless. Residents will not be able to make sound financial decisions, and the system will continue to discriminate against the NPSJ residents, with banks unwilling to offer them loans for ownership due to unsound financial decisions that result from structural racism that prevents them from gaining access to financial literacy. Structures and systems built around and over the community will continue to keep them impoverished, but this impoverishment will be no better or worse than before. A report from the National Endowment for Financial Education (NEFE) in 2019 found that financial literacy programs targeting underserved communities are highly effective in improving financial decision-making, but these programs are often scarce in predominantly Black and Latino neighborhoods. When financial literacy education is not readily available, residents are left without the tools to make informed financial choices (Samuel-Jones, 2024).



Cesspool

"No education, no social safety nets, and blight continues."

In this cesspool scenario, the present situation will continue to deteriorate. There will be no further education and no safety nets for families. The area will downturn gradually, forcing people to either move out of the area or remain there, crawling below the poverty line. Flint, Michigan is an example of such a scenario. While Flint is most famous for the water crisis, the crisis also exposed a significant failure by the city to support its residents. The city was already struggling with a lack of adequate investment in infrastructure, which initially resulted in the crisis, and the crisis has only worsened these issues (Mahoney, 2024). Despite a large settlement, many

residents have yet to be paid and are still struggling from the effects of lead-contaminated water, including chronic health issues. These effects have intersected with already existing issues, like affordable housing and urban blight, while additionally placing an increased burden upon city's educational and health facilities. Without new investment, will continue to worsen the resident's quality of life (Mahoney, 2024). Flint's history is not unlike that of North Port St. Joe. Instead of a water crisis from lead-pipes fueling the community's struggles, NPSJ is struggling from its history with the papermill and chemical plant (Johnson et al., 2024). Like in Flint, a lack of investment in the social capital for PSJ will deny residents the educational and health benefits outlined in the other scenarios while worsening blight for the city.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the potential outcomes for Port St. Joe hinge on the level of funding allocated for community improvement. It is important for the citizens of Port St. Joe to decide for themselves which scenarios they will work towards and which scenarios they avoid. Regardless of the scenarios they choose, though, it is crucial that the choice is made by the residents.



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CHAPTER SEVEN:

Healthcare Access and Quality

Authors: Amelia Chalk, Bryce Jones, Kiara Roman Gonzalez, Joel Sexon

INTRODUCTION

Healthcare should be accessible to everyone, However, in the United States healthcare comes with many barriers, especially for lower-income households. Affordability is one of the main problems many people face (Lazar & Lisa, 2018). Many Americans opt out of health care, not because they want to, but because they cannot afford or do not have efficient and equitable access to healthcare (The Commonwealth Fund, 2023b). Some communities provide solutions to alleviate the burden of the healthcare system while others face more challenges. Lower-income communities often disproportionately face challenges concerning healthcare. In the community of North Port St. Joe, healthcare access and quality are barriers many residents face. Beyond cost, other barriers include, but are not limited to, low availability of services, lack of education, and insufficient preventative care.

AFFORDABILITY

The Health (In)Equity Assessment indicates that access to healthcare is determined by "availability of efficient services and providers, affordability and the degree to which service providers are accommodating," (Johnson et al., 2024, p. 74). Additionally, access to care and quality healthcare should be wholly equitable and easily accessible to all persons within the community (Johnson et al., 2024). Affordable healthcare ensures equitable and effective access for all groups of people in society. Furthermore, affordable healthcare leads to healthier citizens, as seen in states that have expanded Medicaid coverage (American Hospital Association, 2024).



Living Waters

"Economic growth (e.g., improved jobs and infrastructure) results in increased access to quality healthcare and specialized medical options."

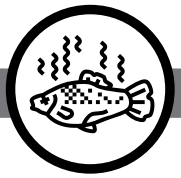
With more funding available through economic growth, infrastructure can be built to facilitate efficient access to healthcare, as states with higher incomes have historically invested more in infrastructure (U.S. Department of Treasury, 2023). Additionally, improved infrastructure will "ensure efficiency, cost reduction… and most importantly improved patient care" (Luxon, 2015, p. 4). Furthermore, better job opportunities can lead to many healthcare benefits for citizens within the community. These benefits stem from more available income and include, but are not limited to, access to efficient transportation, the ability to afford quality healthcare, and greater financial stability in the event of prolonged injury or illness.



Murky Waters

"Healthcare has become more accessible (in a number of options), however, there is no increase in affordability, and thus, healthcare remains expensive for low-income families."

As stated in the scenario, only a select few can afford to pay, therefore families who cannot afford quality healthcare will only seek help in extreme need. This can lead to delayed treatment and more severe health problems later on as symptoms were not managed when less severe (American Hospital Association, 2024). Additionally, since symptoms may not be treated early, low-income individuals may pay more over time as their health worsens (The Commonwealth Fund, 2023b). Although improved accessibility to healthcare is a step in the right direction, affordability must improve for Port St. Joe to have equitable and effective healthcare for all community members.



Cesspool

"Healthcare becomes more expensive and less accessible for residents. Healthcare becomes a high proportion of household expenses, so people have to choose rent or food over healthcare."

According to the Port St. Joe Health (In)Equity Assessment, many residents already feel they lack access to healthcare. If healthcare were to become more expensive, access to healthcare within the community could only continue to decline. This means that low-income and middle-class residents would have little to no access to healthcare, leading to worsening health conditions. Another section of this cesspool scenario describes residents as forced to choose between rent or food over their own health. Choosing between essential needs like this leads to a cycle of poor health and further financial stress. Financial burdens can worsen mental health and leave physical issues untreated, making access to healthcare even more difficult than before (The Commonwealth Fund, 2023b).

PROVISION

According to the Health (In)Equity Assessment, "access to quality and comprehensive healthcare is incredibly important for promoting and maintaining health, preventing disease, unnecessary death, and the overall well-being of a community" (Johnson et al., 2024, p. 68). A key step in healthcare access is the act of providing healthcare to the citizens. The provision of healthcare is essential for the functioning and health of a community. Even if healthcare is decently affordable (as envisioned in the Living Waters scenario for affordability), a lack of efficient providers and provision methods would make that affordability less impactful.

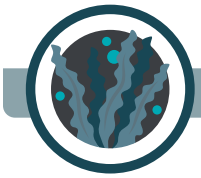


Living Waters

"Greater access to healthcare due to improved telehealthcare, mobile (and "pop up") healthcare clinics, and other novel forms of engaged care and precision medicine."

While traditional methods of healthcare provision must be made more accessible for the residents of the community, novel forms of healthcare such as those mentioned above would vastly improve access. According to Johns Hopkins Medicine, telehealth can allow for better assessments of some illnesses (mental and physical), control of infectious illnesses, and easier connections with doctors or other practitioners (John Hopkins Medicine, 2022). Additionally, for those who lack transportation to the hospital, non-emergency visits may be made via telehealth. Mobile clinics can "reduce barriers to healthcare including transportation, time, system complexity, and trust" (Malone et al., 2020, p. 8). By eliminating barriers, it becomes much easier for

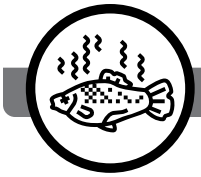
residents to engage in healthcare and take advantage of the healthcare system. Other novel forms of healthcare that could eliminate other barriers, especially for lower-income residents, would be an immense help in providing healthcare to the community.



Murky Waters

"Business owners provide limited and/or ideologically driven support for health insurance."

Businesses are often major providers of healthcare for their employees. In 2023, 53.7% of the U.S. population had employment-based health insurance (Vankar, 2024). Although some healthcare would be provided in this scenario, many issues still exist concerning the extent and equity of the provision. For example, businesses may provide low-cost healthcare options to the community or their employees, yet these may have high deductibles or cover a minimal range of services. This can be worsened by healthcare providers prioritizing ideological values over the needs of the community. Some businesses could view profit as a more important incentive than the health of the community in which they operate, leading to lower access and quality of care.



Cesspool

"Health care provision is no longer a responsibility for employers but a premium that residents opt out of."

In this scenario, many residents would likely have to resort to trying to procure their own healthcare. Affordability could pose an issue here, thus many residents may choose other essential needs over healthcare. Additionally, a lack of education or awareness of other options may lead to some residents going uninsured. In such a scenario, residents may find health insurance through the Marketplace or Medicaid, as those who do not have employer-based healthcare do (Healthcare.gov, n.d.). However, many residents may opt not to pursue health insurance due to high premiums or low availability.

OPTIONS

According to the Health (In)Equity Assessment, the proximity of health facilities is important for efficiently obtaining medical attention. Additionally, the ease and speed at which patients can get medical treatment can prevent deaths in emergencies. The Health (In)Equity Assessment also states that "having access to medical services minimizes costs, absenteeism, and disease transmission (Hoffman and Paradise, 2008)" (Johnson et al., 2024, p. 69).



Living Waters

"Healthcare providers are attracted to the community, providing greater opportunities/options for healthcare and lower costs due to competition."

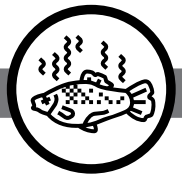
If residents are given a wide range of effective healthcare options, then a diverse range of illnesses and issues can be cared for. Additionally, increased opportunities can lead to a higher percentage of residents having efficient and timely access to healthcare. Competition not only leads to lower prices as competing businesses vie to be the most affordable but also leads to higher quality as those same businesses may vie to provide the highest quality of care. There are many ways healthcare providers have been successfully attracted to underserved areas. In the United States, the National Health Service Corps (NHSC), under the Biden-Harris Administration, sought to improve healthcare access for communities to underserved areas. By using loan forgiveness, they are able to push individual healthcare providers to serve areas and communities that might otherwise struggle to pay for adequate healthcare. As of the 2024 fiscal year, the NHSC boasted 17,419 providers working in high-needs communities (US NHSC, 2024). Programs like this could pull in a greater interest in providing healthcare for PSJ, and in doing so expand the healthcare access and affordability for its community.



Murky Waters

"Current healthcare providers may increase options. However, due to a lack of competition from a multitude of providers, this increase in options is not affordable."

This scenario gives residents more options which helps with personalized care. However, many residents will not be able to afford these healthcare options. Ultimately, this increase in options does not fix the problem and could be a hindrance rather than a solution. Given the increase in prices, residents are left with more choices but less affordable options. "About two of five people with Medicaid or Medicare said they or a family member had delayed or skipped needed health care or prescription drugs in the past 12 months because they couldn't afford it" (Commonwealth Fund, 2023b, para.9). Due to fewer available options, prices increase, and some people simply ignore their health concerns because they cannot afford it.



Cesspool

"Healthcare providers continue to leave the community, making it harder to get appointments and medical care. The community becomes a "healthcare desert"/medically underserved community."

Port St. Joe is a small community. With big cities such as Tallahassee nearby, healthcare providers might have better opportunities and greater total demand for their services, leaving the residents of Port St. Joe without quick access to healthcare. According to the Commonwealth Fund, "In the U.S., people living in rural communities have higher rates of chronic disease and suicide, worse maternal health but in the U.S., the ability to afford health care stands out as a substantial contributor" (Commonwealth Fund, 2023a, para.5). This statement shows that a community without adequate access to healthcare options can suffer from greater health issues in the long run.

PREVENTATIVE HEALTHCARE

The Health (In) Equity Assessment states that preventative care (e.g. vaccines, screenings, check-ups) can catch illnesses and injuries early on and begin early treatment (Johnson et al., 2024). The assessment also states that chronic conditions can be better managed through preventative rather than reactive healthcare.



Living Waters

"The government subsidizes and encourages preventative healthcare practices because they support job growth and economic stability."

In this scenario, preventative healthcare is easily accessible for residents, in part due to subsidies from the government. In 2023, PanCare relaunched their clinic in PSJ where uninsured or impoverished people can go and get basic healthcare. PanCare is a program with federal grants that provide immunizations, pregnancy tests, birth control, and much more (PanCare, 2023). While this gives some residents of Port St. Joe access to basic healthcare, this program does not serve all of PSJ. In this scenario, programs like PanCare would be expanded to better serve all residents. This can be seen in the many countries with successful universal healthcare coverage. Sweden, for example, has seen a significant reduction in preventable deaths, like those from cardiovascular disease, as its public health agencies have started investing and prioritizing preventative healthcare efforts (Janlöv et al., 2023). Investment into preventative healthcare in PSJ could create similar results, greatly enhancing the health of PSJ residents.

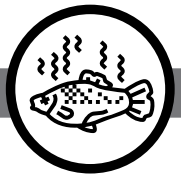


Murky Waters

"Preventative care is a feature, but options are limited, with increasing focus on disease management."

Health Departments create disease control and prevention plans targeted to reduce bacterial and viral diseases transmitted by emerging factors. Citizens fund these commodities by paying taxes. While this is only one way of promoting preventive healthcare, this would be the primary focus of healthcare providers in this scenario. This scenario is the current reality for a significant portion of the country. One author in the Journal of Primary

Care & Community Health writes "Although there is a global recognition of the cost-effectiveness of preventive measures in healthcare practice, a substantial allocation of healthcare resources and attention is still directed toward disease management" (AbdulRaheem, 2023, p. 3). While preventative care is being prioritized more, the focus is still heavily centered on managing diseases while neglecting the many other factors that contribute to effective preventative healthcare. By neglecting these other factors, the healthcare providers in PSJ would leave residents open to other potential healthcare risks, greatly diminishing health equity.



Cesspool

"Preventative care is not a feature of the healthcare industry, which has increasingly become all about the bottom line of profit."

Profit motives in the healthcare world are a major issue. In this scenario, such motives overpower the value of preventative care. Instead of promoting and providing preventative care, the healthcare industry deemphasizes such programs. This trend exists despite the benefits associated with such care. As noted in a CDC report, the financial incentives lead the industry to value treating disease more highly than preventing it (Levine et al., 2019). In a cesspool scenario, this trend is heightened as desire for profit increases. This outcome could be catalyzed by a U.S. Supreme Court case, similar to the recently decided *Xavier Becerra vs. Braidwood Management Inc*., which could have gutted the ability of the Affordable Care Act to mandate preventative care (Ollstein & Gerstein, 2025; Keith et al., 2025). While the court ruled in favor of the mandates, there are still many questions about the ability of any Secretary of Health and Human Services to alter what specific preventive services are mandated (Keith et al., 2025). Without those mandates, the healthcare industry may choose to cut preventative care, resulting in worse economic and health outcomes for residents of PSJ.

ADVOCACY

Advocates in healthcare may work on behalf of patients, communities, or even larger-scale health issues. Advocates can help bridge the connection between a patient and the healthcare system, as well as raise awareness for vulnerable people within the community.

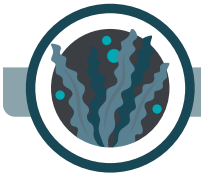


Living Waters

"Health insurance includes funding for healthcare advocates who play a very important role in enhancing both access and quality of care for families and patients."

Healthcare advocates can be seen as crucial roles that serve the public as navigators, ensuring individuals understand their insurance benefits, locate appropriate services, and coordinate their care. John Hopkins

Medicine explains this importance by underlining the idea of someone who is there to help. “Having two people hear the discussion and making sure the patient understands is much better than just one set of ears, since it can be difficult for the patient to remember all the details.” (John Hopkins Medicine, n.d., para 2). This support in times of need is what many people need and is crucial for families to help with the hard decisions that they struggle with in the spur of the moment. This support is especially vital when discussing trends like urban development for unsupported populations who may face additional barriers such as language differences, lack of transportation, or limited health literacy.



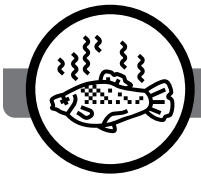
Murky Waters

“Lack of healthcare advocates for patients but current medical personnel/ families can begin to advocate on behalf of patients. Not having advocacy as a full-time focus would make this benefit limited.”

A lack of healthcare advocates for patients can be detrimental. Not having an individual for advocacy as a full-time focus would limit the range of proper healthcare. The absence of dedicated healthcare advocates can significantly impede patients’ ability to navigate the complex medical world. While an immediate family member or close relative can step into the role of an advocate, another issue can arise when these individuals are limited by their primary responsibilities, which may often focus on managing other daily obligations. Because these individuals are not formalized advocates, communication between the doctors, patients and the informal advocates can face additional barriers. Petronio et al. (2004) write in their research

Consequently, relatives and friends present in a clinical visit could have a modifying effect on the communication relationship between a physician and patient. At times, having a friend or relative attending the visit can be positive, while at other times it can complicate relationships between the patient and physician or the patient and family member and friend” (Petronio et al., 2004, p. 35).

In this scenario, the lack of formalized healthcare advocates leaves the value of advocates for residents in a grayer area. Although advocates have many benefits, as shown in the living waters scenario above, the lack of dedicated advocates may create additional complications for the residents who need them most.



Cesspool

“Reduced or limited healthcare advocacy for poor or un/underinsured patients can intensify existing problems in access to care and health outcomes.”

These populations often face significant barriers, including financial constraints, lack of knowledge about available resources, and inadequate access to quality healthcare services. Many times, elderly people who are struggling financially with little to no available family members are the ones who experience this situation the worst. “Without someone to help and watch their health, elderly individuals are more vulnerable to medical emergencies. Minor injuries or health concerns that may be manageable to others can quickly grow into serious

conditions for those without caregiver support. The lack of preventative care or quick emergency response can lead to avoidable accidents and health complications" (Bullough, 2016, para 9). Without immediate access to advocacy, individuals may struggle to navigate the complexities of the healthcare system, leading to missed appointments, unaddressed health issues, and ultimately poorer health outcomes.

SOCIAL DETERMINANTS

According to the Health (In)Equity Assessment "Socioeconomic variables, educational opportunities, healthcare facilities, and systemic bias, all intersect to produce the complex web of health disparities that have affected Port St. Joe" (Johnson et al., 2024, p. 86).



Living Waters

"Social determinants of health are deeply embedded in the healthcare industry, represented by initiatives such as "Health in all policies"."

This incorporation can emphasize how interconnected health is with various sectors, such as housing, education, and transportation, within the urban development of small to large-scale cities. Ultimately, regulating these factors in most fully developed countries can improve the overall healthcare quality. The living waters scenario presents a positive connection between governance and the people. This scenario is in contrast to some places in the world where healthcare is not properly managed. As stated in the scenario, this positive relationship is strongly embodied by the Health in All Policies initiatives. The initiatives have been very successful and have been implemented at state and local levels across the country (American Public Health Association, n.d.). This approach recognizes that health outcomes are not solely determined by clinical care but are significantly influenced by socioeconomic factors and surrounding environmental conditions. By addressing the health of the community more holistically, the access and quality of healthcare available to PSJ residents would dramatically improve in this scenario.

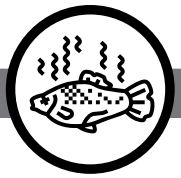


Murky Waters

"Social determinants of health slowly become embedded in the healthcare industry, but the time it takes causes many residents to struggle, in some cases causing individuals to pass away prematurely."

The slow integration of social determinants of health into the healthcare industry poses significant challenges for many residents, particularly those from financially diverse communities. Although factors such as economic stability, access to education, and safe living environments are gradually recognized as critical components of health, the slow pace of change does not acknowledge those that are still dying and in need of immediate health care. It is

very detrimental for these individuals to have to wait out a time lag for their issues to become relevant enough in the public eye for something to change how the industry handles healthcare. This lag will leave many individuals without the support they urgently need. A study published in PubMed central explains how everyday people feel about time lag, stating, “Delays are seen as a waste of scarce resources and a sacrifice of potential patient benefit” (Morris et al., 2011, p. 510). By prioritizing these factors and ensuring that policies reflect a comprehensive approach to health, the industry can better serve communities and help prevent unnecessary suffering and loss of life.



Cesspool

“Structural racism leads to a lack of insurance coverage, making minority groups reliant on Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs) and hospital emergency room visits for basic health care erodes trust in the healthcare system so minority patients stop seeking biomedical care.”

In this scenario structural racism significantly contributes to disparities in healthcare coverage, disproportionately affecting minority groups and forcing many to rely on hospital emergency rooms and Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs) for regular care. The CDC comments on this topic by stating, “Across the country, racial and ethnic minority populations experience higher rates of poor health and disease in a range of health conditions, including diabetes, hypertension, obesity, asthma, and heart disease, when compared to their White counterparts” (CDC, 2024b, para 3). One of the issues that is raised with this is how exclusive, your income cannot be above a certain level, and expensive these trips can be. This ultimately limits the times that people will go to the hospital at all. Many people will wait for a life-threatening venture before going to the hospital because of how financially detrimental these trips are for them. Once their health reaches such a life-threatening state, residents would feel the need to go to the more expensive emergency room, rather than a hospital. This reliance on safety-net services often stems from the aforementioned lack of access to affordable insurance options, leaving these communities vulnerable and underserved. Over time, this distrust can lead minority patients to disengage from seeking necessary biomedical care, exacerbating health disparities and perpetuating a cycle of poor health outcomes (Armstrong et al., 2006).

HEALTH LITERACY

Port St. Joe is a small rural community and because of that, there is less access to specialized healthcare which can make it difficult for residents to understand certain medical issues. Limited healthcare professionals can also hinder healthcare literacy. However, there are solutions to improve healthcare literacy, each with their own costs and benefits.



Living Waters

"Health literacy is taught in schools and free public workshops by the county health department."

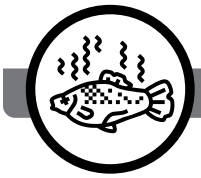
This scenario provides residents with the knowledge needed to understand their medical benefits and conditions. The ability to learn health literacy in schools can help healthcare providers communicate with their patients better and improve their understanding of their conditions, allowing them to better help patients. This scenario is visible across the United States. The CDC lists some of these programs by state, recognizing the considerable variety in how different areas have approached health literacy (CDC, 2024a). The many different approaches include health literacy workshops open to the public, library and school programs, research programs which seek to simplify and disseminate their findings for the public to digest, and even social media campaigns. Each program represents the unique concerns and skillset of the stakeholders involved. There are well-documented harms associated with low health literacy. As noted by the National Action Plan to Improve Health Literacy, "limited health literacy is negatively associated with the use of preventative services..., management of chronic conditions..., and self-reported health. Researchers also found an association between limited health literacy and an increase in preventable hospital visits and admissions" (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2010, p. 9). By implementing similar programs to the ones above in this scenario, PSJ could avoid these negative outcomes, improving the health equity of the community.



Murky Waters

"Availability of health literacy. However, the limited nature of literacy leads to miscommunication and poor relationships between patients and healthcare providers."

In this scenario, there is improved availability of health literacy for patients and providers. But, since literacy is limited, not every health condition is recognized, leading to some missed opportunities for health benefits. While this may help some patients, others are left in the same position as before. This inconsistency in health communication could also breed mistrust of healthcare providers among some residents. This breakdown is supported by research which has found that individuals with lower health literacy were less likely to be trusting of healthcare providers (Chen et al., 2018). Without proper communication and trust between patients and providers, residents in PSJ would likely suffer worse health outcomes. A real-life example of this breakdown in communication can be seen in the Hurricane Katrina disaster and the health communication issues following it in New Orleans. During this disaster, officials struggled to accurately communicate with citizens due to unorganized communication channels (Vanderford et at., 2007). Some individuals did not understand evacuation instructions and as a result, many residents suffered long-term health consequences (Adams et al., 2011). While the issues with communication during the disaster were likely only partially driven by health literacy, the outcomes are still very relevant. Without adequate health literacy investment, this scenario could very well lead to harm for PSJ residents as well.



Cesspool

"Lack of health literacy leads to drops in enrollment in Medicare, Medicaid, and the Affordable Care Act, among others."

Because of a lack of health literacy, many residents will struggle to understand their benefits and eligibility requirements, leading to missed opportunities and often resulting in them not getting the care they need. Research has shown that individuals with lower health literacy are less likely and less able to take advantage of the benefits their insurance offers, including primary care and preventative healthcare services (Yagi et al., 2022). In this scenario, by not investing in health literacy, residents will be less likely to properly utilize the healthcare system to their benefit. Additionally, other research has shown that health literacy is a major factor in deciding how individuals choose plans in programs like Medicare and Medicare advantage (Park et al., 2022). This means that residents in this scenario may also struggle to properly choose insurance plans that actually represent their needs, leaving them potentially underserved even while they are insured.

CONCLUSION

Healthcare access and high-quality healthcare are a necessity for all communities. Places like Port St Joe, a small rural community, show the importance of urban planning and how thoughtful planning can ensure future accessibility to health care. Urban planning not only improves infrastructure but also strengthens communities. Healthcare access depends upon factors including affordability, provision, access to care, insurance, social determinants, and health literacy. To achieve the scenarios stakeholders desire or to avoid the scenarios stakeholders do not desire, a solid plan and a good foundation must be established. By putting the needs of the people first, equitable and efficient urban planning can not only improve healthcare access and quality but also improve transportation, education, and the community, which are all interconnected. Ultimately, equitable planning should ensure communities thrive and not just survive.

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CHAPTER EIGHT:

Disease and Death

Authors: Kolby Harp, Grace Koenders, Lacey Rexroat, & Taylor Smith

INTRODUCTION

The Health (In)Equity Assessment conducted for the city of Port St. Joe analyzed the effects of social inequalities on community health (Johnson et al., 2024); among these disparities were several discoveries related to disproportionate incidences of disease and death among residents of North Port St. Joe (NPSJ) relative to residents in the rest of Port St. Joe. These increased reports of disease and death were attributed to four main factors: health inequities from unjust medical practices, unregulated industry, site contamination, and inadequate access to quality foods. Each of these elements of disease and death can be addressed at varying levels; the intensity and extent of the methods implemented will be direct determinants of the health and well-being of the residents in the future. These channels of change and the scenarios that may unfold in the coming years are discussed below, categorized under the three levels of outcomes: living waters, murky waters, or cesspool.

HEALTH EQUITY

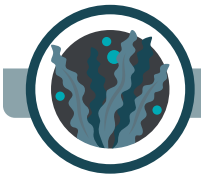
Health equity is described as "the state in which everyone has a fair and just opportunity to attain their highest level of health" (CDC, 2024b, para. 1). Evaluating this definition, health equity strives to remove the obstacles that prevent people from achieving their full health potential. These obstacles can be the social, economic, or environmental factors that affect certain groups of people or certain communities. It requires various approaches that tackle the root causes of health disparities, such as lack of access to care, discrimination, and other negative social determinants of health. Addressing health equity in a community can include policy changes, community-based programs, and healthcare interventions. In Port St. Joe, there is a significant difference in population size between ethnicities, with the ratio of white to black being 7.5 to 1. There are also other significant disparities between populations with regard to all the issues mentioned above, as well as fewer people with high school education and many more emergency room visits and hospitalizations from varying types of chronic diseases and ailments (Florida Health Charts, 2024). In this section, three different scenarios will be addressed and analyzed.



Living Waters

"Focusing on prevention rather than chronic disease management as a result of an increasing emphasis on shealth equity and justice."

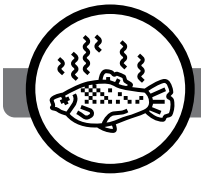
In this living waters scenario, all citizens would have access to similar jobs through adequate education and the provision of equitable health care. This provision, in turn, allows easier access to different doctors with lower copays and similar treatment plans improving access to preventative care. This would not only properly aid and reduce ailments and chronic illnesses, but also potentially reduce the rate of such issues for the residents in the future. Studies show that people with access to education have improved reasoning, effectiveness, knowledge, and a list of other traits that can be utilized to produce health benefits (Mirowski, 2003). With this improvement being emphasized, people would have more time to work, and thus more money, to put towards their futures and could thrive by being more successful in chosen career paths, leading to a better quality of life in general. As of 2022, an average of 90.3% of the white population in Gulf County received a high school diploma versus an average of 76.8% of the black community (Florida Health Charts, 2024). Ideally, more effort and funding would be put towards education in general, as well as teachers who are willing to help lower-income students of color to ensure they have access to equal opportunities as other students from higher-income families. By taking the steps mentioned, graduation rates would increase steadily, and there would be a more diverse workforce active in the community, leading to lower rates of social discrimination and higher annual income, bringing more opportunities and access. By shifting the focus from treatment to prevention, the goal of an overall healthy community would be achieved under this scenario.



Murky Waters

"Epigenetic study/research and longitudinal studies of community health (history) could reveal reasons for disease. However, that information could be used to continually target and harm populations."

In this Murky Waters scenario, epigenetic and longitudinal studies have been able to provide officials with behaviors and environmental factors contributing to disparate disease outcomes. Epigenetics lead to reversible changes in how your body reads and reacts to DNA sequences which makes knowing risk factors crucial (CDC, 2024a). Some of the studies conducted in this scenario would focus on how these changes present themselves, such as birth defects, different types of cancer, and infections like tuberculosis. While studying these reasons may present a way to improve research into aiding and treating residents, this research could also target different demographics in terms of clinical trials and an observed generational mistrust of the healthcare system. The Tuskegee Syphilis Study is a prime example of a clinical trial that fits this criterion. During the trial conducted on 600 African American men, researchers willingly withheld a proven treatment from the patients. Researchers at Tuskegee University studied this case, stating that, "between the start of the study in 1932 and 1947, the date when penicillin was determined to be a cure for the disease, dozens of men had died, and their wives, children, and an untold number of others had been infected" (Tuskegee University, 2024). Such an outcome in Port St. Joe would no doubt lead to increased harm toward residents and a growing mistrust of their healthcare system.



Cesspool

"There will be a greater incidence of disease and death related to willful, and/or intentional perpetuations of health inequities due to structurally racist medical practice and laws and policies."

In this cesspool scenario, many persons of color are still discriminated against even when healthcare is more accessible. Similar to the aforementioned scenario, this discrimination initiates a deeper mistrust in the government and overall healthcare system; "several investigators have found that African Americans are more likely than age-, education-, and gender-matched Whites to believe that research findings will be used to reinforce negative stereotypes about their ethnic group or will expose them to unnecessary risks" (Scharff et al., 2010, p. 880). When compared to findings showing increased epigenetic risk factors, persons of color are more likely to suffer from chronic illnesses, premature death, and barriers to treatment. Even when educational opportunities are increased and there is a push for persons of color to enter healthcare workforces to reduce discrimination by healthcare workers in minority communities, many minority workers face issues of discrimination among their coworkers or superiors. One study conducted on African American nurses in the U.S. showed that many of them felt untrusting of staff they worked with, explaining that they experienced racism in different ways (Hamed et al., 2022). This phenomenon is an issue that does not exist only in the U.S. but happens

all around the world to immigrants compared to native born residents in a community. Due to physicians having the freedom to withhold treatment based on professional judgment calls in many places, this discrimination will remain an underlying sociological issue that can enable this cesspool scenario to be possible.

RETURN OF INDUSTRY

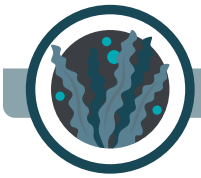
Prior to the St. Joe Paper Mill decommissioning in 1998, the mill discharged large volumes of effluent water into neighboring bodies of water, released volatile organic compounds and particulate matter into the air, and degraded the land with improper disposal of solid waste (Kowu, 2024). In 2023, Port St. Joe fought, and won, against energy company Noperto to strike down the proposal of a liquefied natural gas plant on the former site of the papermill that would have brought more pollution, heavy traffic, and the risk of explosive accidents (Errett et al., 2023). These risks were justified by supporters of the project by an increase in available jobs that turned out to be false. "The project would not have generated publicized job opportunities and it would have amplified the economic and health disparities in the communities" (Kowu, 2024, p. 124). If the liquified natural gas plant proposal had been allowed to come to fruition, the effects could have been disastrous to North Port St. Joe, a community already affected by pollution inequality, low wages, and stagnant industry. However, this return of industry is not improbable in the future, and the nature of such industry can vary under different scenarios.



Living Waters

"Return of a regulated, environmentally friendly, and worker supportive industry will reduce soil contamination and provide gainful employment, livable wages, increased quality of life."

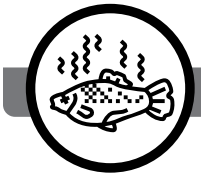
In this living waters scenario, an environmentally friendly and worker-supportive industry reduces soil contamination and provides gainful employment, livable wages, and increased quality of life for the residents of North Port St. Joe – which would benefit Port St. Joe as a whole. Studies show that workers prioritize organizational support and environmentally friendly business practices when seeking employment (Pinna et al., 2020). Workers are also shown to be heavily influenced by their organization's environmental practices and are more likely to feel emotionally fulfilled by an environmentally sustainable company (Saifulina & Carballo-Penela, 2016). Decreased pollution leads to higher productivity for skilled and unskilled workers (Zhang, 2023). Increased productivity leads to higher employee wages, more opportunities for advancement, and economic growth. In PSJ, an environmentally sustainable and worker-supportive industry would lead to livable wages and industry growth for all.



Murky Waters

"Return of a regulated industry but industry might not be environmentally friendly or might not support worker rights."

In this murky waters scenario, regulated industry returns but might not be environmentally friendly or it might not be supportive of worker rights. Workers that are not treated fairly are more likely to experience emotional exhaustion, which decreases sustainability-oriented and social behaviors outside of the workplace (Jahanshahi & Al- Gamrh, 2024). Residents rationalize the pollution produced as a trade-off for industrial growth and economic prosperity. They also fear that more strict pollution regulation will deter future growth (Kowu, 2024). An increase in pollution control often leads to a price increase for goods produced and services rendered. Many industries offset this by lowering wages and decreasing employment, widening the gap between skilled and unskilled workers (Zhang, 2023). Income and environmental impact are positively correlated. Employees with higher incomes can afford to consume more resources and energy at home, thus paying less attention to environmental issues at work (Saifulina & Carballo-Penela, 2016). For the residents of PSJ, a return of industry that is not environmentally friendly or does not support worker rights would not lead to fair wages for unskilled workers and would not solve the city's problems with pollution inequality.



Cesspool

"Return of unregulated environmentally destructive industry will lead to further soil contamination and increased incidence of diseases and possible death."

In this cesspool scenario, return of unregulated and environmentally destructive industry leads to further soil contamination and increased incidence of disease and possible death. In Port St. Joe, the energy company, Nopetro, intended to construct their facility a quarter mile away from the loading dock and transport the liquefied natural gas on trucks. This distance and transportation would have allowed Nopetro to avoid an environmental review and oversight by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (Loeb, 2023). An unregulated industry such as this LNG project would cause further pollution and endanger the residents of NPSJ and thus citizens of PSJ.

TREATMENT OF CONTAMINATED SITES

While the paper mill was operational, it released harmful pollutants into the soil and air, including arsenic, lead, and other toxic substances. According to the Health (In)Equity Assessment, just before the mill closed, arsenic contamination was detected in the surrounding groundwater, which is a crucial drinking water source for many Floridians (Johnson et al., 2024). Data from the Environmental Working Group (EWG), a nonprofit that aims to protect environmental health by educating citizens and promoting change in industry standards,

revealed that arsenic levels in water supplied to residents by the Port St Joe water utility exceeded the EWG health guideline by 29 times (Environmental Working Group, 2024). Additionally, EWG found that five other contaminants exceed EWG health guidelines, including chlorate, haloacetic acids (HAA5 and HAA9), radium, and trihalomethanes (Environmental Working Group, 2024). Arsenic is a known carcinogen linked to various health issues, including skin and liver cancer, nervous system damage, hepatic and hematological disruptions, and even death (Viraraghavan, 2006). More alarmingly, studies indicate that children exposed to these chemicals over long periods face higher risks of mental health problems, decreased intellectual functioning, severe hearing loss, epilepsy, and brain damage (Viraraghavan, 2006). The toxic contaminants in the North Port St. Joe area put residents at a greater risk of severe health issues and mortality. The three possible scenarios that could play out as far as treatment of these contaminated sites is discussed below.

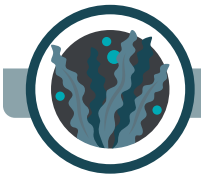


Living Waters

"Advent of new technologies leads to the complete cleanup of contaminated sites, and harmed people are compensated for loss and damages, leading to healthier generations."

In this living waters scenario, new technologies allow the cleanup of contaminated sites, and individuals negatively impacted by the site contamination are compensated for their losses and damages, leading to healthier communities for present and future generations. Some technologies are showing promising results for the remediation of contaminants in groundwater and soil. Groundwater and soil remediation are usually implemented in one or a combination of three ways: physical, chemical, or biological (Sánchez-Castro et al., 2023). There have been successful cases of groundwater remediation in the state of Florida, including the removal of arsenic. In the case of Brighton, Florida, arsenic was removed from groundwater through the promotion of natural bacteria, resulting in a 95% reduction in arsenic levels during a five-month pilot test (Apex Companies, 2023). For soil contamination of heavy metals such as arsenic, physical containment combined with assisted phytoremediation is deemed the most effective in reducing concentrations (Sánchez-Castro et al., 2023). This method combines the containment of polluted soils with the implementation of physical barriers and use of plants as an absorber of heavy metals in soils to remove contaminants. Although these groundwater and soil remediation methods have been successful in some cases, characteristics of the Port St. Joe site may affect the appropriate remediation method. Additionally, these remediation techniques can be costly, resulting in the need for funding to implement them.

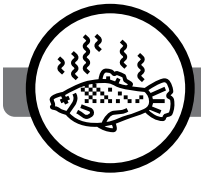
Class action lawsuits have seen some success in compensating individuals exposed to toxic chemicals by industry. Studies have confirmed that due to discriminatory practices, such as racial residential segregation (among others), minority populations and lower-income households are more at risk for toxic chemical exposure (Payne-Sturges et al., 2023). In the case of PSJ, many families have been exposed to toxic chemicals left behind by industrial pollution. In fact, the area now known as North PSJ was built over an underground stream. This land was filled and smoothed over with ash from the paper mill, which may have contained pollutants, and then parceled out and sold to predominantly African American families to build homes (Johnson et al., 2024; Kowu, 2024). In this scenario, these individuals, their descendants, and others exposed to harmful chemicals are represented and compensation is awarded, leading to the ability of these individuals to invest in a healthier and brighter future for themselves and future generations. This funding can allow them to pay for medical bills that may have been incurred due to pollution exposure, invest in better water filtering installations for their homes, and more.



Murky Waters

"Contaminated sites not seeming to cause any further health impacts after cleanup but sites not being used for anything productive and people not being compensated for loss and damages from initial industrial uses."

In this murky waters scenario, contaminated sites no longer pose health risks but remain unused, and individuals remain uncompensated for past industrial use. The former Port St. Joe Kraft Papermill and St. Joe Site Surface Impoundment are listed as Brownfield sites (Florida Department of Environmental Protection, 2022). The parties listed as responsible for the remediation of the sites are Stone Container Corporation and the St. Joe Company, which owned the parcels of land listed at the time of designation (Florida Department of Environmental Protection, 2002). Since the designation of the sites, little action has taken place to restore the sites properly. Although Brownfield designations are an important tool in environmental management, it is essential to note that the ultimate goal of brownfield site cleanup is redevelopment, not only cleanup and compensation.. In this murky waters scenario, the site remains as is after cleanup, fenced off and unused for any significant purpose, serving only as an unbeneficial eye-sore for community members. Further, it contributes to the large swaths of unused developed land instead of being used for an environmentally friendly industry that can provide jobs or serve as a community center, park, or other land use that is beneficial to the surrounding community. Additionally, the community and those affected by exposure to toxic chemicals from previous industrial uses remain un-compensated, leaving them financially and physically disparaged due to the physical and financial harm that chemical exposure can incur.



Cesspool

"Contaminated sites will continue to pollute flora, fauna, and the food sources and result in disease and death from contact and/or consumption."

In this cesspool scenario, contaminated sites continue to have adverse effects on both people and the environment, leading to disease and death from contact or consumption. This scenario is not difficult to imagine when there are well-documented cases of the harms to human health and the environment that already exist from pollutants found within and around the former mill site (Johnson et al., 2024). Arsenic is a known carcinogen linked to various health issues, including skin and liver cancer, nervous system damage, hepatic and hematological disruptions, and even death (Viraraghavan, 2006). Although the level of arsenic in the drinking water supplied to NPSJ residents meets federal standards, studies have been completed that suggest more stringent health guidelines are necessary in the interest of protecting human health (Environmental Working Group, 2024). For children in the area, this scenario is even bleaker. Since children are smaller, the consumption of contaminated water, even at lower concentrations, can have severe impacts on their health, including a heightened risk of hearing loss, mental health issues, epilepsy, and brain damage (Viraraghavan, 2006). Research has shown that it is not uncommon for minority or marginalized communities to bear the greatest impact of damage from chemical exposure (Payne-Sturges et al., 2023). Without cleanup or compensation, environmental

injustices are allowed to continue, putting families and children at risk. In this cesspool scenario, the NPSJ community is continually exposed to harmful chemicals that proceed to negatively impact their health and contribute to higher rates of death and disease. Such an outcome is inequitable for all of PSJ.

ACCESS TO HEALTHY FOODS

The Health (In)Equity Assessment states that living in a food desert can impact people's health (Johnson et al., 2024). Food deserts, as defined by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, are areas where people have limited access to a variety of healthy and affordable foods (Dutko et al., 2012); these sites are often characterized by households with low incomes, inadequate public transportation, and few retailers of fresh produce and healthy groceries at affordable prices (Dutko et al., 2012). A lack of access to quality foods accounts for more than 35% of fatalities worldwide, and overwhelming evidence links chronic diseases, which account for nearly 90% of deaths in the U.S., to inappropriate diet consumption and physical inactivity (Galhena et al., 2013; Roberts & Barnard, 2005; Schmidt, 2016). Diets with increased intake of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, seeds, and nuts reduce the risk of noncommunicable diseases, including cardiovascular disease and cancer (Hellas & Calder, 2020). In the city of Port St. Joe, limited access to these quality foods hinders the ability of residents to adequately nourish themselves, placing them at increased risk of disease development. Three shops within the city offer fresh fruits and vegetables to the community, albeit with limited variety and few transportation options available to access them (Johnson et al., 2024). The possible futures of access to healthy foods under each of the three scenarios are explored below.

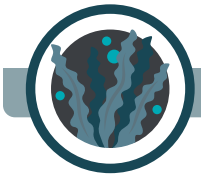


Living Waters

"Reduced disease and death due to safe, affordable, and easy access (home grown, farmers markets etc.) to healthy foods (fresh fruits and vegetables) and also as a result of more regulation on fast foods."

In this living waters scenario, safe, affordable, and easily accessible healthy foods and concurrent regulations on fast food leads to reduced disease and death in the residents of NPSJ and thus reduce healthy food access inequality in all of Port St. Joe. When sources of fresh foods, such as markets and grocery stores, are introduced to a food desert, residents' economic well-being and health improve (Richardson et al., 2017). Studies analyzing the impact of the addition of supermarkets to low-income neighborhoods lacking accessible options show reductions in food insecurity, increases in income, and overall improvements in dietary quality that the control neighborhoods did not experience (Richardson et al., 2017; Cantor, 2020); specifically, declines in the intake of added sugars, total kilocalories, and the percentage of daily calories from fats and alcoholic beverages are observed (Dubowitz, 2015; Cantor, 2020). The result of these dietary changes following the introduction of sources of healthy food is profound: after supermarkets open, fewer diagnoses of conditions such as high cholesterol, arthritis, and diabetes ensue (Richardson et al., 2017). Similarly, the development of community and home gardens will increase the availability, accessibility, and utilization of food products, as studies in similar food deserts demonstrate (Galhena et al., 2013). Beyond their alleviation of malnutrition and hunger, local gardens will also help fulfill the social, cultural, and economic needs of residents (Galhena et al., 2013). The availability of these affordable food sources to residents of NPSJ will be followed by improvements in resident health and well-

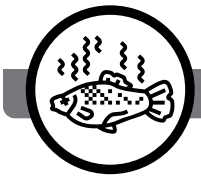
being. While food accessibility is enhanced, simultaneous implementation of additional fast-food regulations will improve resident knowledge and lead to healthier dietary choices. The use of land use planning and restrictive zoning of fast-food establishments will prevent the inundation of convenience food outlets in the city, instead allowing room for the development of healthier grocery options. These land use interventions will offer protection to public health, safety, and welfare and have been defendable as constitutional in cities where restrictive zoning is utilized (Spacht, 2009). Where fast food locations do exist in the city, menu labeling regulations that require calorie totals and nutritional information to be reported to customers will improve consumer knowledge of caloric intake; and when faced with this information, customers are proven to adjust their food selections and consumer fewer calories than those who were not provided with this information (Dumanovsky, 2011). These regulations, in conjunction with improved access to other affordable, healthy options, improve the health and well-being of residents of NPSJ and reduce healthy food inequality in all of PSJ.



Murky Waters

"Reduced disease and death due to increased intake of fresh fruits and vegetables (not necessarily safe, affordable or easily accessible) but no concurrent regulation on fast foods."

In this murky waters scenario, increased intake of healthy foods, though not necessarily affordable or easily accessible, without concurrent regulations on fast food leads to a slight reduction in disease and death in the residents of NPSJ and thus a slight reduction in healthy food inequality in PSJ. Reviews of the relationship between fruit and vegetable intake and the risk of chronic diseases show that high daily intake of these quality foods promote health (Boeing, 2012). However, with a surplus of fast-food options present, residents will often choose the more convenient, less expensive option. Despite the detriment of fast food on a person's health, consumers will often select this option due to the fact that convenience foods tend to be less expensive and quicker, allowing meals to be consumed in accordance with time constraints resulting from responsibilities such as jobs or childcare. When children are involved, fast food options are often the preferred meal avenue, with studies showing that households with children purchase 19% more fast-food meals than those without children (Rahkovsky, 2018). Additionally, a lack of regulations on fast food menus will hinder consumers' ability to select healthier food options, preventing significant dietary improvements; when only exposed to subtle integrated health information on menus, consumers are shown to be less likely to choose a healthy food product (Folkvord, 2020). For residents of NPSJ, an increase in healthy food consumption will improve health, but be limited due to shortcomings elsewhere - thus hampering the possibility for a holistic reduction in healthy food inequality in PSJ.



Cesspool

"Greater increase of disease and death due to continuing trends of poor health outcomes as a result of the proliferation of fast foods."

In this cesspool scenario, increases of disease and death plague the residents of NPSJ due to the proliferation of fast foods. The current number of fast-food restaurants in the city, a number already double that of grocery stores (Johnson et al., 2024), will increase with no regulations imposed, while the number of markets providing quality foods will remain stagnant. As a result of increased fast-food consumption, poor dietary patterns will be exacerbated, harming the health and well-being of residents. Namely, lower consumption of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and dairy products paired with higher intakes of carbonated soft drinks and sweets will adversely affect resident health (Jaworowska, 2013). As the frequency of visits to these convenient food options increases, increases in body weight and insulin resistance, the two major risk factors for type 2 diabetes, will also threaten the well-being of the community (Pereira, 2005). Because of the role that food plays in the development and prevention of diseases, the lack of meaningful action and subsequent regressive dietary changes will impact the health of those in NPSJ in detrimental ways, furthering community hardships and increasing overall healthy food inequality in PSJ.

CONCLUSION

This chapter builds upon the Health (In)Equity Assessment conducted for PSJ. Outlined are "Living Waters," "Murky Waters," and "Cesspool" scenarios in areas that impact the rates of death and disease of NPSJ residents and the health equity in all of PSJ. Without intervention, the cesspool scenarios described in this chapter reflect the current trajectory PSJ will follow. Stakeholders of the health equity system in PSJ must decide which of the outlined possible scenarios they want to experience, and from that choice, must work to achieve the scenarios they want and/or work to prevent the scenarios they do not. Local and state actors have the ability to shape the community that surrounds them and impact the health of their neighbors, friends, and families. No matter which route they chose, it is certain that the incidence of disease and death in residents of PSJ will be a direct reflection of the actions they take to address the health equity, return of industry, treatment of contaminated sites, and access to healthy foods within this community.

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CHAPTER NINE:

Conclusion

Author: Jordan Harrison

This report represents a continuation of the Port St. Joe community's efforts to recognize and address the historic health inequities which exist within its communities. The environmental injustices that have plagued the city, and especially the community of North Port St. Joe have continued to persist into present day, perpetuating these inequalities. Without the contributions and participation of the many stakeholders invested in the Port St. Joe community, this report would not have been possible. By asking residents and stakeholders to envision their own community's future, stakeholders have been able to express and map the direction of their community. The scenarios envisioned by the community of Port St. Joe are extremely probable, with some already taking effect. However, as this research report has demonstrated, the residents of Port St. Joe are not alone in their struggles. There are many communities who are fighting or have fought the same battles as Port St. Joe. By drawing upon this body of knowledge and experience, any scenario can be attained or avoided for the community. Ultimately, this report can only substantiate the validity of these scenarios. The voices and decisions of residents will be the key factor that truly decides Port St. Joe's future.

Community engagement, access to affordable and safe housing, widespread educational opportunities, strong transportation infrastructure, and equitable healthcare systems are all key components of a living waters future for Port St. Joe. Additionally, by encouraging civic participation, promoting environmental remediation is prioritized, and ensuring that governance is transparent, the community of Port St. Joe would ensure that they are able to address historic inequalities and reach a living waters future. However, if there is continued inaction, a lack of collaboration, and a suppression of community voices, the community could easily move towards a cesspool scenario. A cesspool scenario at this stage of Port St. Joe's future would only maintain and worsen the injustice within the community. Regardless of which scenarios residents seek to pursue, it is crucial that residents continue to collaborate and voice their concerns for their future. By presenting the scenarios created by stakeholders with supportive research, this report hopes to aid residents and stakeholders in making and promoting their decisions about their future.

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The work that produced this report was supported by a grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation No. 80862, “Interdisciplinary Research Leaders (IRL) Program: Using Transformative Scenario-Planning in North Port St. Joe, Fla., to Address Structural Racism in Health.” The IRL program also supported our consultation with Reos Partners - the pioneers of the transformative scenarios process which was the core methodology for this project - specifically our conversation with Brenna Atnikov early on in the project which helped focus and foreground our work on the principles of transformative scenarios. We are also grateful to all University of West Florida students (current and former) who worked on course projects related to this project between 2023 and 2024. We particularly want to thank Chris Bickham (who drafted the scenario text) and Jordan Harrison (who was the primary editor of this report) for their monumental work in streamlining the collective consciousness of so many voices. We are also grateful to all the individuals who served as facilitators and/or research assistants for the workshops specifically: Abby Vidmar, Amanda Post, Akosua (Nana) Duah, Bright Nyameasem, Chase Walsh, Chris Bickham, Josiah Tawiah, Kaylin Colvin-Reece, and Nelson Kowu. We want to thank Dr. Deanna Wathington in particular for so graciously and thoughtfully facilitating our second workshop in February 2024, in which we finalized the construction of the scenarios with an eye towards dissemination. Finally, and most importantly, we are grateful to all the Transformative Scenario Planning workshop participants and the citizens of North Port St. Joe for their support of and assistance with constructing these scenarios. This work exists because of, and for, you and we hope that the scenarios you have envisioned will enable you collectively transform the future of Port St. Joe for the good of all its citizens.

Dannie Bolden, Christian Wells, and Kwame Owusu-Daaku. Interdisciplinary Research Leaders Program Fellows (Cohort Seven: 2022-2025).

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APPENDIX A:

Full Scenario Table

Author: Chris Bickham

		STATES OF TRANSFORMATION		
		SCENARIO 1 	SCENARIO 2 	SCENARIO 3 
CHANNELS OF CHANGE	COMMUNITY VOICE	Dissenting ideologies are encouraged while only obscenity is filtered on community social media accounts. This encouragement reaches a wider audience of citizens potentially resulting in outcomes such as increased voter turnout and engagement on official community accounts	Individual voices/ social media posts are tolerated instead of a community social media handle/ account. Multiple accounts spreading fake news and also suppression of voices that provide points of departure or new lines of questioning	Community social media account which does not tolerate dissenting opinions. Community voice slowly stagnates/ dissipates over time, and eventually disappears due to a lack of diversity of opinion.
		Influx of new residents leads to the breaking down of the "Good Ole Boy" network[3]	Influx of new residents could suggest different ways of relating and establish new order - or these residents could find their places in the existing order and continue with "business as usual"	Influx of corporate interests or influence/power could lead to silencing of community voices. New residents come with same race/socioeconomic class separatist agenda or their own agenda Members of the " Good Ole Boy" network1 pass the mentality/mindset on to their children causing the network to persist
		Leaching contaminants into St. Joseph's Bay may force more community voices into action	Remediation of land without resident displacement may satisfy some resident voices but may also give governance an opportunity to claim no one has any cause for complain	Awareness of contamination leads to residents moving away and a diminishing of community voice

3 A situation in which power is hoarded by a small group of wealthy men with similar social and educational backgrounds who act in the best interest of one another's business and personal matters. For example, a job position which allows whoever fills the role to make a large impact on their community will most often be given to an applicant who bears a familial or social relationship to other members in the informal network.

STATES OF TRANSFORMATION				
		SCENARIO 1 	SCENARIO 2 	SCENARIO 3 
CHANNELS OF CHANGE	COMMUNITY VOICE	Education and community activism without a crisis to induce action	Hurricane Michael or another significant event such as opposition to an Liquified Natural Gas (LNG) plant brings the community together. However post the event, community remains divided/ separate	Community never recovers after a hurricane or extreme weather event. Pollution of biophysical environment due to opposed developments, causes exodus of residents and discourages settlement of new residents to area
		Welcome committee to encourage residents to be involved in activities	Welcome committee struggles to find members willing to spend time encouraging residents	With no welcome committee at all, residents are disconnected with the activities and issues prevalent in their community. Causing difficulty in the ability to use community voice for enacting change
		Current generation is continually involved with the movement to instill change in their community, and increases the quality of life in their community by addressing the historical and localized structural racism and health inequities in the community.	While the current generation is actively involved, they are unable to cause meaningful change in spite of their best efforts. The movement remains but numbers dwindle and the current generation struggles to maintain the movement.	Current generation is not actively involved, causing stagnation of momentum/ progress and the continuity of the movement to address localized structural racism and health inequities in the community .
		Citizen engagement through collaboration becomes the norm due to support from the local government. The local government is responsive to the needs voiced by citizens and makes steps to implement change based on citizen input.	Citizen engagement increases as a result of grassroots efforts. However this increases experiences setbacks due to either local governance intimidation/retaliation, apathy or pressures of life	Residents who speak up are threatened. State workers and some categories of residents cannot speak out because of their roles, or feel the need to stay politically neutral instead of taking an explicit stance on issues. Hence community voice is stifled.
	NEIGHBORHOOD AND BUILT ENVIRONMENT	Identification of brownfield sites and increased environmental regulation will lead to improved environmental management and thus to improved neighborhood conditions due to the discovery of contaminants and the liability to clean up.	The knowledge of past and possibility of more contaminated sites could also either cause further blight, thus leading to more socio economic downturn; or provide more funding for clean up, thus creating opportunities for redevelopment	More contaminated sites are identified, reducing gardening potential. Buildings will have to be destroyed and rebuilt at St. Joe's cost since they sold the land or people will continue to live on contaminated land
		The cleanup of brownfields allow for better land reuse through the improvement of infrastructure	Brownfields will be cleaned up yet remain unused, allowing the possible return of industry- which may either bring increased economic activity or further drive health inequity.	Brownfields will remain uncleaned (i.e. contaminants completely removed instead of capped) causing leakage into soil and groundwater.

STATES OF TRANSFORMATION				
		SCENARIO 1 	SCENARIO 2 	SCENARIO 3 
CHANNELS OF CHANGE	NEIGHBORHOOD AND BUILT ENVIRONMENT	New housing development with less restrictions allows for new housing to be built quickly	Less restrictions for new housing development and the ability for faster building results in poor planning and design.	New housing development is not governed by federal regulations leading to public health and safety concerns as developers operate without regulations. Greater likelihood that developments will have adverse impacts on the environment. Eg; new development causes stormwater runoff to carry sediment into neighboring lands and bodies of water
		Affordable housing is built with ample availability for residents who are surviving on fixed incomes/living paycheck to paycheck. Housing is located in a central area with access to resources such as groceries, hospitals, etc.	Community supportive Commercial & Residential Development happens but is slow - still reducing Quality of Life from unavoidable increases in costs of living for current residents due to neighborhood improvements	Volatile market could lead to worsening housing crisis, influx of new residents, causing gentrification and continued segregation
		The government issues revitalization initiatives, giving grants to those who renovate historical/dilapidated homes	The government uses power of eminent domain to buy individuals out of their foreclosed or defaulted property, but such a buyout may cause mass displacement and possibly lead to gentrification	Taxes not paid/properties condemned and a loss of property due to non-cleared titles leading to blight, further economic downturn, and a further loss of community vitality.
		Low crime rate could help increase integration of neighborhoods by slowly decreasing the stigma associated with living on “the other side of the tracks.” if higher income individuals moving into NPSJ are respectful and honoring of the community’s history	Low crime rate could influence an increase in the integration of city neighborhoods and could bolster the local economy, in-turn increasing business trade in NPSJ. However, some current residents could be priced out of their homes, becoming displaced due to gentrification of their community as a result of an improved local economy.	Low crime rate brings influx of higher income individuals from outside the community. Resulting in displacement and gentrification of long term Black residents and thus a disintegration of the primarily Black neighborhood
		Improved sidewalks, lighting and also legally enforcing speed limits (on Avenue A which is a divert road for Highway 71) could lead to a higher quality of life by increasing access to necessities for residents in addition to providing a sense of security when walking through the town. Thus, improving quality of life through increased access and pedestrian/cyclist safety on roadways.	Speed limits are enforced but no maintenance or improvement for sidewalks leads to increased health risks for residents and lack of access to necessary resources such as medicine, groceries, and general health services.	No improvement in sidewalks and no speed limit enforced. Quality of life continues to diminish.

STATES OF TRANSFORMATION				
		SCENARIO 1 	SCENARIO 2 	SCENARIO 3 
CHANNELS OF CHANGE	NEIGHBORHOOD AND BUILT ENVIRONMENT	Justified appropriation of public funding is delegated to programs which community members have been vocal about their desire for. Leading to an increase in the quality of life and access to resources	Public Funding is hoarded by local government sitting on their hands rather than working to distribute funding appropriately by listening to community members input	Public funds are misused by local governments and benefits outside industry/entities who displace locals/local businesses.
		Water supply system is fixed without an inordinate rise in water bills	Water supply cleanup reveals more issues with groundwater contamination. Cleanup could lead to increased water bills	Residents leave for their health impacts from a poor water supply. Those who stay develop health issues. Difficulty bringing new residents to town due to water quality issues. Town faces further blight, and the economy suffers without a workforce.
		External community voices and internal voices of new employees at the St. Joe Company propel the Company to give out more land to the community, enabling the expansion of the community garden. Community garden also receives more financial support from others A Farmacy also returns to the community (i.e. a fresh fruit and vegetables store)	More residents become involved with the community garden. However community garden may not be able to become self-sufficient from a lack of funding which will minimize the ability to increase garden acreage. Residents will attempt backyard gardening as a support to small community garden acreage. However, soil from backyard gardens is still contaminated and residents may be unaware. Over time, residents consuming the food they grow will develop adverse health effects resulting from eating contaminated food.	Community garden becomes abandoned due to a lack of financial and volunteer support, increasing the cost of fruits and vegetables for residents, worsening the current food desert-which will be exacerbated by the closure of the fresh fruit and vegetables store - the Farmacy.
		Increase in homeownership and retention of ownership as a result of empowerment of community on home ownership, title/taxes and how to acquire housing financing.	Increase in home ownership education and access increases development and property values, attracting new residents. However this increase could lead to gentrification	Decreased education and motivation for home ownership leads to younger people exiting the community. This exodus could lead to a further loss of a sense of community.

STATES OF TRANSFORMATION				
		SCENARIO 1 	SCENARIO 2 	SCENARIO 3 
CHANNELS OF CHANGE	TRANSPORTATION	Involvement of the city improves transportation to meet the needs of the city - connected to the amplification of citizen voices , the economic activities and Hurricane Emergency and Traffic Management plans like rerouting of vehicular traffic	Transportation is vulnerable due to rising fuel cost and inadequate (number of) personnel. This stalls any possible attempts to improve transportation such as a public shuttle service or changes to infrastructure.	Transportation system may get worse and people may not even patronize. The Gulf Transportation system ceases to exist.
		An affordable and accessible public shuttle service that makes rounds/loop around and through PSJ to improve upon the Gulf Transportation system which is only for health-related appointments. Broaden it to address transportation needs. Example: resident desire to be able to get to Panama City (beyond just monthly service for senior citizens) - would help determine demand.	Increased quote for Gulf County Transportation, will depend on taxes and number of residents, because currently, due to scheduling issues, people have to wake up early to be picked up and also have to wait long hours to be picked up	People are continually forced to depend on friends and family for their daily transportation, even for the most basic necessities
		An energy transition (improved and environmentally friendly energy sources), will result in improved transportation. Under such a transition, there will be an E-bike voucher program with ADA accessible bikes for residents to apply for and economic opportunity for a bike shop	Tax incentives to switch to eco-friendly cars and fuels or an increased tax for using fossil fuel but with very little options for public transportation, this may likely burden residents that cannot switch.	City does nothing about electric vehicles, energy efficient options, family members continue to have to provide transportation for family/friends.
		Enough bus drivers and buses for students of all ages, where busing is separate between age groups so young students aren't on the same bus as older students. Safety for students insured while they wait for bus (shade coverage and sidewalk)	Increased number of personnel. However, not to the point where they can separate students of all ages because school bus drivers are also community bus drivers.	Current situation where bus drivers declining, and students of all ages are grouped together on school buses continues and only gets worse School bus transportation system may get worse, because it has reduced this school year (2023/2024) from 4 to 3 buses No safety improvements for students waiting and riding on the bus in this scenario
		Construction of a regional airport could improve access to and from PSJ for all residents and bring people and business to all parts of the city.	Construction of an airport - but, far from NPSJ, not accessible for everyday people who want to take a flight	A private airport is constructed, with millionaires being the predominant users as properties are bought up and developed by transplants or "snowbirds" who leave their properties vacant a majority of the year. . The cost of living becomes unaffordable for longtime residents. Structural racism continues through the gentrification of NPSJ

STATES OF TRANSFORMATION				
		SCENARIO 1 	SCENARIO 2 	SCENARIO 3 
CHANNELS OF CHANGE	EDUCATION ACCESS AND QUALITY	Education disparity gap will close due to more educational opportunities for current K-12 students and their parents leading to greater educational attainment for all	Based on talks of a high school being built between PSJ and Wewahitchka, a new high school could reduce class sizes because the new school is projected to exceed the capacities of both current high schools. However this new school could imply the closure of both current high schools and cause social unrest.	Educational infrastructure does not improve and current conditions persist
		The advent of online education dramatically increases education access. Mentors and educators have a higher quality of life due to their ability to work remote/hybrid in order to reach more students than they previously were	The advent of Online education may increase access. However this access may not ensure the quality of education provided due to a difference in quality control compared to in-person education.	Online education causes students to feel disengaged, and they mentally check out as they feel they are not able to engage with fellow students or teachers in a truly meaningful and personal experience. Student grades drop and the amount of students finishing high school diminishes
		The community sees an overhaul in the school board, providing the opportunity for new members who want to instill change in the quality of education with students needs coming first	Even though the current school board composition changes, members who wish to enact change are impeded by the status quo and management above them. Some changes could be made but the quality of education might still be less than it could be	Current school board composition and ideology that is not supportive of equity stays the same and very little to nothing changes for educational outcomes. The board also censors those who seek change
		Mentorship and educational programming will increase due to increased funding opportunities	Mentorship and educational programming receives some funding, but is still not enough to create a meaningful change	Mentorship and educational programming receive no additional funding and may even see funding cuts, causing a downward spiral in educational quality and impedes the next generation's ability to realize their true potential.
		Requirement, support, and inclusion of more African American teachers in major (decision-making) educational roles provides increased motivation and role modeling for students leading to higher graduation rate	There is an increased recruitment of African American teachers into qualified positions and roles. However, these teachers are not supported and not retained - creating a revolving door system	Historical truth of racial differences manipulated to further racial divide by teachers who deny structural racism

STATES OF TRANSFORMATION				
		SCENARIO 1 	SCENARIO 2 	SCENARIO 3 
CHANNELS OF CHANGE	SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONTEXT AND TRENDS	Increased funding to support cleanup activities and also to provide jobs training for the residents of NPSJ which would reduce employment inequity in all of Port St. Joe.	Some funding from the state/ city to support jobs training but apathy among residents may cause the loss of some of that funding to support jobs training	No community support and widespread apathy. The North Port St. Joe Community Development Corporation gets no further funding to support jobs training
		Economic growth (return of sustainable and equitable industry, business, and jobs) in which all sections of the city benefit equally, coupled with increased representation in decision making, investment in innovation	Equitable but Unsustainable economic growth, therefore not all residents can continually benefit from economic growth, and workplace inequality will persists	Inequitable economic growth further divides the community and discrimination persists.
		Social capital building that benefits all segments of the society. This social capital building will include a focus on homeownership education and financial discipline.	Residents benefit from economic prosperity but are unable to make good financial decisions because of a system structured to prevent black and brown individuals from accessing resources which could improve their financial literacy. With technological improvements or in case businesses fold up again, residents are back to being impoverished	No education, no social safety nets, and blight continues.
	HEALTHCARE ACCESS AND QUALITY	Economic growth (e.g., improved jobs and infrastructure) results in increased access to quality healthcare and specialized medical options.	Healthcare becomes more accessible (in number of options), however no increase in affordability/still remains expensive for low income families. A select few can afford to pay thus most families will only use facilities in extreme need.	Healthcare becomes more expensive and less accessible for residents. Healthcare becomes a high proportion of household expenses so people have to choose rent or food over healthcare
		Greater access to care due to improved telehealthcare, mobile (and “pop up”) healthcare clinics, and other novel forms of engaged care and precision medicine	Business owners provide limited and/or ideologically driven support for health insurance	Health care provision is no longer a responsibility for employers but a premium which residents opt out of
		Healthcare providers are attracted to the community, providing greater opportunities/ options for healthcare and lower costs due to competition	Current healthcare providers may increase options (i.e. specialists). However, due to lack of competition from a multitude of providers-this increase in options are not affordable	Healthcare providers continue to leave the community, making it harder to get appointments, and medical care The community becomes a “healthcare desert”/medically underserved community

STATES OF TRANSFORMATION				
		SCENARIO 1 	SCENARIO 2 	SCENARIO 3 
CHANNELS OF CHANGE	HEALTHCARE ACCESS AND QUALITY	The government subsidizes and encourages preventative health care practices because they support job growth and economic stability	Preventative care is a feature but options are limited, with increasing focus on disease management	Preventative care is not a feature of the healthcare industry, which becomes increasingly all about the bottom line of profit
		Health insurance includes funding for healthcare advocates who play a very important role in enhancing both access and quality of care for families and patients.	Lack of healthcare advocates for patients but current medical personnel/families can begin to advocate on behalf of patients. Not having advocacy as a full time focus would make this benefit limited.	Reduced/limited healthcare advocacy for poor or un/underinsured patients can intensify existing problems in access to care and health outcomes.
		Social determinants of health are embedded in the healthcare industry, represented by initiatives such as “health in all policies”.	Social determinants of health slowly become embedded in the healthcare industry, but the time it takes causes many residents to struggle, in some cases causing individuals to pass away prematurely	Structural racism leads to lack of insurance coverage, making minority groups reliant on Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs) and hospital emergency room visits for basic health care erodes trust in health care system so minority patients stop seeking biomedical care
		Health literacy is taught in schools and free public workshops by the county health department	Availability of health literacy. However the limited nature of literacy leads to miscommunication and poor relationships between patients and health care providers	Lack of health literacy leads to drops in enrollment in medicare, medicaid, and the Affordable Care Act, among others.
	DISEASE AND DEATH	Focusing on prevention rather than chronic disease management as a result of increasing emphasis on health equity and justice	Epigenetic study/ research and longitudinal studies of community health (history) could reveal reasons for disease. However, that information could be used to continually target and harm populations	There will be a greater incidence of disease and death related to willful, and/or intentional perpetuations of health inequities due to structurally racist medical practice and laws and policies
		Return of a regulated, environmentally friendly, and worker supportive industry will reduce soil contamination and provide gainful employment, livable wages, increased quality of life	Return of a regulated industry but industry might not be environmentally friendly or might not support worker rights	Return of unregulated environmentally destructive industry will lead to further soil contamination and increased incidence of diseases and possible death
		Advent of new technologies leading to complete cleanup of contaminated sites, and harmed people being compensated for loss and damages, leading to healthier generations	Contaminated sites not seeming to cause any further health impacts after cleanup but sites not being used for anything productive and people not being compensated for loss and damages from initial industrial uses	Contaminated sites will continue to pollute flora, fauna, and food sources and result in disease and death from contact and/or consumption
		Reduced disease and death due to safe, affordable, and easy access (home grown, farmers markets etc.) to healthy foods (fresh fruits and vegetables) and also as a result of more regulation on fast foods	Reduced disease and death due to increased intake of fresh fruits and vegetables (not necessarily safe, affordable or easily accessible) but no concurrent regulation on fast foods	Greater increase of disease and death due to continuing trends of poor health outcomes as a result of the proliferation of fast foods

APPENDIX B:

Scenario Outcomes Visualized



Future scenarios that restore justice



Future scenarios that recognize an issue but take minimal action and/or maintain status quo



Future scenarios that deepen inequity and injustice

SCENARIO SUMMARY VIDEOS PLAYLIST

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6NRZ6wE8W7Q&list=PLIsyI2r_KOvLZVbqgClAZ9XhE_7EEkdfm&index=1

APPENDIX C:

Strategic Plan

PARTICIPANTS REFLECTED ON THE SCENARIOS THEY WANTED TO ENACT AND DRAFTED A STRATEGIC PLAN WITH THE FOLLOWING GOALS AND OBJECTIVES:

GOAL 1: To have a thriving business community along Martin Luther King (MLK) Blvd that provides quality economic opportunities (e.g., good jobs, needed businesses) to NPSJ residents

- **OBJECTIVE 1:** Update the NPSJ Master Plan to reflect Living Waters scenarios (through community meetings and stakeholder review)
    - *Resources:* ABCA (Analysis of Brownfield Cleanup Alternatives) funding in the current Brownfields Assessment Grant (ends 2026)
    - *Responsibility:* NPSJ Community Development Corporation (CDC), NPSJ Project Area Coalition (CDC)
- **OBJECTIVE 2:** Obtain "Brownfield Area" designation for properties along MLK Blvd (have a community conversation about the designation) through a vote by the city council/a city-wide vote
    - *Resources:* To Be Determined (TBD)
    - *Responsibility:* NPSJ CDC
- **OBJECTIVE 3:** Conduct a current economic market assessment for NPSJ to learn about needs and business gaps/opportunities
    - *Resources:* Gulf County (GC) Economic Development Coalition, GC Tourist Development Council (TDC), Opportunity Florida, Florida's Great Northwest, 2021 Economic Opportunity Study of (North) Port St. Joe
    - *Responsibility:* NPSJ PAC & CDC, Gulf County, City of Port St. Joe
- **OBJECTIVE 4:** Improve critical infrastructures along MLK Blvd
    - *Resources:* Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds, Tax Increment Financing (TIF) or Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA) loans against anticipated TIF revenue, Florida Commerce (formerly Department of Economic Opportunity) CDBG program and other grants
    - *Responsibility:* NPSJ CDC, Gulf County, City of Port St. Joe
- **OBJECTIVE 5:** Implement (a) streetscape design (competition) with traffic calming to improve safety
    - *Resources:* TBD
    - *Responsibility:* TBD

GOAL 2: To have attainable, high-quality housing for all NPSJ residents

- **OBJECTIVE 1:** Pursue land grants, land banking and other equitable ways to (re)distribute ownership of and/or access to land
    - *Resources:* TBD
    - *Responsibility:* TBD

- **OBJECTIVE 2:** Clear titles and deeds, create wills, and probate estates in order to ensure families own their properties
    - *Resources:* (Pro Bono Assistance from) Legal Services of North Florida
    - *Responsibility:* NPSJ PAC & CDC
- **OBJECTIVE 3:** Host housing workshops to educate residents and homeowners about credit, and/or improving housing stock
    - *Resources:* Florida Housing Finance Corporation (specifically their State Housing Initiatives Partnership [SHIP] Program), Florida Housing Coalition
    - *Responsibility:* NPSJ CDC, Gulf County, City of Port St. Joe
- **OBJECTIVE 4:** Weatherize, and improve resilience of, housing
    - *Resources:* Florida Commerce Community Services & CDBG programs
    - *Responsibility:* NPSJ CDC, Gulf County, City of Port St. Joe
- **OBJECTIVE 5:** Eliminate the existence of slumlords and educate tenants on their rights
    - *Resources:* Florida Housing Finance Corporation, Florida Housing Coalition
    - *Responsibility:* NPSJ CDC, Gulf County, City of Port St. Joe

GOAL 3: To have an accountable and responsive local (i.e., city, county, school board) government

- **OBJECTIVE 1:** Conduct a power analysis or stakeholder mapping exercise of local government (i.e. who makes up the government, how does government work, how effective is the government etc)
    - *Resources:* TBD
    - *Responsibility:* TBD
- **OBJECTIVE 2:** Ensure accountability and transparency in the political and election process (get to know candidates when they are running office, require candidates to visit the community and attend community town hall meetings, ask candidates to commit to transparency and hold them accountable to this commitment if they are elected)
    - *Resources:* TBD
    - *Responsibility:* NPSJ PAC
- **OBJECTIVE 3:** Ensure elected officials remain accountable to citizens after they get elected, by showing up to town halls, city/county meetings to insist on alignment with campaign promises after the election; and by providing responsive support for community advocates in the form of empowering storytelling and media engagement training
    - *Resources:* TBD
    - *Responsibility:* NPSJ PAC

GOAL 4: To have an active, engaged community where people feel empowered to participate in decision making about the future of NPSJ

- **OBJECTIVE 1:** Create a diverse and decentralized engagement committee through distributed participation structures such as neighborhood block captains
    - *Resources:* A place to meet (e.g WIG Building, Washington High School Gym)
    - *Responsibility:* NPSJ PAC & CDC

- **OBJECTIVE 2:** Hold more consistent or routine town hall meetings/events for communal gathering (e.g quarterly)
    - *Resources:* Local Business Sponsorship
    - *Responsibility:* Engagement Committee
- **OBJECTIVE 3:** Create one-page summaries to remind and inform residents of the purpose and goals of engagement for the PAC and CDC
    - *Resources:* TBD
    - *Responsibility:* Engagement Committee, NPSJ PAC & CDC
- **OBJECTIVE 4:** Increase voter registration, turnout and overall civic participation by involving members of the community to encourage others to register to vote, assist those who need help getting out to the polls to vote; as well as encourage community presence and/or visibility at town halls; inviting elected officials to meet with residents; and giving residents more access to civic information and resources
    - *Resources:* TBD
    - *Responsibility:* Engagement Committee, NPSJ PAC
- **OBJECTIVE 5:** Request an official community garden day proclamation to increase engagement with the community garden on that designated day and throughout the year
    - *Resources:* TBD
    - *Responsibility:* NPSJ CDC

GOAL 5: To provide opportunities for youth development and recreation in NPSJ

- **OBJECTIVE 1:** Support entrepreneurs in the community through small business loans/incubators; business/ accounting basics training; and technical assistance
    - *Resources:* Florida Commerce Business and Entrepreneur Resources, Florida Small Business Development Center (SBDC) Gulf County Outreach Office
    - *Responsibility:* NPSJ CDC, Gulf County, City of Port St. Joe
- **OBJECTIVE 2:** Revitalize and use gym for regular community events
    - *Resources:* TBD
    - *Responsibility:*TBD
- **OBJECTIVE 3:** Construct/Redevelop a playground at Peter's Park
    - *Resources:* KaBOOM!
    - *Responsibility:* NPSJ CDC
- **OBJECTIVE 4:** leverage existing infrastructure (e.g. cross walks) to connect the walking trails in NPSJ to the trails in the rest of Port St. Joe
    - *Resources:* Local (City and County) and State (e.g. Florida Department of Transportation Shared-Use Nonmotorized [SUN] Trail program) funding
    - *Responsibility:* Gulf County, City of Port St. Joe
- **OBJECTIVE 5:** Develop individualized mentoring program for the youth
    - *Resources:* Washington Improvement Group (WIG), Career Source Gulf Coast
    - *Responsibility:* NPSJ PAC