
From: Mary Dateo
Sent: Monday, May 27, 2024 2:45 PM
To: City Council
Subject: 6.1 Active Transportation Plan-Scoring Criteria
Attachments: Analysis See how much nature you have access to in your neighborhood and city - Washington Post.pdf

CAUTION: EXTERNAL EMAIL - Ensure you trust this email before clicking on any links or attachments.

Dear Council Members,

I strongly support the draft Vision statement for the Active Transportation Plan (ATP) (bolded words are mine):

"The City of Mountain View will lead regionally by creating an active transportation system that strengthens the community's **access** to housing, employment, schools, and other destinations.

The Active Transportation Plan will enable the City to intentionally plan with policies that support walkable and bikeable places; programs that create a culture of walking and biking; and projects that produce a **connected, low-stress, and inviting** active transportation network that doubles as corridors of **shade, habitat, and/or public open space**. This network of streets and trails will **encourage biking and walking, enhance biodiversity, and reduce climate-change impacts**."

Regarding the scoring proposal for the Active Transportation Plan, I think improvements are needed in order for the scoring mechanism to strongly support the stated vision. The network will not meet its goals if the network is not used.

Safety

The scoring provides a high number of points for safety, which is absolutely crucial for the network to be used.

Biodiversity / Sustainability

However, the network must also be **inviting** to encourage use.

Only 5 points are allowed for trees/plants.

Greening the AT network is crucial to making the network pleasant / attractive / inviting so that the network is actually used. More emphasis should be given to adding trees / nature in order to create the corridors of shade, habitat, and public open space mentioned in the Vision.

A recent article in the Washington Post explains the importance of incorporating nature in urban settings, for physical and mental health, counteracting the urban heat island effect, as well as a whole host of other benefits.

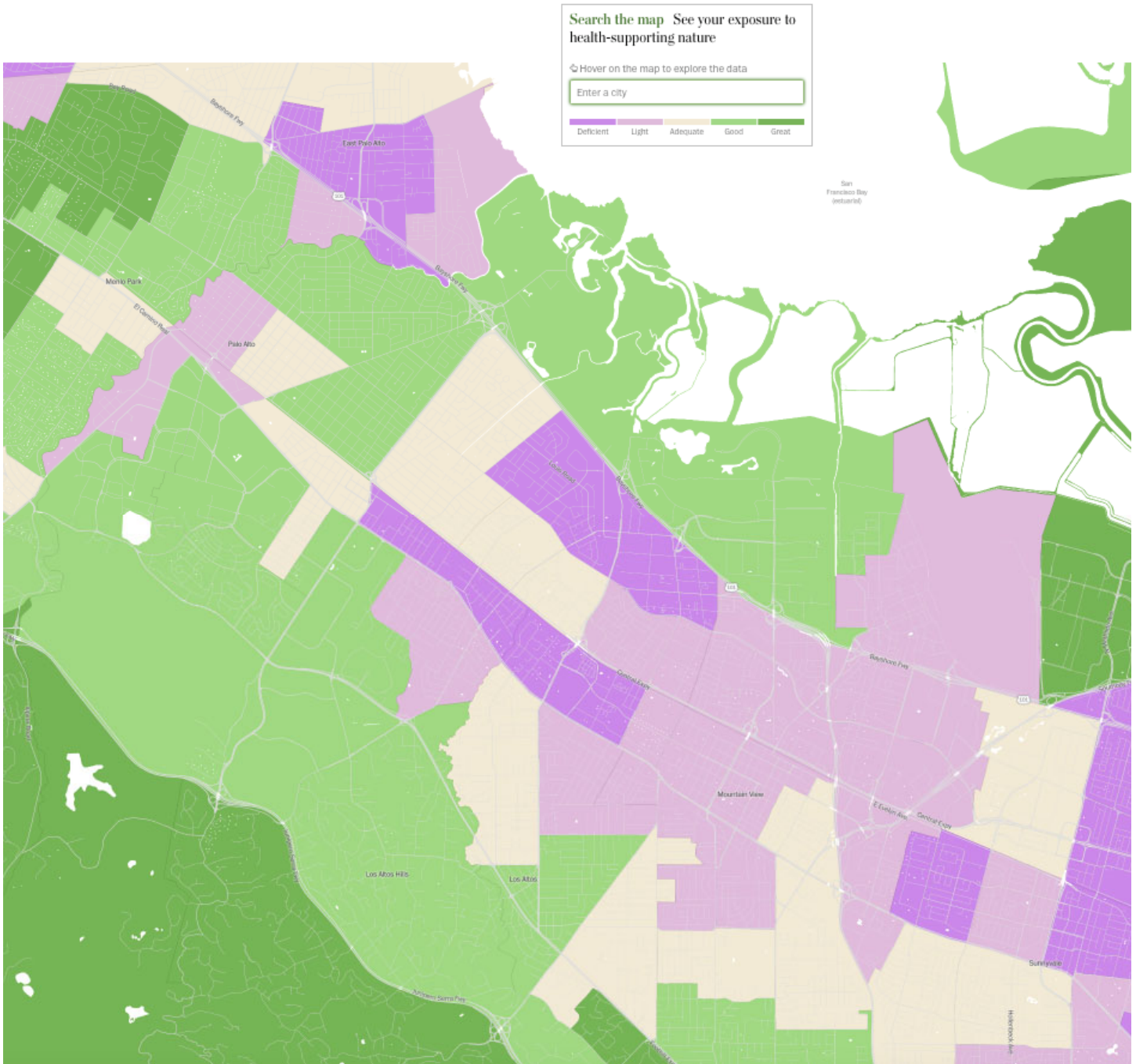
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/climate-environment/interactive/2024/nature-health-maps-neighborhood-city/>

(A pdf of the article is attached, in case you cannot access the Washington Post article on-line.)

It tells of an organization named NatureQuant that has rated where nature is abundant, and where it is not, across America.

NatureQuant lists Mountain View, except for the North Bayshore, as adequate at best (lightest

pink),
and deficient (dark pink) in much of the city, as you can see in this screen print.



Connectivity

To be used, the safe and inviting Active Transportation Network needs to be a Network. Just one safety gap in a route is enough to discourage many people from using that route.

None of the metrics seem to actually encourage connectivity across the network; a few emphasize the last quarter mile, or half mile, and the points given are low.

To see what a network looks like, check out the Safe Routes to School network for Mountain View High School.

This show a network of mostly low-speed, 2-lane roads, and it seems to avoid the scariest intersections.

This network can actually be used as a guide to find your way to many points of interest in Mountain View.

Improving the Safe Routes to Schools would

- improve the safety for school children, one of the largest populations of pedestrians and cyclists in our city
- improve connectivity for everyone.

Following feedback from the ATPAC / BPAC, Safe Routes to School has been added to the scoring; but it actually just makes it more difficult for a location to score points. A location has to be within 0.25 miles of a school, AND be on the Safe Routes, in order to get 5 meager points.

Possible Improvements

To offer suggestions to address the criticisms above:

1. Give additional points for adding trees in low-to-mid-income census tracts, and give additional points for adding trees in locations considered light or deficient in trees.
2. The Connectivity scoring be reworked to give MUCH more emphasis to improving networks, and Safe Routes to Schools (STS) in particular. As I look at the network, I do see places that give me pause from a safety standpoint, or places where the route seems long and convoluted. Those are the places that should be given a significant number of points in the scoring model. For example, give points for projects that improve a segment of the STS by making it safer. Give more points for projects that create another Safe Route. Or for projects that reduce a Safe Route by a quarter mile or more in length.

Mapping America's access to nature, neighborhood by neighborhood

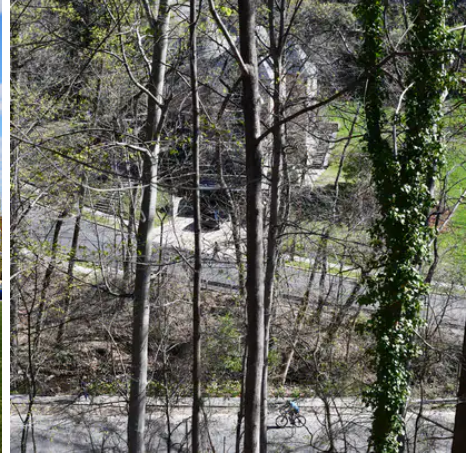
Deficient nature
NoMa in Northeast D.C.



Adequate nature
Brookland in Northeast D.C.



Great nature
Woodland Normanstone in Northwest D.C.



Nature ratings via NatureQuant

Photographs by Astrid Riecken for The Post



Analysis by [Harry Stevens](#)
Climate Lab columnist

April 10, 2024 at 7:30 a.m.

Share Comment Save

A city is a science experiment. What happens when we separate human beings from the environment in which they evolved? Can people be healthy without nature? The results have been bleak. [Countless studies](#) have shown that people who spend less time in nature die younger and suffer higher rates of mental and physical ailments.

“There’s a really, really strong case for proximity to nature influencing health in a really big way,” said Jared Hanley, the co-founder and CEO of NatureQuant, an Oregon start-up whose mission is to discover what kind of nature best supports human health, map where it is and persuade people to spend more time in it.

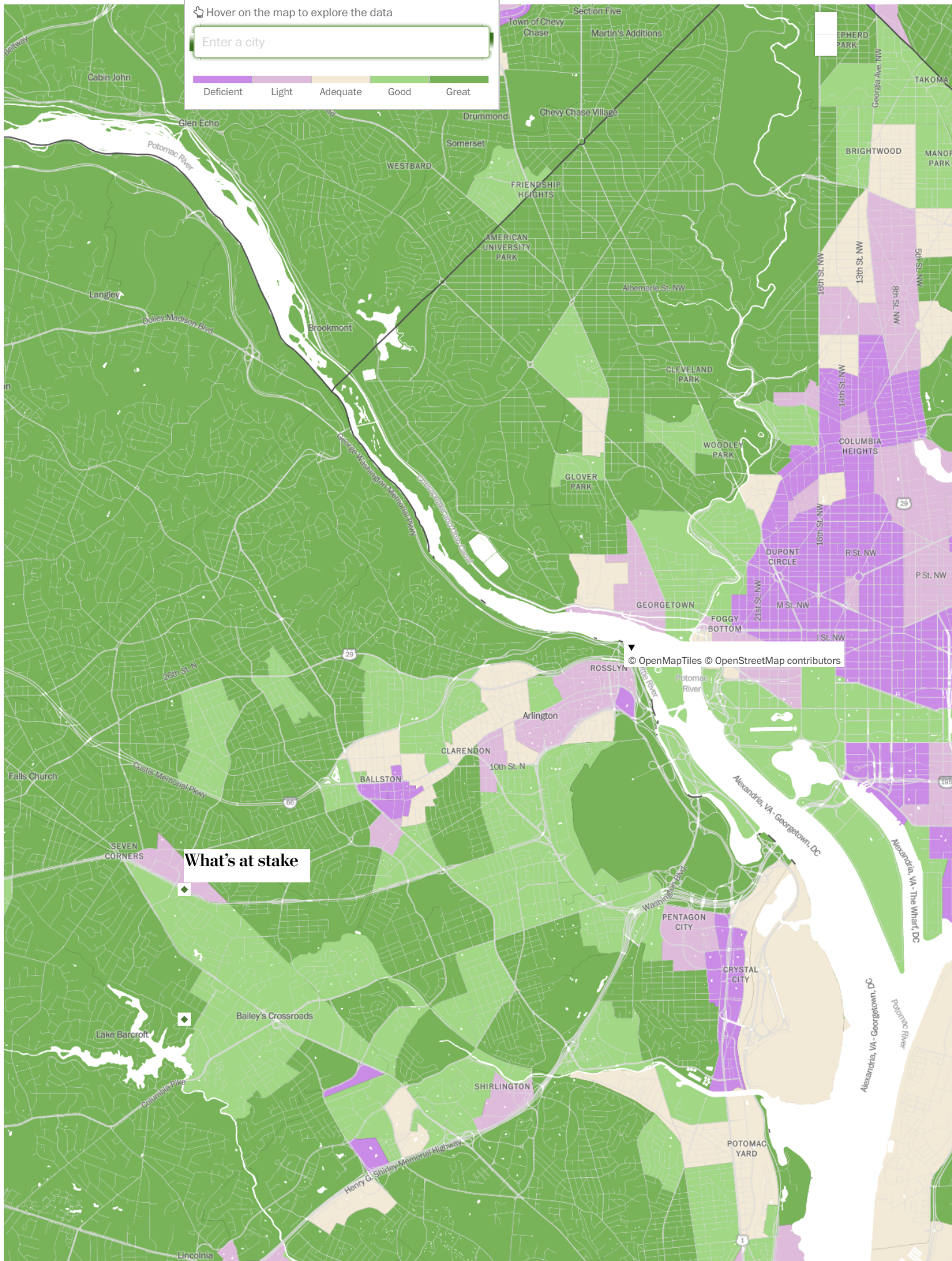
Using satellite imagery and data on [dozens of factors](#) — including air and noise pollution, park space, open water and tree canopy — NatureQuant has distilled the elements of health-supporting nature into a single variable called NatureScore. Aggregated to the level of Census tracts — roughly the size of a neighborhood — the data provide a high-resolution image of where nature is abundant and where it is lacking across the United States.

[Search the map](#) See your exposure to health-supporting nature

Hover on the map to explore the data

Enter a city

Deficient	Light	Adequate	Good	Great
-----------	-------	----------	------	-------



What's at stake

© OpenMapTiles © OpenStreetMap contributors

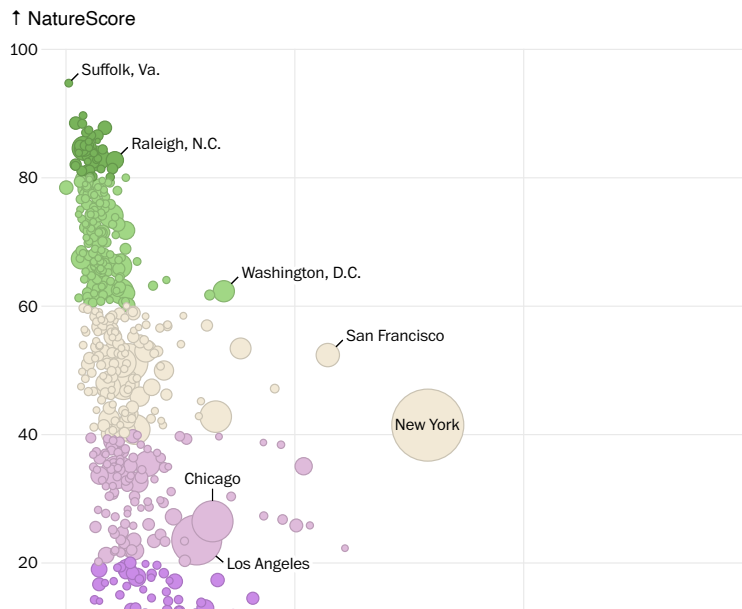
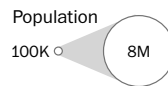


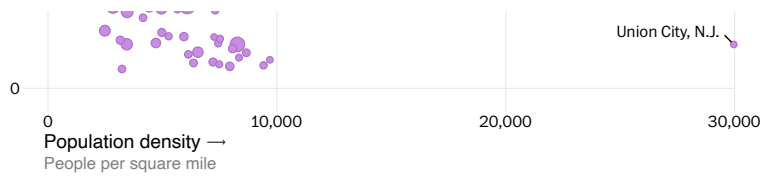
was lamenting that we'd paved paradise, that figure was up to 75 percent. Today, 86 percent of us live in cities, and the share continues to rise.



The denser the city, the less health-supporting nature you are likely to find. Among the 500 most populous cities in the United States, Suffolk, Va., with just 147 people per square mile, has the highest NatureScore. Union City, N.J., is by far the densest — almost 30,000 people per square mile — and has one of the lowest NatureScores.

But density is not destiny. New York, for instance, has a better NatureScore than Los Angeles and Chicago, even though its population density is higher. And the best way to boost a city's NatureScore is to plant trees.





👉 Hover on the chart to explore the data

The Arbor Day Foundation, which directs millions of dollars to tree planting projects around the world, started using NatureQuant’s data in 2021. If a donor comes to the Arbor Day Foundation with a plan to plant trees in a posh part of town, the data can help make the argument that the trees would do more good elsewhere.

“Everybody wants to plant in their neighborhood,” said Jeff Salem, director of communications for the Arbor Day Foundation. “But this helps that conversation of, ‘Hey, you might live in North Chicago in a really great neighborhood, but really, as you can see here, there’s some neighborhoods on the South Side that really could use your support with trees.’”

In rural America, it doesn’t matter if you are rich or poor, Black or White, dropped out of high school or have a PhD: you are still likely to have access to health-supporting nature. But in cities, differences in access to nature are as stark as other forms of inequality.

For example, among the fifth of Census tracts with the lowest levels of education, the average NatureScore is just 37, compared with an average score of 68 in the most educated Census tracts. The Census tracts with the lowest share of White people have an average NatureScore of 45, compared with 73 in the tracts with highest share of Whites.

How NatureScore relates to socioeconomic variables in urban Census tracts

Density People per square mile		Education Percent with at least high school diploma		Race Percent White		Earnings Median income (\$)	
Quintile	NatureScore	Quintile	NatureScore	Quintile	NatureScore	Quintile	NatureScore
Densest 9.3K-31K	22	Least ed. 21%-80%	37	Least White <1%-41%	45	Poorest 3K-42K	50
2nd 5.3K-9.2K	46	2nd 80%-89%	52	2nd 41%-63%	48	2nd 42K-56K	54
3rd 3.4K-5.3K	62	3rd 89%-93%	61	3rd 63%-76%	55	3rd 56K-73K	56
4th 2.1K-3.4K	72	4th 93%-97%	66	4th 76%-86%	63	4th 73K-98K	60
Sparsest 1K-2.1K	82	Most ed. 97%-99+%	68	Most White 86%-99+%	73	Richest 98K-250K	65

Note: Urban tracts are defined as those with at least 1,000 people per square mile.

NatureScores can identify neighborhoods that need trees. Planting them is another matter. “We use [the data] as a starting point. But, you know, the devil is in the details,” said Christina Smith, the executive director of Groundwork Bridgeport, an environmental nonprofit in Bridgeport, Conn., where she grew up.

Suppose you want to boost a neighborhood’s NatureScore by lining the sidewalk with trees. Before you buy the first sapling, you need to make sure the sidewalk is wide enough to fit a tree and still comply with the Americans With Disabilities Act. And you’ll need money to hire workers or face the dangerous prospect of twenty high school volunteers packed

into a narrow sidewalk with cars whizzing by.

What about just giving free trees to neighborhood residents? If most people rent, they won't have the authority to plant on their property. If you manage to track down property owners, they might not want the burden of planting and caring for trees.

Yet Groundwork Bridgeport has figured out how to host successful tree giveaways (door knocking works better than direct mail, and it helps to have friends at community gardens). Last year, they distributed 100 trees to residents on the east side of the city. If all those trees are still around in 30 years, it will boost the area's NatureScore by 15 points, amounting to an increase of a year of life expectancy for people in the neighborhood, NatureQuant told me.

Thirty years is a long time to wait, which is one of the reasons cash-strapped city governments often view tree planting as a frivolous expense compared to more pressing matters like crime and homelessness. "Trees are not a silver bullet. Trees are not going to solve poverty," said Dan Lambe, the Arbor Day Foundation's CEO.

But quantifying nature can make sure trees are going where they're needed most, Lambe said: "We know we can make a difference in people's lives by emphasizing neighborhoods that have been disadvantaged, who have been ignored, that just simply don't have the tree benefits."

Check my work

◆ The census tract were provided by NatureQuant, Inc., which described its methodology in [this paper](#). Those data are as of July 31, 2023. You can find my analysis of those data along with 2020 socioeconomic data from the U.S. Census Bureau in [this computational notebook](#). The top 500 U.S. cities were also provided by NatureQuant and are based on 2020 NatureScore data. You can find my analysis of the city data in [this notebook](#).

You can use the code and data to produce your own analyses and charts — and to make sure mine are accurate. If you do, email me at harry.stevens@washpost.com.

🗨️ 750 Comments

[Harry Stevens](#)

Harry Stevens is the Climate Lab columnist at The Washington Post. He was part of a team at The Post that won the 2020 Pulitzer Prize for Explanatory Reporting for the series "2C: Beyond the Limit." ✉️ [@Harry_Stevens](#)
