

**Gatekeeping Green Space:
Minimum Lot Size Requirements, Private Lands, and Public Park Provision
in Beverly Hills, Los Angeles County**

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Abstract

This paper examines how affluent neighborhoods control their spaces, from minimum lot size requirements to gatekeeping public parks in the City of Beverly Hills, California. Utilizing spatial analysis and ethnographic observations, the study reveals that restrictive land-use policies, such as minimum lot size requirements, limit public space availability, reinforcing socio-economic disparities. Public parks in northern areas often function as semi-private extensions of luxury properties, with numerous regulations catering to aesthetic preferences rather than inclusivity. Parks in the southern parts of Beverly Hills, though more community-oriented, still face regulatory barriers, revealing the city's prioritization of property values and homeowner interests over accessible public spaces. Through analysis of city commission meetings and planning decisions, this paper demonstrates how the influence of affluent residents on urban policy perpetuates exclusivity, as public parks serve dual roles in enhancing property values and acting as extensions of private green spaces. The findings underscore the need for urban planning reforms that address these inequities, advocating for public spaces that foster inclusivity and meet the needs of diverse communities.

Keywords: parks, private property, inequality

Introduction

Located halfway between Santa Monica Beach and downtown Los Angeles, the City of Beverly Hills has long been renowned for its affluent and famous residents and the exclusivity of its neighborhoods. The city has continued to grow and protect its properties and residents through various measures for over a hundred years. Spacious lot size requirements were implemented to ensure housing standards so the residents do not overcrowd spaces, which has a spillover effect on increasing property values. From minimum housing lot size restrictions to gatekeeping public amenities, the city implements these policies to appreciate its home values and serve its exclusive private entities. In this study, I focus on how the minimum lot size rules turn the city's lands into private property, leaving fewer open spaces for public green spaces. Through the mixed methods of spatial analysis, ethnographic fieldwork, and archival research, I found that these public spaces became an extension of private backyards to showcase social status and wealth. Consequently, I argue the city uses strict regulations and surveillance to "gatekeep" its ostensibly privatized public gardens.

Literature Review

Properties, Values, and Ownership

Property has been defined in the literature to include "exclusive rights of possession, use, and disposition" (Mill, 1909, as cited in Harris, 1993, p. 1731). Harris (1993) argues that those properties' attributes encompass "the right to transfer or alienability, the right to use and enjoyment, and the right to exclude others" (p. 1731). Since the colonial era, Glenn (2015) argues that settlers secured land by imposing ownership to legalize their land occupation. The term property, thus, arose as a thing to be owned, bundled with the full rights of the owners to control and take advantage of it. Gilbert (2007) presents the constraints of green belt planning as the "strengths of the market and landowners' assumed rights and expectations" (p. 1128). He further argues that power, privilege, duty, and forbearances constitute property rights, reflecting the values and institutions of society (Gilbert, 2007). Similarly, Hong (2014) states that property

ownership legitimizes social relations, protecting values and property ownership resulting from settler colonialism.

Based on the concept of property, Lipsitz (2011) utilizes Marx's concept of use value and exchange value to explain racial imaginaries. The use value refers to how much worth the property is to the owner, while the exchange value evaluates how much outsiders define that particular property's worthiness. Lipsitz's (2011) concept of "the white spatial imaginary" describes how these concepts serve the interests of homeowners and investors, incentivizing them to protect their property value. In privileged neighborhoods, the homeowners and developers take advantage of their property, maximizing the exchange values of their homes through segregation and asset wealth accumulation. Based on deeply divided races and classes, White homeowners take advantage of the guaranteed property values stemming from their communities' homogeneity and isolation, becoming the main focus of many affluent neighborhoods to speculate on their property values. With powerful homeowner groups, these residents can craft measures politically and construct institutional methods to sustain their privileges, ultimately achieving "the ideal of the private properly ordered suburban home and homogenous community" (Lipsitz, 2011, p. 29). In this study, I expand upon the concepts of property use and exchange values in Beverly Hills, in turn shaping their neighborhood's environment. Homeowners and the city authority emphasize property value appropriation, shaping the city's decisions on city planning and public amenity infrastructures.

Exclusive Private Property and Minimum Lot Size Restrictions

The property market is a significant element of surplus absorption and building capital to finance urban elites (Harvey, 2008, p.29). Similarly, in the *City of Quartz*, Davis (2018) argues that the homeowners are the most crucial entity guarding their home values and promoting community isolation through land use control and zoning restrictions. The most common approach to "secure the city," as Davis (2018) suggests, is "the destruction of accessible public spaces" (p. 226). Drawing the line from city privatization, homeowners can restrict and determine who has access to their public spaces, building "invisible walls" against unfavorable populations that would decrease the appeal of their community (Davis, 2018, p. 246).

Rothstein (2018) and Nightingale (2012) discuss how wealthy homeowners justify racial isolation to preserve property values while devaluing marginalized neighborhoods. The actions have shifted from a prominent tool like redlining to a more subtle approach, including but not limited to gated communities and zoning ordinances (Nightingale, 2012; Rothstein, 2018; Gray, 2022). Apart from building use regulations, the law bundles many restrictions, from height to lot size requirements, as they claim to ensure the standard of housing.

Minimum housing lot size rules require homeowners to acquire more land per housing unit (Gray, 2022). Parsons (1990) argues that larger lot sizes will reduce land availability for other parcels, as he suggests that "doubling the lot size doubles the lost opportunity," meaning that the parcel size increases the privatization of the space and leaves fewer spaces for other possible activities and opportunities (p.309). The unnecessarily large parcel size reduces the city's density and increases the base cost for housing construction, making it less affordable and perpetuating the city's spatial disparity (Gray, 2022; Zhao, 2022; Manville et al., 2020). Additionally, Gyourko and McCulloch (2023) found that parcel size outcompetes housing size, leaving many open spaces within the lots caused by the setback requirement. These restrictions regulate the allowable size of the actual housing, increase privately owned underutilized spaces, and inflate the number of private gardens as a result (Gray, 2022). Pristeri et al. (2021) also prove that privately owned, lower-density areas with higher income tend to have more green spaces.

Not only does it physically enhance the privatization of city spaces, but the minimum lot size requirement exacerbates the negotiation power of the homeowners since they are the primary property taxpayers, especially in a small and privileged city.

To understand the stratification of wealthy enclaves within metropolitan areas, I draw the Tiebout Sorting Theory by Charles Tiebout (1995), which explains how city dwellers form a small socioeconomically homogenous group within their population to serve different levels of public provision preferences. Many scholars (Rhode & Strumpf, 2003; Banzhaf & Walsh, 2010; Hachadoorian, 2016) afterward proved that the theory is true: public good investment can lead to significant neighborhood stratification. Affluent households tend to agglomerate to construct one community where they can ensure the exclusivity of their amenities and adjust according to their preferences. This practice became common in the United States, resulting in a fragmented Los Angeles County. Despite being close to Downtown Los Angeles, Beverly Hills exemplifies a living story of the American Dream—owning individual big homes with lawns and driving expensive cars. Most residential lots are single-family houses with tall fences and extensive spaces. The strict regulations on zoning ordinances and minimum lot size requirements drew my attention to observing the relationship between the private lawns and their public spaces.

Green Space Supplies in Segregated Neighborhoods.

Many studies investigating urban disparity through green spaces show that green spaces correlate with housing size. Lewis & Acharya (2016) suggest that larger houses “diminish the importance almost entirely of having open space close by,” reflecting that people with big houses do not feel the necessity of having public spaces, reflecting an almost or no price effect (p. 326). Coolen & Meesters (2012) claim that higher-income residents value their privacy more than having gardens for recreational purposes and prefer smaller public gardens to large public parks. These private gardens are the “symbol of order and industriousness,” resonating with the neighborhood and homeowners’ status and values (Feagan & Ripmeester, 1999). Lawns become essential to accompany the private residential lot, which many cities implement through their property standards. Feagan and Ripmeesters (2001) eventually also emphasize the function of lawns as a status quo to maintain their property value and naturalize their homes. Hand et al. (2016) also prove that affluent home dwellers can access higher urban biodiversity through their private gardens, which the low-income cannot afford. Thus, Fan et al. (2019) and Daniel et al. (2016) conclude that socioeconomic and housing conditions play roles in urban tree cover, as single-family homes and more stable neighborhoods are greener. However, even though private green spaces have constantly increased in the city, Lee et al. (2017) point out that the tree cover has grown significantly on private rather than publicly owned lands since 1950.

The creation of green spaces reveals the dynamics between the influential stakeholders in the city, especially between the homeowners and the city officials. Persall and Eller (2020) unpack the disruption of park provision in the marginalized communities in Philadelphia due to the political pressures from powerful homeowners. The higher green space accessibility among higher-income groups is also a consequence of the privately-owned green spaces in the United States (Hand et al., 2016) and China in the form of Residential Quarter Green Space (Wen et al., 2023). Since private green space is more influential in the increase of green space accessibility, a case study in China by Xiao et al. (2016) suggests that private club green spaces can substitute the public district park since there is no significant price difference when the house is located close to the public park; on the other hand, the private gardens spiked the home value significantly. Thus, homeowners decide to invest in privatizing their public parks or creating private parks to increase the exchange values of their homes. These studies show that having

more private green space alters how people perceive public parks, directly enhances the power of homeowners, and benefits higher-income residents.

Privatization of Public Space

Increasingly, powerful homeowners privatized cities by occupying more city spaces and turning public spaces into privately managed ones. Harvey (2008) argues that the rights to the city “is too narrowly defined” since most of the stakeholders who benefit from this system are a small political and economic elite, while most people still struggle to live (p. 38). Because the power is constituted among the powerful and wealthy homeowners, they shape the cities after their desires, controlling the city to be “fortified fragments, gated communities, and privatized public spaces under constant surveillance” (Harvey, 2008, p. 32). Even though the city's rights should be for everyone, not all city dwellers can enjoy the rights under the abusive system of privileged, affluent homeowners and influential political groups.

Schindler (2017) introduces frameworks for discussing publicizing private gardens and privatizing public spaces. She first describes the evaluation of well-functioning public spaces (p. 1101):

- 1) Foster interaction between diverse groups of people;
- 2) Facilitate nurturing of democratic values and free assembly;
- 3) Serve as a “third place” to build social capital;
- 4) Are functional and allow people to get from place to place;
- 5) Provide spaces for those with nowhere else to go.

Revealing that public spaces do not generally meet these requirements, Schindler (2017) argues that exclusionary design is an approach to protecting public facilities from outsiders, including, but not limited to, physical barriers, psychological barriers, and uninviting features (p.1131). Many cities have implemented surveillance systems to control public spaces or to filter people who use public parks. Many towns also raised revenue through these privatized public spaces by charging people for the use of space (Schindler, 2017, p. 1110). Through the privatization of public spaces, I plan to utilize these concepts and frameworks to investigate how the City of Beverly Hills secures its public parks for its exclusive use.

Methodology

In this study, I employ a mixed method—spatial quantitative and qualitative analyses—which portray relationships between private gardens, public parks, and properties. These approaches emphasize those properties' impacts on public spaces' perception, creating their exclusionary spaces through housing restrictions and public space regulations. Many studies have investigated how affluent homeowners guard their communities through various measures, primarily conducting qualitative research. On the other hand, the studies on housing lot sizes have been dominated by quantitative approaches to measure the economic impacts of those parcel sizes. However, a gap exists in how minimum lot size requirements comprehensively shape neighborhood environments. While the spatial dimensions offer macro-scale analysis of those lot sizes and green spaces, qualitative approaches provide insights from the comments of the city commissioners and homeowners, including how the park users perceive and use their public spaces. Therefore, mixed-method analysis offers a complete portrayal of macro and micro scale analyses elaborating relationships between minimum lot size requirements, homeowners, the city authority, and public-private spaces.

Quantitative Approaches

To visualize the spatial association between parcel size, land use, and green spaces, I made different maps focusing on private and public green spaces, residential parcel size, and land use with private green space areas. I obtained the public green space shapefiles from the city of Los Angeles's GIS hub. From there, I filtered to use only the local parks, which refer to the urban green spaces created by human decisions, not influenced by the natural landforms that could skew the data analysis. Since I only focused on the city of Beverly Hills, I clipped the feature to the city boundary to improve the visualization and data interpretation. For the parcel data, I downloaded the shapefiles from the SCAG Housing Element Tool 2.0, which gives the parcel acres as well as the land use data I visualized in those cartographic works. Since the parcel data is for 2019, I decided to coordinate all other layers to be in 2019 for the best analysis alignment. I also obtained the city boundary layer from the U.S. Census Bureau's TIGER/Line shapefiles for California, which helps to situate my data in the city boundary.

Even though no readily available dataset for the private green spaces was available, I used the Normal Difference Vegetation Index (NDVI) to detect the presence of vegetation throughout Sentinel-2 Satellite images of August 2, 2018, as also implemented by Pristeri et al. (2021) and Wen et al. (2023).

The NDVI calculation was performed as follows:

$$NDVI = \frac{NIR - Red}{NIR + Red}$$

Since the Sentinel-2 imagery offers a better spatial resolution, I decided to use Sentinel-2 over Landsat images. From the NDVI calculation, I compared it with the false-colored pictures to determine which threshold I should implement to cover the spaces, which are lawns or green spaces. Then, I clipped the public park areas out to get only the private green space areas.

Based on all the data I acquired, I calculated the percentage share of each land use in the city area. These values provide a general sense of how public or private space areas have been established within the city.

Qualitative Approaches

I watched the City of Beverly Hills Recreation and Parks Commission meetings to understand how the city authority and the residents expressed their preferences and opinions surrounding the public parks. Since the parcel-level data indicates 2019, I reviewed their recordings from 2012 (the oldest publicly available online) to 2020. I read their meeting agenda, memorandum, and meeting minutes. From the meeting observations, I recorded those topics and quotes into different themes regarding each initiative and the framework of how the city residents and homeowners view and regulate public green spaces. The Recreation and Park Commission meetings of the City of Beverly Hills provided insights and information regarding the park construction, renovations, public space regulations, and other related issues based on the public infrastructure. The commissioners' discussions reflect how the city gatekeeps their public parks and how the homeowners play a role in determining public amenity provision.

Apart from the city meeting archives, I also reviewed the city of Beverly Hills' fifth cycle housing element, which matches the timeframe of the parcel data available. The city housing element specifies housing stock, household characteristics, and building regulations, especially the minimum housing lot size requirement and the density limitations.

Even though I acquired enough information to understand how the city and residents play roles in determining their privatized spaces, I still needed more clarity on how these relationships are demonstrated in the urban space. Thus, I conducted ethnographic fieldwork, visiting every

major public park in Beverly Hills between April and May 2024. I spent 18 hours in the field, from weekdays to weekends, from morning to afternoon to evening. During my field visits, I recorded the atmosphere of the parks, physical and social regulations, activities in the park, park users, and their interactions. I also joined the City of Beverly Hills Planning Commission meeting in person, which allowed me to learn more about residents' motives and preferences through new neighborhood developments.

Data Analysis and Discussions

Privatized Spaces: Minimum Housing Lot Size Restrictions

Through visualization of private and public green spaces in Beverly Hills, I argue that minimal public spaces are available for residents; most city areas are oriented toward privately owned gardens. Map 1 shows a prominent clustering of private green spaces located densely in the northern region above the diagonal street that crosses through the middle of the city. There are scattered locations of the private green spaces located south of the street. Looking at Map 1 and Table 1, it is clear that public green space areas are significantly fewer, comprising 1.76% of the total city area, while private green spaces comprise 26.03%, almost 15-fold of the public parks. The public green spaces are virtually smaller than private green spaces, with only three big parks, while the rest are small pocket parks primarily located in the city's northern region. The significantly larger shared areas of private green spaces over the public ones signal the homeowners' influence from allocating the city's spaces.

Looking specifically at parcel lot size, Map 2 suggests that the northernmost part of the city contains the most extensive parcels in the whole town. The larger lot size in the northernmost region is densely populated with private green. In contrast, the southern region has more sparsely populated private garden spaces with smaller housing parcels. Most of the large residential lots are owned by single-family homeowners who privatize the city's spaces within their yards and fences through the minimum housing lot size regulation. This minimum lot size legalizes unnecessarily large parcels for the homes, leaving more unbuilt spaces within their gates. With so much land going toward private property, there is less opportunity to provide public amenities for all residents, which may offer much higher use value but less exchange value. However, the city chooses its homeowners to control the space through its area privatization, allowing property value appreciation from its exchange value but not the public use value. Even though initially concerned with the housing standards, the parcel size rule turns out to be a tool for homeowners to appreciate their property value and negotiate power to shape the city spaces.

Since many city areas have become private properties, fewer open spaces are available for public use, especially as public parks. Many meetings revealed that the commissioners realize this challenging fact in building new green space inventories due to the limited open spaces available in the city, and it is hard to alter that because those homeowners are also influential stakeholders in the city. In the review of the Recreation and Park Commission's Fiscal Plan between 2015 and 2016 (Jan 27, 2015), one of the commissioners stated that they would like to add more inventory, but it is difficult. When the city started conducting the Los Angeles County Park Assessment Survey, the preliminary result showed that 32.8% of the respondents suggested building new parks (Recreation and Park Commission, Feb 23, 2016). However, the survey presenter and the commissioners agreed that adding inventories is costly, and there are limitations to acquiring open space for new inventories. Unsurprisingly, throughout the 7-year meeting recordings, the only new park construction was a dog park located in a small area due to the spatial limitations. The spillover effects of the minimum housing regulations forming the

low-density, large residential lots lessen the public open spaces available for new park provision. The size of housing lots does not directly limit public parks; however, the unintended effects of having fewer public open spaces due to the large private open spaces hinder the park creation opportunities in Beverly Hills.

Through minimum housing lot sizes, homeowners are forced to acquire more spaces to build their houses, resulting in higher property taxes for the city government. The political power of stakeholders in the city is embedded in the property-owning system. Since the homeowners are the primary funding source for the city authority, the city committees prioritize the homeowners in their development consideration. In the Recreation and Park Commission meetings, some incidents reveal the power of homeowners. On August 23, 2016, a group of residents appealed to the Recreation and Park commissioners that the redwood trees in Roxbury Park obstruct their enjoyment of the beautiful views from their homes, which decreases their property value. They claimed the trees “blocked out daylight, sun, and it also uses much water.” It would be better to cut down the redwoods that the residents claimed to grow extremely fast, reaching 370 feet maximum, equating to a 7-story tall building. For these reasons, a group of around 20 residents requested permission to cut down the trees, and they proposed that they would fund the removal of the trees at no cost to the city. While this request was not approved, this action emphasizes the power of the homeowners, as the trees are considered public amenities. These residents only joined the meeting to appeal for cutting trees solely for personal enjoyment. These comments reveal that homeowners can powerfully alter the city’s public amenities and space decisions.

Urban Forms, Gatekeeping Practices, and Green Space Functionality

Through my visit to Beverly Hills’ public parks, I observed the stark differences between parks in the Northern Beverly Hills and the Southern ones. I argue that the park’s regulations, park users, and purposes vary based on the surrounding neighborhood. Northern Beverly Hills parks are adjacent to plentiful single-family residential lots with spacious parcels and, therefore, serve as “showcases” for the neighborhood. They are highly regulated and fenced, emphasize aesthetics over function, and reconstruct perceptions of an extension of private backyards. Southern Beverly Hills parks, on the other hand, are located amid smaller single-family residential lots and multi-family dwellings. These southern city parks instead provide some community centers and lively spaces for social gatherings whilst still heavily regulated by the general public park rules written by the city government.

Gatekeeping

Physical barriers and heavy policing are presented extensively in the Northern Beverly Hills parks. Fences surround the modern-designed playground in Coldwater Canyon Park. The playground became the only gathering space for the families, but parents were not interacting with one another, mostly occupying and playing with their children. One of the parents told me they are a homeowner located 3-4 blocks away, which they moved to after the pandemic. They loved the place because it was so “quiet and peaceful,” unlike where they used to live in the Southern part of the city. The fences are the physical gatekeepers that put barriers against outsiders who do not feel they belong in the park. In Beverly Hills Garden, the signs remind people that everyone is under video surveillance everywhere—at every side, every corner, as presented in Figure 1. I found no typical park user activities but more tourist activities. Walking to another block on the East side of the primary Beverly Hills sign, I saw private security cars and officers in uniform walking from the exhibition zones. Figure 2 emphasizes the active surveillance and heavy policing of the area. Combined with an unfunctional design as a

showcase for the city's visitors, the town makes the space even more intimidating through heavy surveillance infrastructures discouraging a vibrant use of active public space. Less than a 10-minute walk from Beverly Hills Garden, I visited Beverly Hills Dog Park. The first thing that welcomed me was a tall wall surrounding a sandy area, divided into two portions for big and small dogs. At the entrance, I noticed that all dogs must be registered and obtain licenses to get a key fob to enter the dog park, as seen in Figure 3. Although there are only a couple of sitting benches and perennial trees, the fences and authorized key entrances made the space so exclusive, extremely privatized, and closed to the public. From physical barriers to video surveillance, gated green spaces appear unfriendly to visitors, possibly leading to minimal interactions between park users. As seen in these cases, public spaces use physical and psychological barriers to foreclose the functionality of public space (Schindler 2017).

Aesthetics

Walking around the Northern city parks, I noticed countless sculptures across every public park, from Greystone Mansion to Beverly Hills Garden, but no areas for sports or any activity spaces. Will Roger Memorial Park has a lawn, fountain, and palm trees. There is no playground or public restrooms. Despite accessibility, as it is located next to a major street, no one actively uses the park since it is not functional for park users but is treated as a showcase. Along the same line, more than 70% of the Beverly Hills Garden visitors were tourists, standing around the lily pond to take pictures of the Beverly Hills signage. The garden has nothing but the city signage, lily pond, and sculptures. Unsurprisingly, many Recreation and Parks Committee members spent a lot of time discussing how to design the ponds, where to put the sculptures, or even providing funding to renovate the new city signage, which cost almost \$400,000 during the 2014-2015 fiscal year, about 6% of the funds used in that fiscal year. The project of renovating the lily ponds is discussed in many meetings and emphasized as one of the most critical projects of that period. The aesthetic is presented through the art sculptures, flower gardens, and well-cared lawn areas, showing that the city prioritizes these aesthetics for the visitors. These aesthetic elements also showcase residents' wealth and exquisite taste through their beautiful park designs.

Extension of Private Backyards

Apart from solid barriers and outstanding designs of the parks, the overall ambiance performs as an extension of the surrounding houses' gardens. These parks are located within the historical or existing private real estates, where the city treated them as a privatized public space. For example, Greystone Mansion & Garden, located on a hilly slope in the middle of single-family homes, requires me to walk 20 minutes from the bus stop, making me spend 50% of my journey without an appropriate pedestrian walkway. Arguably, the entire path to this mansion, including its entrance, was designed for cars, not pedestrians. Since most homeowners are also automobile owners, there is no need to cater to pedestrians, a relatively minority among city residents. Unlike a usual public park with lawns, trees, and playgrounds, the city turned the mansion into a so-called "public park" with architecture, as seen in Figure 4. Walking around, I felt like I entered someone's private castle rather than a public park. It did not feel as welcoming as it should be if it were meant for the public. No sports activity, dogs, picnics, photography, or filming video is allowed unless the city permit is received. Since the park users cannot enjoy these basic activities people would typically do, I felt the space was even more regulated and privatized, with expectations for visitors to behave and dress in a certain way to be acceptable in the park. There also was a wedding when I visited, so they closed off half of the mansion for the ceremony, which the city rented out at a high price (The City of Beverly Hills). The city privatized the park through this monetary charge and specific expectations for park users that set

barriers against outsiders. This public park reflects the identity of Beverly Hills as a showcase of its affluent and exclusive status, which makes this city different from others, acting as an extension of the surrounding single-family homes' backyards.

Along the same line, Beverly Canon Garden, located between two buildings of a five-star hotel amid the city's commercial district, also felt like I walked into a private garden of the hotel rather than a public park that should welcome everyone. Like Beverly Hills Garden, surveillance signages were everywhere, as shown in Figure 5. However, unlike other parks I mentioned above, I observed some community gatherings and interactions in this park. Because the park is located next to the coffee shop in the hotel lobby, the park was used as an extension of those spaces, explaining the community interactions that are not common in the Northern Beverly Hills parks. Additionally, the city designed Beverly Canon Garden's rules to keep the area exclusive through higher fees for event hosting. Since the park is next to the five-star hotel, the scenery and the ambiance are extremely important, allowing only appealing park users to take advantage of the spaces. In the September 25, 2012 meeting, the Recreation and Park Commission expanded the use for private events and receptions and increased the fee, making it substantially more. The high financial barrier to using public spaces exemplifies how the city of Beverly Hills privatizes and takes advantage of the public spaces, which are supposed to provide for all and build community.

Southern Parks: More Functional But Still Regulated

Although the city still implements countless park regulations, South Beverly Hills offers more vibrant and community-building green spaces. As suggested in Map 2, since residents of the South acquire smaller housing lots than the Northern residents, having functional public spaces is more significant for the health and well-being of the Southern Beverly Hills community. This area has two major public parks, La Cienega Park and Roxbury Park, with Community Centers that function differently from the Northern parks.

As the Recreation and Park Commissioners indicate, Roxbury Park is one of the city's most prominent and essential parks, with a relatively new community center for residents. It was a Friday evening, and the playground and basketball court were packed with people. Surrounding the playground, I saw parents talking with one another and kids interacting with each other. There was no fence around the park, so the space had visually no physical barriers. It was the first time I had encountered a sense of community in the park after many visits to green spaces in Northern Beverly Hills. The basketball court is provided on a first-come, first-served basis, and no permit is needed, which explains why many people are gathering on the court, as seen in Figure 6. On the other hand, the tennis courts next door had no one using them since it required membership, check-in, and reservation in advance. These approaches made access to facilities more complicated and exclusive, discouraging using those spaces and arguably privatizing public facilities for private use. The divide was evident—no one was using the highly regulated space, and many people clustered in a less regulated and flexible space.

La Cienega Park, located in the Southeast corner of Map 1, provides a community center for gatherings, athletic fields, and a playground. I noticed many children and families surrounding the baseball field during my visit. They were cheering their kids in the matches, jogging around the parks, and climbing the walls in the playground. I felt a vibrant community and interaction between parents and children. However, all those athletic fields needed to be permitted sports activity with six or more persons involved, and hardball play is also prohibited except by permit, as indicated in Figure 7. Even though the Southern parks allow users to enjoy more activities than the Northern ones, many barriers to using public facilities in these parks

discourage people from participating and regulate how community members interact and navigate the spaces.

Public parks are more functional in the spaces that the community needs, like the Southern region of the city, where homeowners cannot afford to have large lot spaces. Map 3 demonstrates the median income household for census tracts across Beverly Hills, suggesting that the southern part has significantly lower household income, which means it has less capacity to afford large property spaces, resulting in denser urban forms. Despite the strict rules and some gated regulations in some portions of the park, Roxbury Park and La Cienega Park offer a more vibrant community and build a sense of community among the park users and residents. On the other hand, the park in Central Beverly Hills aims to attract tourists with its city signage and aesthetic, giving visitors a luxurious experience rather than a functional park. The Northern region has some of the most exclusive public parks I have been to, such as Greystone Mansion, which made me feel like I walked into someone's mansion, or Coldwater Canyon Park, which was so quiet in the middle of single-family homes. I argue that the single-family homeowners who owned large parcel lots treated these parks as an extension of their backyards. Nevertheless, the efforts of privatizing and gatekeeping public spaces reflect the city and the surrounding homeowners' preferences are visible in those parks from heavy surveillance in Beverly Hills Gardens, physical fences and a key fob entrance to the dog park, or the athletic fields by permit in La Cienega Park. In the City of Beverly Hills, through the negotiation of spaces between public and private entities, the public parks were privatized to serve the demand of homeowners, who are the drivers of the "sweet and quiet" neighborhood mindset they value.

Community Spaces v. Suburban Civility

Apart from privatizing lands through lot size and property-owning, Beverly Hills residents exemplify the ideology of suburbanites in the United States, ensuring their neighborhoods remain private, isolated, and exclusive. These suburban civility efforts dominate various public comments and shape forms of public green spaces within Beverly Hills. In one of the special Planning Commission meetings I attended in person, they discussed a new mixed-use development with retail, residential, and commercial spaces located at 9600 Wilshire Blvd. The Commissioners opened for public comments regarding the Environmental Report draft for the construction of this project. More than half of the public comments are against the development, ranging from concerns during the project construction phase to the development concept itself. "This is not the right project for Beverly Hills," one public commenter said. Many called for a responsible development, blaming this project for pushing at the city's maximum height and density allowance. Many homeowners who came for public comments advocated for a "sweet, quiet neighborhood." They claimed this development would change how it used to be, bringing in more people and crowding their streets. This public comment session reveals that single-family homeowners, the majority residents of Beverly Hills, still want to ensure their private, luxurious, and exclusive environment. As Lipsitz discusses in the chapter "White Spatial Imaginary," these residents strive to use their spaces to accumulate capital, believing the best way to achieve the suburban ideal is by segregating themselves from all possible threats that will devalue their property's exchange value. These residents perceive development that brings more density to the neighborhood as a threat, revealing the underlying belief in a suburban city form. This attitude leads to heavy policing within Beverly Hills, especially in its public spaces.

Since homeowners built their power from the parcel lots they occupied through the minimum lot size requirements, the city government caters to the public facilities to serve the interests of their powerful homeowners. The City of Beverly Hills proposed many rules to ensure

the exchange value of the parks, which impacts the exchange values for homeowners' property. At every park visit, I noticed long lists of park regulations posted near the entrance and around the park, in addition to much surveillance and policing in public spaces. The Park Commission conducted a sign discussion on November 26, 2019. Beverly Hills parks do not allow park users to picnic, grill, or barbeque, have folding tables and chairs, participate in any group exercise or group instruction course, or even have shading structures or tents in the parks. Most activities listed are typical reasons people go to the park: to enjoy the weather, picnic, and gather with friends. The group practice of Tai Chi in the public park would be considered illegal, and having a picnic under their prepared umbrella is also unlawful. The strict rules of the parks significantly limit park users' activities. In response to the rigid park rules, one of the public commenters in the Recreation and Park Commission meeting expressed, "I don't believe that the wider and diverse park use is a luxury; I believe that it should be allowed to make full use of our beautiful city parks." Due to the structure of property and capital at work, the public park could not enhance a sense of community and provide comfortable spaces for residents. Instead, it prioritizes exchange values over functionality to demonstrate and reproduce wealth. The commission controls the permitted activities to keep their public parks clean with the least effort, restricting the residents from thoroughly enjoying them. In Beverly Hills, the public park does not offer a distinctively different function than the private gardens that homeowners obtain. While the homeowners restrict new green space development by privatizing city spaces, the Recreation and Park Commissioners also disallow functional public parks through strict regulations. Residents do not always have sole authority; the city also tries to protect itself from any possible liability. This paradox is created by the trap of being beholden to property value rather than the functionality of the public parks.

Another discussion among the Recreation and Park Commissioners is to revise park regulations on the prohibition of riding on wheeled vehicles, including but not limited to bicycles and skateboards. There have been many attempts to add biking lane facilities to the parks; for example, on June 11, 2013, a city resident suggested adding bike lanes to improve bike safety. However, the committee pushed back against it because of the safety concerns that could happen to the pedestrians, and the city does not want to have liability for this issue. After that public hearing, the problem disappeared until almost a year later when a group of parents appealed to the Recreation and Park Commission that they strongly suggested revising this rule on March 25, 2014. The public presenters argued that not allowing the children to ride bikes in the park is "a lack of opportunity for children to be children" and that many families must leave the city to enjoy these activities with their children. However, the commissioners claimed that no park in Beverly Hills is big enough to accommodate biking simultaneously with walking or jogging. Many public opinion givers proposed to close off the parks for biking on Sundays every odd week in a month; however, many commissioners strongly disagreed while suggesting new ideas, such as opening up schools after hours for such activities, but it cannot be in practice due to funding shortage of the school. Ultimately, the committee did not grant permission to ride wheeled vehicles in the parks, which are still active in the city of Beverly Hills parks. Even though the homeowners have influenced the city's decision, the committees posed that they do not want to have any liability regarding the possible injuries in the park from permitting biking, which has limited the experiences of public park usage. The city is functionally protecting itself from its residents, who can sue a city park since they are the primary users of the park. Instead of thinking about the park users, the city's actions reveal that they do not care about the enjoyment of the park users but rather prioritize their security to have the lowest possible accident reports in the park.

While many regulations aim to protect the city government from legal complications residents could appeal to, some rules specifically target specific groups of people, especially unhoused populations and panhandlers. Many regulations do not explicitly say that they do not welcome those people to the Beverly Hills parks since it would be unconstitutional. Still, some rules, for example, the shading structures or tents, oppress the unhoused people who camp and stay in those spaces as their temporary shelters. The “Adults in Playgrounds” discussion on October 27, 2015, initially targeted the unhoused people who stayed past hours and loitered in the playground area. They claimed the playground should be a “safe” place instead of a shelter. Because of that, the presenter suggested that the city should handle the unhoused more proactively rather than reactively, suggesting drafting an ordinance that decreases the presence of this population group in the park. Although there is some argument that the details of this ordinance are unconstitutional since it sets barriers targeting social classes, the commissioners decided to move forward with the implementation. While the city took more than five years to create a new park, no adult-in-playground regulation was implemented within two meeting periods (a month apart). Since the park users benefit from the exchange value of being in the park's proximity, the ordinance exemplifies how the city regulates and chooses who is permitted or not allowed to be in those so-called public spaces by setting barriers that obstruct certain activities targeting a specific population group.

A firm belief of Beverly Hills’ residents in a sweet and quiet form of suburban civility turns against new developments while maintaining their wealth through property exchange values. The regulations in public parks control who is permitted to use and draw lines on someone the residents see as unappealing, setting physical rules that act as psychological barriers against outsiders. These park restrictions make the spaces less accessible and less functional, not as a space to build community but as a space to showcase their wealth and social status. Even though homeowners are the primary voice in shaping their city spaces, the government is a practical implementor of these preferences. The city committee is only concerned about protecting themselves from legal responsibilities, including from their residents, rather than supporting lively public green spaces, as shown through the wheeled-vehicles in-park regulations. Ultimately, the park regulations aim to protect the exchange value of the residents’ homes by making an exclusive green space rather than prioritizing the use values of the parks. Meanwhile, the city administration perpetuates these desires by creating extremely restrictive parks, protecting themselves from users and flourishing property exchange values, as seen in every Beverly Hills public green space.

Limitations

Through quantitative and qualitative analyses, this study reveals the systemic impacts of the parcel lot size on the perception of private and public spaces within the City of Beverly Hills. However, the author could not visit the field sites more often than six times due to limited time and resources. Subsequent studies should be conducted in other cities with more extended ethnographic fieldwork to evaluate and reconfirm relationships between park aesthetics, policing, and use value. More studies are needed to understand the patterns of lot size and public spaces across different communities in the United States.

Conclusion

Through spatial analysis, the maps reveal the predominance of private green spaces, particularly in the northern regions of the city, underscores a spatial inequity that favors homeowners with substantial parcels. These large private green spaces, facilitated by minimum

lot size restrictions, not only limit the availability of land for public use but also reinforce urban disparity, as shown through the numbers and location of public green spaces within the city. Derived from ethnographic notes of park visits, I realized that public parks in Beverly Hills reflect a stark divide, with northern parks often serving as extensions of private backyards, exhibiting a degree of exclusivity and limited functionality. The city's public parks, characterized by numerous regulations and heavy surveillance, cater more to aesthetic values and the preferences of affluent homeowners rather than serving as inclusive community spaces. Privatizing public spaces manifests in restrictive park rules, limited recreational activities, and an overall ambiance that discourages broad public use, thereby maintaining a luxurious and exclusive environment.

Conversely, parks in the southern regions of Beverly Hills, although still regulated, tend to be more vibrant and community-oriented. These parks serve a vital role for residents who lack extensive private green spaces due to limited parcel size, fostering social interactions and community engagement. However, the strict regulations and barriers to access still pose significant limitations, reflecting a broader city strategy that prioritizes property values and homeowner interests over inclusive public use. The influence of homeowners on city planning and park regulations is evident in the decision-making processes, as reflected in the City Commission Meetings, where the interests of affluent residents often take precedence. Driven by minimum lot size regulations and the prioritization of homeowner interests, the city government further reinforced the system through financial dependence on property taxes, aligning the priorities of city committees with those of the homeowners. Hence, public parks in Beverly Hills serve dual purposes: insurance of homeowners' property exchange value and extensions of private backyards, reinforcing the city's identity as an affluent and exclusive enclave, undermining the potential for public parks to serve as inclusive community assets. The case study of wealthy neighborhoods uncovers extreme power imbalance and how communities exercise their privileges on the spaces, enhancing a better understanding of complex urban landscapes. Not only does this study observe the land use patterns and regulations, but it also allows us to dive deeper into exclusivity by design in cities worldwide. Beverly Hills, known as one of the most affluent cities in Los Angeles—one of the wealthiest regions in the world—portrays an extreme case to elaborate upon and understand the relationships between local politicians and homeowners and their negotiations between public and private spaces. Beverly Hills reveals how affluent homeowners recreate their private spaces via spacious lot size ownership and gatekeeping policies perpetuating exclusivity. This case demonstrates how broader structural inequality is at work at a smaller scale. Addressing these inequities requires reevaluating urban planning policies and a commitment to creating more accessible and functional public spaces that genuinely serve the diverse needs of all residents.

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Declaration of Interest Statement

This research received no external funding or non-financial support. There are no additional relationships, patents, or activities to disclose.

Figures and Tables

Map 1: Public and private green space locations in the City of Beverly Hills

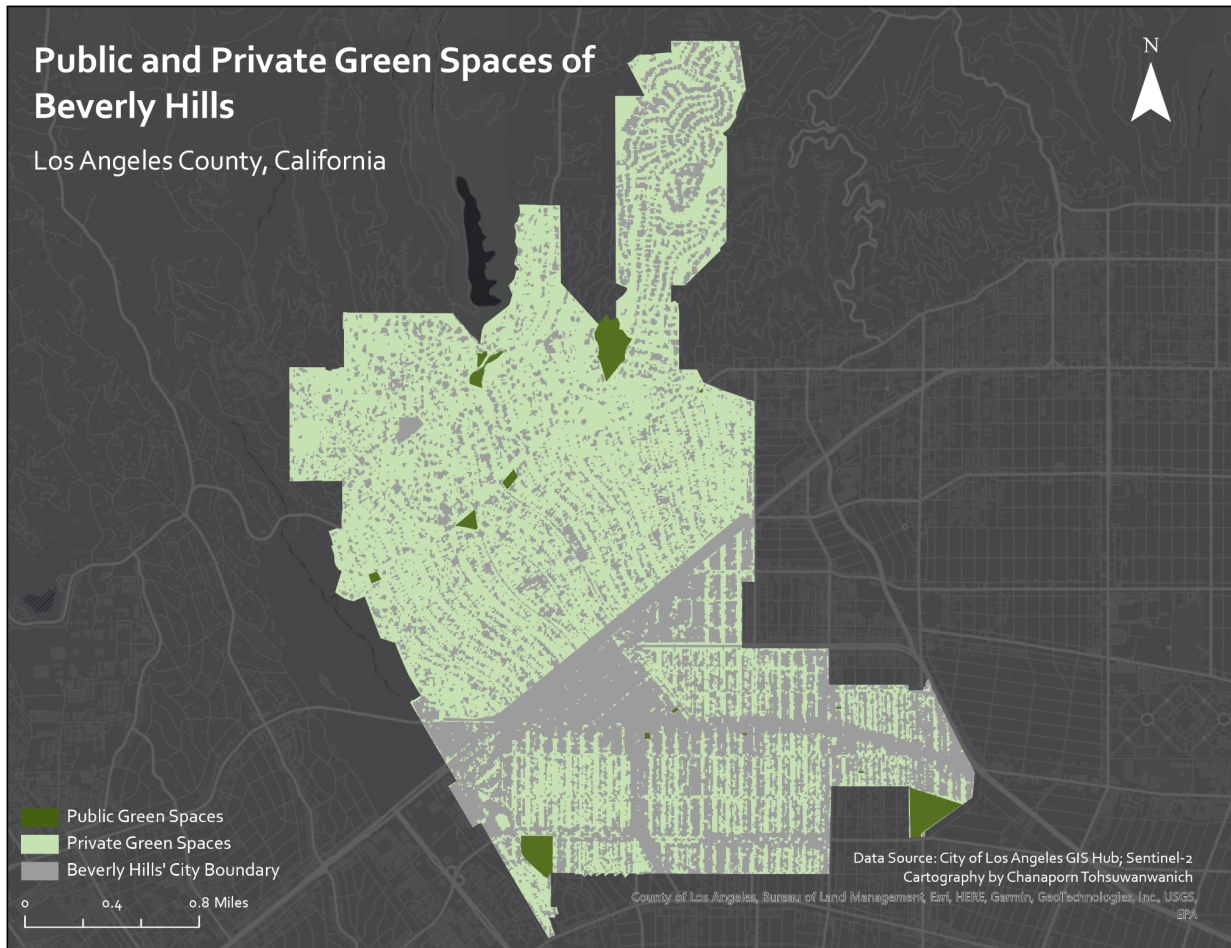


Table 1: The share of different types of green spaces and residential areas compared to the total city area of Beverly Hills.

Types of Land Use	Areas (Acres)	Share of the Total City Area (%)
Total Public Green Spaces	64.33	1.76
Total Private Green Spaces	950.94	26.03
Total Residential Areas	3632.80	99.44
Total Single-Family Residential Areas	2104.79	57.62
Total City Area	3653.12	100

Map 2: Residential parcel size of the City of Beverly Hills, visualized through natural break (Jenks) classification to highlight the differences between each category.

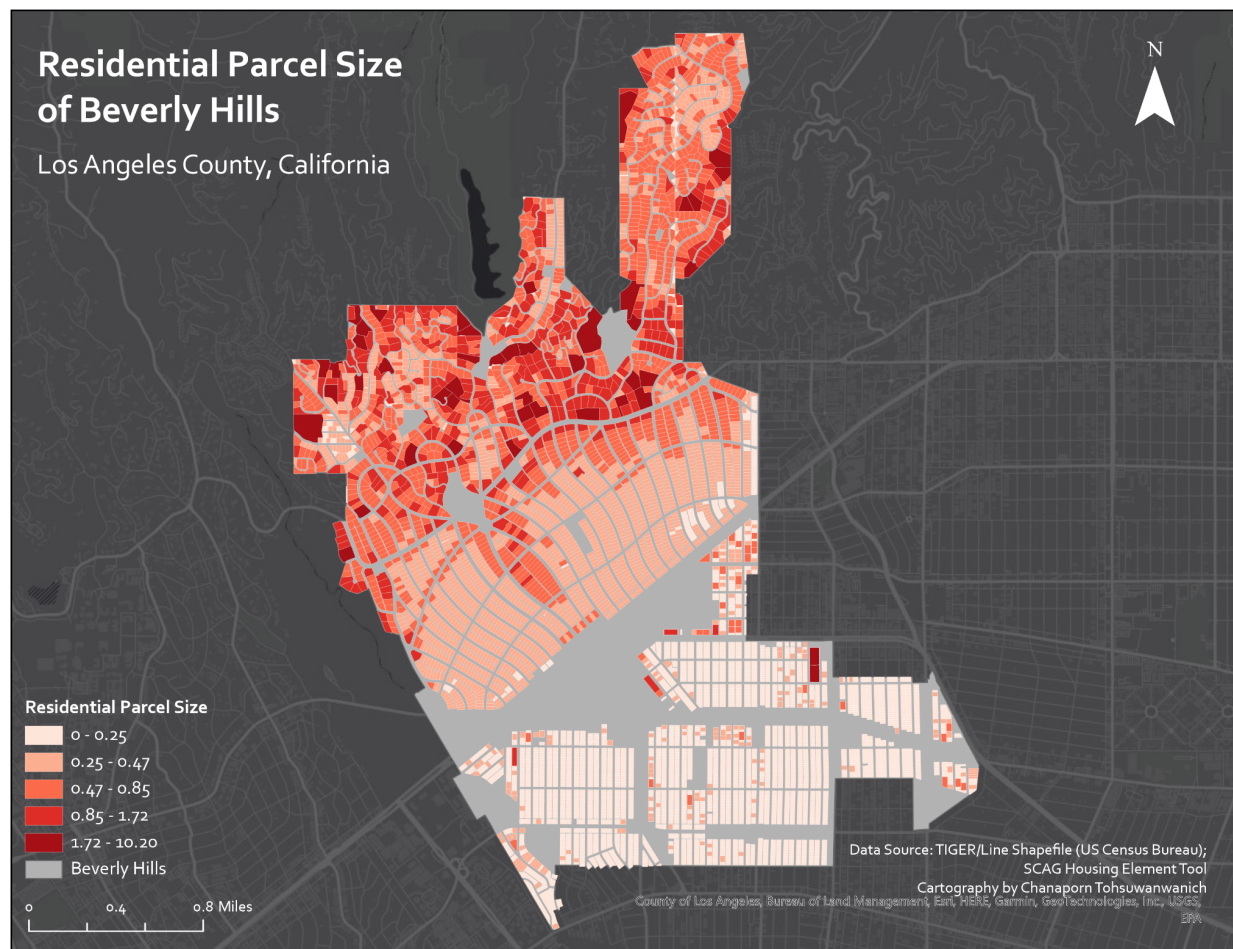


Figure 1: Video surveillance signage is everywhere in Beverly Hills Garden.



Photos by author on April 6, 2024

Figure 2: Active Policing and Video Surveillance in Beverly Hills Garden



Photos by author on April 6, 2024

Figure 3: Beverly Hills Dog Park's Entrance



Photos by author on April 6, 2024

Figure 4: Greystone Mansion Garden



Photos by author on May 25, 2024

Figure 5: Beverly Hills Canon Garden and Its Video Surveillance Signage



Photos by author on April 6, 2024

Figure 6: Roxbury Park Basketball Court and Playground



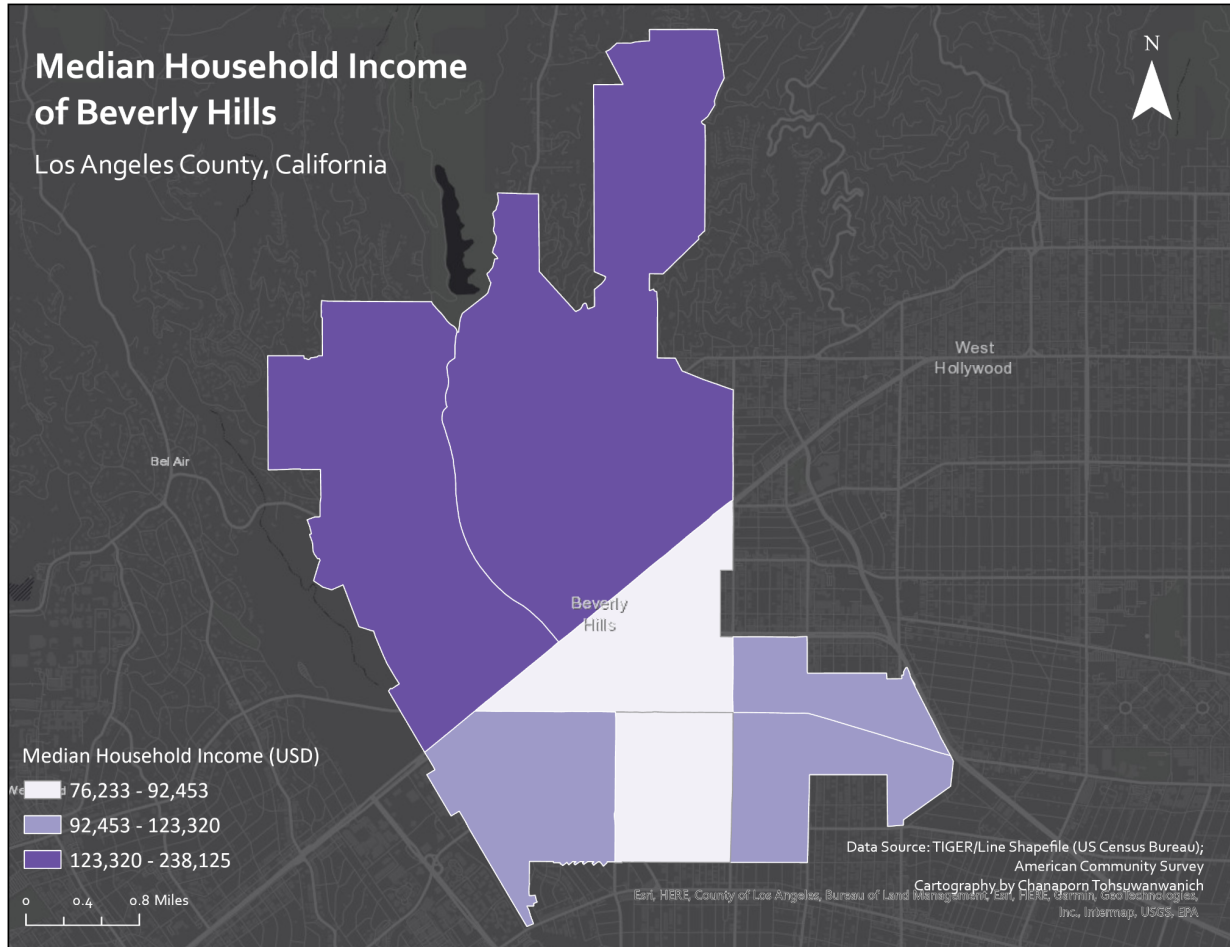
Photos by author on April 26, 2024

Figure 7: La Cienega Park's Sports Field Regulations



Photos by author on April 13, 2024

Map 3: Median Household Income of Beverly Hills



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