

BRANCH PROFILE  
EXCELSIOR BRANCH

Excelsior Branch opened in 1925 on Ocean Avenue and has occupied its current brick and stone building on Mission Street since 1967. The building is a one floor structure of 8500 square feet, fully accessible for the disabled, and features the largest public use area (7,000 square feet) in the branch system. This public area forms one large, approximately square room, with shelving dividing children's and adult areas. Excelsior has a meeting room used for children's library programs, Project Read tutoring and community group meetings.

Excelsior is most heavily used by children, teens and seniors. A working-class neighborhood, it includes large Asian (36%) and Hispanic (31%) populations. A large comprehensive public high school, two public middle schools, and four public elementary schools are located nearby, and the neighborhood is also home to four private schools. The library's busiest hours occur after school when the branch fills up with children and teens doing school assignments. In addition, a substantial number of children use the branch as a latchkey location. The branch receives many visits from group homes and other sheltered environments, and has regular homeless users.

As a resource branch, Excelsior is open 34 hours a week, Tuesdays through Saturdays, and is managed by a Principal Librarian who is also responsible for the Excelsior Cluster, comprised of Excelsior, Bayview, Bernal Heights and Glen Park. There are 3.5 FTE librarians, two FTE technical/clerical staff and six part-time pages who work a combined total of 62 hours. The branch has two staff members bilingual in Spanish and one bilingual in Tagalog.

The population of the Excelsior service area is 46,681--third largest in the branch system. Correspondingly, borrower registration for 1992/93 ranked third among the branches at 24,597. Patron use averages 64.28 visitors per open hour (113,638 per annum). In 1992-93, we ranked seventh highest among the branches for reference questions asked (24,778) and in-library materials use (79,716). Circulation was 107,945 (2.31 per capita); 37% of circulation was in children's materials. Turnover rate was 2.5 in a collection of 42,867 items.

The Children's Services Librarian offers regularly scheduled storytimes, film, craft and performer programs for pre-school and school age children. School and childcare groups visit the library throughout the year. In 1992/93 3,498 children attended programs at the library and 1,642 were seen on an outreach basis. Other users of the children's area include parents and care givers with young children, and students and teachers in the field of early education.

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Excelsior has a growing Spanish language collection that is the second largest in the branches. It also has the only collection of Filipiniana (a donated display collection), and small, well-used adult and juvenile collections in Tagalog. Small popular collections of juvenile and adult Chinese materials and a small collection of juvenile books in Vietnamese round out other-language holdings.

Materials in English on citizenship, legal self-help, GED and TOEFL, math and language skills and usage are plentiful and well used. Curriculum adjunct materials at all levels account for much of reference and circulation and are often in short supply. Strengths of the adult collection include language skills, health and home repair.

The children's collection is strong in picture stories and easy readers. While the non-fiction has been greatly strengthened over the past few years, there is still a greater demand than supply for titles in certain areas such as math, states, countries and American history. New board books are always needed. A younger reading fiction section has been quite helpful.

The Excelsior Branch is heavily patronized by students (including City College students) and school groups from the service areas of smaller branches and reading centers in the southern part of the city. These students, who are generally reluctant to go to the Main Library, need the greater resources of a large branch to complete their assignments.

The Excelsior Branch is located in the long business district along Mission Street. While it sports a few Victorians, it is largely an unattractive, treeless boulevard that nonetheless performs the vital role of providing the transportation and shopping nexus for the large, primarily residential neighborhood. The Mission Street business district features some major chain stores such as Safeway and Walgreens, but is primarily composed of a wide assortment of small independent businesses which provide a broad range of consumer goods and services, and reflect the rich cultural diversity of the neighborhood (over time, increasing numbers of these users are Hispanic and Filipino customers). The largest secondary commercial district lies on Geneva Avenue to the south of Mission Street toward Visitation Valley.

Housing consists mostly of detached one and two-family dwellings. Probably in excess of 90% of housing units are single family dwellings. At 44% the proportion of homeownership is very high.



## EXCELSIOR BRANCH COMMUNITY DESCRIPTION

The Excelsior Branch service area is known as Excelsior/Outer Mission, and includes Balboa Terrace, New Mission Terrace, and part of Crocker Amazon. It is bounded on the south by the city limits, north by the Southern Freeway (Highway 280), east by Mansfield Street and McLaren Park, and to the west by San Jose Avenue. The boundaries of the cluster for which Excelsior is the Resource Branch extend west to Monterey Boulevard and north to Precita and to the east the cluster includes Bayview/Hunter's Point from Bayshore Boulevard to the Bay.

### OVERVIEW

Perhaps the most outstanding physical feature of the Excelsior District is hilly McLaren Park, the second largest park in the City. It is both underutilized and undermaintained, although some recent volunteer neighborhood cleanup efforts have attempted to alleviate the effects of littering and illegal dumping. Several other parks are used more by neighborhood children, including the large Crocker-Amazon Playground and Balboa Park (which includes a swimming pool and the Ingleside Police Station). There are three small but strategically-located playgrounds, Chalmers, Cayuga, and Excelsior. Excelsior, at the intersection of Russia and Madrid Street, is the closest to the branch and houses a new clubhouse where community organizations can meet.

The commercial heart of the community is the long business district along Mission Street. While it sports a few Victorians, it is largely an unattractive, treeless boulevard that nonetheless performs the vital role of providing the transportation and shopping nexus for the large, primarily residential neighborhood. The Mission Street business district features some major chain stores such as Safeway and Walgreens, but is primarily composed of a wide assortment of small independent businesses which provide a broad range of consumer goods and services, and reflect the rich cultural diversity of the neighborhood (over time, increasing numbers of these cater to Hispanic and Filipino customers). The largest secondary commercial district lies on Geneva Avenue to the south of Mission Street toward Visitation Valley.

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**HISTORY**

The community grew up around the old Corpus Christi Church on Alemany Boulevard, which was founded in 1897 by Archbishop Riordan to serve the Italians who worked on truck farms in the area. After the 1906 earthquake, settlement of the still rural area by Italians and a significant minority of Irish accelerated. (McLaren Park served as a tent city in the weeks following the quake.) The neighborhood continued to develop as a largely Catholic area, and Epiphany Church opened in 1914. Both parishes started schools; children attending them still use the Excelsior Branch today.

Beginning in the 1960s a sizable influx of Hispanics began settling in the area, often moving here from the Inner Mission in search of affordable single-family housing. More recently a large number of Filipinos and Chinese have moved into the area. As the neighborhood changed, many of the original Irish and Italian residents followed the familiar pattern of moving to the suburbs. The area began to suffer somewhat from the symptoms of urban decay, with an accompanying decline in city services and political clout. Vigorous community organizing efforts in the mid-1970s, spearheaded by a group called Communities of the Outer Mission Organization (COMO), resulted in some successes in dealing with these problems through the creation of block clubs and the lobbying efforts of a number of the Outer Mission neighborhoods of which Excelsior is a part.

**COMMUNITY SERVICES AND ORGANIZATIONS**

Excelsior's service area includes many schools, preschools and day care facilities, reflecting the high concentration of children in the neighborhood population. There are four public elementary schools, one of which, San Francisco Community School, is a magnet K-8 program featuring parent participation. The four schools (the other three are Cleveland, Longfellow and Monroe) serve a combined total of over 1500 students, of whom 31% are identified as LEP/NEP (limited or non-English proficient) and 69% as EDY (educationally disadvantaged youth). Two public middle schools, James Denman and Luther Burbank, serve over 1600 students. Denman has 28% LEP/NEP students; 69% are EDY; Burbank has 29% LEP/NEP; 83% are EDY. Balboa High School, a large comprehensive school which has been threatened with closure several times in recent years, enrolls over 1200 students, of whom 35% are LEP/NEP and 75% EDY.



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The neighborhood is also home to a full contingent of private schools. The two Catholic schools connected to long-time neighborhood parishes, Corpus Christi and Epiphany, serve 297 and 600 students respectively, in grades K-8. Corpus Christi students benefit from an especially close proximity to the Excelsior Branch. The Discovery Center, a non-religious private school with 385 K-8th graders, has been in operation for over 25 years. Three Christian schools lie within the Excelsior service area: Fellowship Academy, Cornerstone Academy and S.F. Christian School. In addition, students who live in the neighborhood but attend magnet schools elsewhere, and students from schools near our service borders frequent the branch regularly. Students from Martin Luther King Middle School, and high school students from Wilson, Burton, and International Studies Academy are often identified at the Excelsior Branch, and we also see Daly City students with regularity. During a recent summer reading program participants came from over 70 San Francisco and 5 non-San Francisco schools. Branch librarians frequently help patrons find books on their reading lists from the community colleges, City College, and San Francisco State.

Two school district Children's Centers, each with both preschool and afterschool K-4 programs, fall within the service area. The Excelsior Children's Center share a facility with the San Francisco Community School; San Miguel Children's Center is next to James Denman Middle School. Rounding out the neighborhood's children's programs are four private preschools, two Tiny Tots programs, family day care groups and the childcare program at the local YMCA. Most of the preschools attend library programs at least once a month, and three to four family day care groups attend on a weekly basis.

Compared to neighborhoods such as the Mission, the Excelsior neighborhood is generally thin on programs and services. The Mission YMCA has an active Senior Center, and the Jewish Home for the Aged, located near the branch at Silver Avenue and Mission Streets, is one of the more imposing structures in the area; its residents or their proxies use the Library on a regular basis. District Health Center #4 shares resources and information with the branch. The Social Security Administration has an office three blocks from the Library. St. Mary's Hospital has an adjunct Adult Geriatric Care program in the neighborhood. Enterprise for High School at Ocean and Mission finds part-time jobs for high school students.



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The Excelsior Youth Club, an organization for ages 12-24, formed recently to create a sense of community among youth fed up with drugs, gangs, and violence. It and another volunteer-run program for latchkey children meet at the newly renovated clubhouse at the Excelsior Playground.

The Neighbors of the Excelsior (NOTE), a community improvement organization, publishes a quarterly neighborhood newsletter. Various booster clubs and block organizations can also be found in the district, though not to the extent of earlier years. The Excelsior Business Association has been in existence for over 30 years, but has become smaller. Other business organizations include the Geneva-Mission Merchants Association and the Excelsior Lions Club. Four cultural/social organizations are headquartered in the neighborhood: La Union Espanola de San Francisco for those interested in Spanish culture; the Slavonic Cultural Center for those of Croatian ancestry, and for those of Italian descent the Sons of Italy Hall and the Italian-American Social Club.

**WHO LIVES HERE? A PROFILE OF EXCELSIOR RESIDENTS**

Neighborhood trends show growing Hispanic and Asian populations with Hispanics currently at 31% (of the Excelsior population of 46,681), Filipino-Americans at 20% and Chinese-Americans at 14.8%. We are also seeing more new immigrants (25% of those asked told the Census they were non-citizens), and this despite a relatively small rental housing offering here (only 32% are renters). It is significant to note for our language collection building that in response to the question "What language do you speak at home?" 28% responded Spanish, 16 Tagalog and 13% Chinese, with 35% saying English only.

Excelsior has one of the three largest youth populations in the City, with 22% under age 18. The population over 65 years old is 15%. The neighborhood has historically been working class with a high number of skilled workers and one of the lowest levels of education in San Francisco; 30% of adults do not complete high school, compared to 21% citywide. All but one of our census tracts are above the City's 1989 median income of \$33,414, ranging from a high of \$43,125 in the northwest to an unbelievable low of \$12,387 at McLaren Park in the southeast (Tract 605, shared with Visitation Valley Branch, which also has the highest youth population in our neighborhood).

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**SUMMARY**

The Excelsior today is a relatively stable low to moderate income neighborhood where families can own their own homes, in a price range that is moderate by San Francisco standards. Small businesses continue to be marginalized in our current economic climate, and buildings often remain unoccupied for longer periods, continuing the cycle of blight: lack of maintenance, graffiti, litter.