Equity, Gentrification, and Building More Walkable Communities
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A serious concern about the effort to create more walkable communities and built environments that support routine physical activity is that these benefits often do not equitably reach all residents. A particular concern is gentrification, when successful walkability projects over time make an area so desirable that real estate values rise and the lowest income residents are forced out. Following are some examples of approaches and policies that may help distribute the benefits of walkability equitably across residents of all incomes, ethnicities, ages, backgrounds, ability and disability, and reduce the adverse impacts of gentrification.

Community engagement & involvement
A common issue can be when low income and minority residents are not effectively engaged during project planning, policy review, and public input. Some approaches:

- Anticipate & overcome language barriers; e.g. translation at events & workshops, multi-lingual checklists for walk audits and other activities.
- Do community outreach for broadest public input through three means:
  - Not just “public meetings,” but creative approaches such as listening sessions, photo voice collections, walk audits, & interactive design charrettes.
  - Engage all possible partners: social service, arts, & historical organizations and advocacy groups such as health, pedestrian, bike, trails, disability, & social justice.
  - Engage in target areas, hosted on site by schools; churches; service organizations; business districts; neighborhood associations; social clubs, and others.

Land use/zoning
Zoning policies and incentives can strongly influence residents’ access to daily needs and essential services.

- Zone for neighborhood mixed-use: retail clusters, neighborhood schools, parks & playgrounds, civic infrastructure. Include incentives for neighborhood groceries.
- Strong incentives for 2nd story residential in retail (such as density bonuses).
- Site design requirements. Include walkways, bike parking, transit shelters; green space & street trees, seating, awnings, articulated facades and windows; low-impact development (LID) practices for storm water.
- Retain neighborhood elementary schools, for walkability & resident engagement.
- Shared use agreements for facilities. Make schools, fields, parks and other facilities available to all residents, for example on evenings and weekends.
- Require multi-modal transportation analysis (MMTA), not just Traffic Impact Analysis (TIA), during development. Assure that impact mitigation measures serve all users (pedestrians, bikes, & transit users, not just cars).

Housing
A consistent challenge is the gentrification that successful efforts to increase walkability can bring; rising housing values that reflects increased desirability. Following are design and policy approaches that may help mitigate adverse impacts.

- Inclusionary zoning. Require a percentage of affordable residential units in major new and re-development, in both residential and mixed-use projects.
- Encourage accessory dwellings, such as over-garages and granny flats. Design neighborhood grids or re-energize existing alleys to ease access.
- Ease permitting for affordable (vs. market rate) accessory dwellings. E.g. by-right development for affordable units; but a special permit for market rate units.
- Add an owner occupancy requirement on rental properties if absentee landlords are an issue (e.g. in particular areas of blight or low maintenance).
- Require mixed housing types and sizes in residential development: rent & own; single families, duplexes & triplexes, row houses, larger multi-unit structures.
- Work with a land bank on acquiring & refurbishing blighted properties.

Transit & Bike Share policies

Transit can be the primary transportation mode for many residents including low-income, those with disabilities, and non-car owners. Providing comprehensive, frequent, and timely transit service can be critical for equitable access to jobs, services, education, and recreation. The most robust transit systems serve the most diverse populations, across lines of race, income, age, and disability. Approaches:

- Transit pass inclusion programs. Contract or bulk purchase of transit passes by schools, colleges, employers, and municipalities for students and employees, to allow IDs to act as transit passes reduces barriers for users, creates predictable incomes streams for transit entities, and a more diverse ridership.
- Extend service to evening and weekend hours to support shift workers and others dependent on transit for essential services.
- Creative funding: parking districts, development impact fees, local gas taxes.
- Monthly passes, subsidized memberships for bike share programs.
- Universal pass program for all forms of transit and bike share program, to maximize access to all.

Resources:

- PolicyLink: a research & action institute for economic & social equity. [www.policylink.org](http://www.policylink.org)
- *A Practitioner's Guide for Advancing Health Equity: Community Strategies for Preventing Chronic Disease*, compiled by the CDC, with case studies & many resources:


• A brief but striking summary of the problem from GirlTrek, a health and social change organization targeting black women, at [www.girltrek.org](http://www.girltrek.org).

• Black pedestrians are 60 percent more likely than white ones to be killed by cars while walking in the U.S. See SmartGrowth America’s *Dangerous by Design 2014* report. [http://www.smartgrowthamerica.org/2014/05/20/dangerous-by-design-2014-highlights-preventable-pedestrian-fatals/](http://www.smartgrowthamerica.org/2014/05/20/dangerous-by-design-2014-highlights-preventable-pedestrian-fatals/)

• The disparity is due in part to unequal infrastructure. Low-income neighborhoods are less likely to have adequate sidewalks, crosswalks, lighting or traffic-calming measures. [https://nextcity.org/daily/entry/sidewalks-silver-line-washington-dc-tysons-corner](https://nextcity.org/daily/entry/sidewalks-silver-line-washington-dc-tysons-corner)

• Black Americans are more likely than white Americans to live in concentrated poverty, the issue impacts black pedestrians disproportionately. [https://nextcity.org/daily/entry/concentrated-poverty-has-increased-50-percent-since-2000](https://nextcity.org/daily/entry/concentrated-poverty-has-increased-50-percent-since-2000)

• A 2014 Portland State University study of crosswalks in downtown Portland found that motorists yielded more frequently to white walkers than black walkers. [https://nextcity.org/daily/entry/baltimore-pedestrian-error-pedestrian-deaths-walkability](https://nextcity.org/daily/entry/baltimore-pedestrian-error-pedestrian-deaths-walkability)