On May 20th, 2019, America Walks hosted the webinar, “Equitable Development: Putting it into Place”, where we took the “what” of equitable development and addressed the “how.” The panel shares their own experiences in equitable development planning and share lessons, resources, and practices for you to get started on the path.

It featured Mary Bogle, principal research associate in the Metropolitan Housing and Communities Policy Center at the Urban Institute, Don Edwards, Chief Executive Officer and Principal, Justice and Sustainability Associates, and Scott Kratz, Director of the 11th Street Bridge Park. Our inspiring panelists shared their own experiences in equitable development planning and shared lessons, resources, and practices for you to get started on the path.

America Walks received many questions and comments from attendees. Panelist Mary Bogle took time to offer her expert answers, to continue the conversation and provide further insight on best practices her and her colleagues used for creating safe, accessible, and enjoyable walking conditions in their work, so you can too.

Did you release the plan in different languages? If so, how did you decide what language?

Mary: The Equitable Development Plan (EDP) was released in English - in our immediate neighborhoods most residents speak English. But we are subtitling our EDP videos into Spanish for a broader applicability. We chose Spanish as that is the second most spoken language in the U.S.

Can you all speak to the need to be nimble as external factors change, ie increase in crime, government shutdown, new developments and angst around loss of established communities, ie Barry Farm.

Mary: It is important to be able to shift strategies when needed. For instance, we realized that cultural equity strategies should have been included in the original plan and we spent a year working with the community to identify these new arts & culture strategies. And we’ve since added a Community Leadership Empowerment Workshop to build more effective local leaders and matched Children Savings Accounts after realizing that 50% of our residents are either unbanked or underbanked. The plan should continue to grow & respond to community needs.

Did you come up with a single concept to let people shoot at or concept alternatives and let people pick the preferred alternative?

Mary: Every equitable development strategy was developed in community meetings. These ideas were refined & prioritized in subsequent convenings through a dot voting process. We did intentionally put suggestions into one of three buckets: #1 - strategies that we could implement ourselves #2 - strategies that we could influence #3 - strategies that we had no control over. Ideas in this third bucket were put off to the side.
Of the 42,000 people in your core area, how many participated in the process? Surveys, public meetings, etc. Did you engage elected officials to facilitate your outreach or engage elected officials as part of the outreach?

Mary: We engaged several hundred residents to help create our equitable development strategies in public meetings, refining ideas on-line and in small convenings. Public officials were invited to participate in the convenings (Office of Planning, DSLBD, Employment Services, Housing & Community Development) and we shared draft copies with key government leaders for feedback at every step. The city needs to be our partner for success.

Since the core area was determined by walk time from the park, what steps did you take to advance better and more access by bike, walking, and the river?

Mary: We have spent much time ensuring that the park will be deeply stitched into local neighborhoods by installing approx. $200,000 of public art along key corridors & activating nearby site with an annual River Festival that draws approx. 9,000 residents. A great way to test how people are getting down to the river!

What is the life expectancy of this bridge in its park form?

Mary: The new bridges have a life-span of 75 years.

Since the 11th Street bridge won't be completed for 4 years, do you have any plans to start using the space temporarily for pop up events before then? or other ways to do short term pre construction actions and activities there?

Mary: For the last 5 years, we have hosted an annual Anacostia River Festival down by the park site in collaboration with the National Park Service, National Cherry Blossom Festival and over 40 non-profit partners. This has been a fabulous way to test, pilot & evaluate programming for the future park.

How do you combat planning fatigue?

Mary: We need to demonstrate real action & progress. For us that meant launching a Ward 8 Home Buyers Club within 1 month of formally releasing our Equitable Development Plan.