

Race and Equity Pocket Questions

Title and purpose of this initiative:

Reimagining E Weaver Street (between N Greensboro Street and Main Street). The purpose of this work session item is to provide a framework for the Council to discuss possible modifications to East Weaver Street that would reduce or eliminate vehicle traffic, thereby creating a pedestrian-priority space or pedestrian plaza.

Department:

Planning

What are the racial and equity impacts?

Closure of E Weaver Street must consider both positive and negative impacts for residents, particularly those living in Lloyd-Broad and Tin Top, the two most proximate historically Black neighborhoods, as well as visitors to downtown Carrboro. This project will impact community members and visitors based on transportation choices – which has intersections with various dimensions of equity including race, income, age, and disability status.

Who is or will experience community burden?

Burdens will be experienced principally by those that travel through downtown Carrboro by choice or out-of-necessity. Rerouting of bus (F and CW routes), bicycle, and vehicle trips along E Weaver Street may increase traffic and stacking on Greensboro Street and Main Street. Stacking from rerouted trips (6,800 average annual daily trips in 2023) on Greensboro, Main, and Roberson may reduce air quality along those corridors for pedestrians and cyclists--patrons, and residents. Residents in the Lloyd-Broad neighborhood have conveyed extended wait times exiting the neighborhood currently due to stacking and particularly during peak travel times. Residents in Tin Top have also expressed access concerns with entering and exiting their neighborhood at all times of day. Stacking on N Greensboro Street may also affect access to everyday businesses like Harris Teeter and CVS, as well as access to the parking lots for Carr Mill Mall businesses, potentially burdening both business owners and residents. Community members who must use a car due to a physical disability, employees that work downtown but live beyond regular transit access (i.e. service industry employees), and transit users will experience these burdens both from losing a bus stop and having to walk farther, and from increased travel times due to road congestion as well. Additionally, emergency responders will have to navigate this congestion—Fire when traveling east through Carrboro, (Chapel Hill Fire providing back-up to Carrboro) and the Police when exiting from the Century Center—which could result in impacts to residents in need of emergency response.

Who is or will experience community benefit?

Benefits will be provided foremost to patrons and visitors along E Weaver Street, as well as those that can travel to and through downtown without a vehicle. The project may also have long-term benefits to visitors and nearby residents. Reimagining E Weaver Street as a pedestrian only corridor will reduce noise and idling outside of Weaver Street Market and E Weaver businesses—improving the pedestrian and patron experience along the block, as well as acute air quality and walkability. Closure allows the Town to explore public space enhancement in the downtown and pursue climate-friendly and green infrastructure improvements that contribute to shading and reduction in heat island

effects. East Weaver Street can also serve more frequently as a space activated by local events, much like it does during Open Streets and the Festival en La Calle (Latin American Festival). These benefits may bring more visitors to downtown. Improvements to the space that make it safer for pedestrians, and safe infrastructure for bicyclists, will improve the pedestrian and bike experience downtown. Changes may make it easier for those who live close enough and/or are able-bodied to choose alternate modes of travel which could reduce overall vehicle-miles-traveled and greenhouse gas emissions.

What are the root causes of inequity?

Income and its intersection with race, and disability status are major contributing factors to inequitable access to multiple transit choices. Low-income households are more likely to have limited to no access to a vehicle and/or cannot afford to live close to transit or close to places of employment. These community members either must rely on transit, walking, and biking or must own a car to get to work or access their basic needs. Additionally, community members with a physical disability often require the use of a motor vehicle. Community members that do not have the luxury of transportation choice are burdened disproportionately from infrastructure changes that result in rerouting of transit, changes in congestion, and varying levels of access.

What might be the unintended consequences of this action or strategy?

Safety considerations will require traffic signal changes at both ends of E Weaver Street to protect pedestrians exiting the facility to cross N Greensboro or Main Street and cyclists who may not dismount when traveling through the block. If the improved pedestrian experience does not counterbalance the impacts to those that choose to or must drive, visitors and residents may choose destinations other than downtown Carrboro. Increased traffic on NCDOT maintained roads from rerouted cars may result in recommendations for road changes to meet the capacity needs for increased motor vehicle traffic (whether on Main Street, N Greensboro Street, or NC 54). One remaining unknown is how private parking lot owners will interact with the pedestrian space—users of the pedestrian street could be towed from the Carr Mill and Harris Teeter lots.

How is your department planning to mitigate any burdens, inequities, and unintended consequences?

Mitigation will be interdepartmental and require collaboration. Safe intersection improvements will need to be designed to coordinate circulation changes and provide for the safety of pedestrians using the facility and safety of cyclists dismounting or mounting the bikes to reenter the roadway. The Town will need to reach out to business and property owners to consistently measure economic impacts. Town staff should continue counting travelers in downtown to understand whether closing E Weaver to vehicles leads to an increase or decrease of visitors/patrons to downtown businesses or changes to downtown visitation as a whole. The Town will need to pull data from Orange County to monitor emergency response times. The Town will also need to conduct engagement with downtown residents, particularly those in historically Black neighborhoods including Lloyd-Broad and Tin Top, to understand how these changes are impacting access to their neighborhoods.