

RACE & EQUITY POCKET QUESTIONS

Title & Purpose of this Initiative: Bolin Creek Greenway and Community Engagement

Department: Communication & Engagement

Information below cited in part from *Rails-to-Trails Conservancy (RTC)*

<https://www.railstotrails.org/build-trails/trail-building-toolbox/basics/equitable-and-inclusive-trails/>
and *Running while Black: A distinctive safety concern and barrier to exercise in White neighborhoods*
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8105660/>

What are the Racial and Equity impacts?

Goals of the greenway conceptual plan include to “connect surrounding land use in Carrboro by providing a non-motorized mode of transportation” and to “enhance quality of life by providing a recreational facility for all citizens of Carrboro to enjoy.” If constructed, Carrboro’s Bolin Creek Greenway has the potential to provide both transportation and recreational opportunities. Key to maximizing the impact of trails is ensuring every stakeholder in a community is a part of the development process and will benefit from their use.

From an engagement perspective on the Bolin Creek Greenway trail alignment question, it was important to conduct both broad communitywide outreach and targeted outreach to underserved communities. Targeted outreach utilized partnerships with El Centro Hispano, Refugee Community Partnership and the Chapel Hill-Carrboro Branch of the NAACP.

Who is or will experience community burden?

Trails have the ability to help reconnect neighborhoods and contribute to healthier and more inclusive communities. All stakeholder groups—with a focus on those that have been traditionally underserved—should be represented at all levels.

As the Town strives to bring in more voices from across the community, residents who live adjacent to the green space for the proposed project may temporarily feel their voices are not receiving appropriate consideration at this stage of the planning process. Hearing from neighborhoods that border the Bolin Forest and the creek in future engagement efforts will be important to understand the perspectives, opportunities, and challenges from these residents to be incorporated into the future greenway development.

During the greenway engagement process, newly engaged residents who are pressed for time and are not already in the loop on these conversations may feel burdened by requests to learn more about the topic, take surveys and provide feedback. When engagement is presented as a complicated topic, it can become a burden for some to take the time to form opinions and provide feedback.

Who is or will experience community benefit?

Trails and greenways have the potential to deliver powerful benefits to communities—providing people of every age, ability, and socioeconomic background safe and inexpensive spaces for outdoor physical activity, commuting and recreation.

Trails can serve as economic catalysts—opening up opportunities for outdoor tourism and small business development, and they can also provide critical “social infrastructure”— public spaces where people can meet, interact and build relationships.

What are the root causes of inequity?

On the surface, trails are egalitarian and inclusive. In practice, these facilities, and the benefits they bring, are not always equitably distributed. Low-income neighborhoods, Communities of color, people with physical or intellectual disabilities, older adults and people with limited English proficiency are among those that have been traditionally underserved, mis-served or left out of decision-making and planning processes including the development of parks, trails and safe active transportation facilities.

The reasons for these disparities in access and investment are both contemporary and historical. For example, many U.S. cities were intentionally divided along race and class lines—with residential and transportation development patterns rooted in segregation, discriminatory laws and housing policies intended to disadvantage and exclude people of color. Infrastructure such as railroads and, later, highways reinforced this segregation.

This separation extended to outdoor recreation; pools, beaches and municipal parks were segregated both by law and in practice. These places, which ought to have been places where Americans from different walks of life could come together, instead became contested spaces.

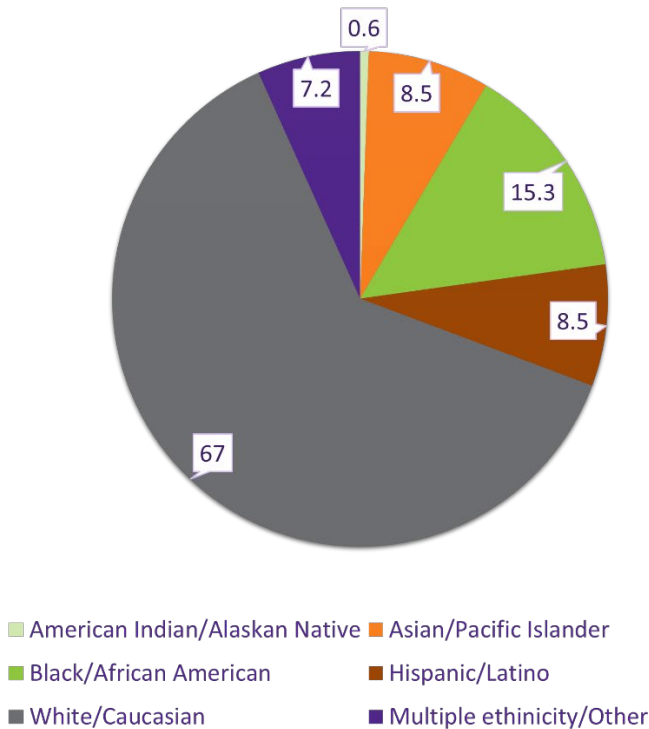
All of these things work together to negatively impact the health of residents. In addition, crime and the perception of safety, as well as racial profiling, harassment and stereotyping, has made people of color feel unwelcome, uncomfortable and even unsafe in the outdoors.

Barriers to trail use can include lack of signage. Attention should be directed toward the safety concerns of Black Americans living in neighborhoods and an inherent hyperawareness of one’s Blackness while exercising outdoors in White neighborhoods. While White residents may feel comfortable exercising in an unmarked natural area without signage, many Black residents will not have the same comfort level.

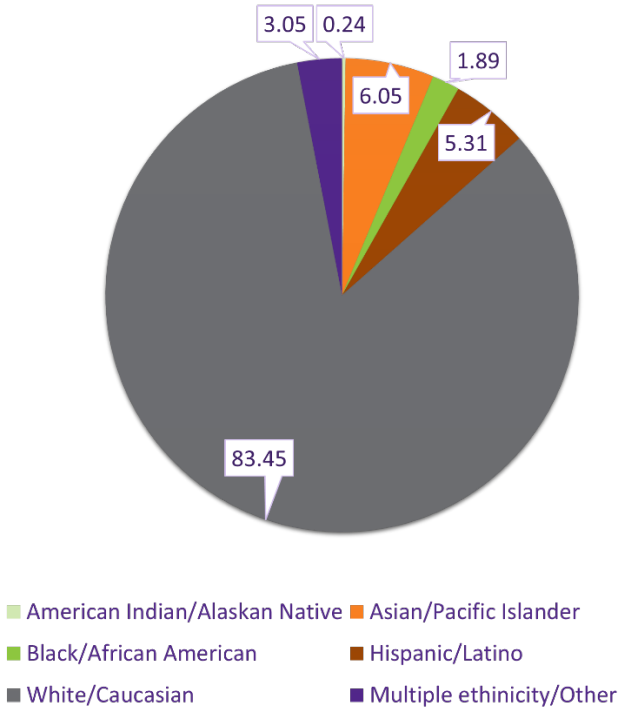
What might be the unintended consequences of this action or strategy?

Survey engagement for the Bolin Creek Greenway along race and ethnicity reporting by respondents (Carrboro residents only) is as follows:

Carrboro Demographics



Survey Demographics of Carrboro Residents



Throughout the Bolin Creek Greenway engagement process, Town staff partnered with the Refugee Community Partnership, which conducted outreach primarily within the Asian community; and El Centro Hispano, which canvassed within the Hispanic/Latino community. More work is needed to improve engagement systems within Black communities through partnerships with the NAACP, residents of historically Black neighborhoods, trusted community members, and other methods.

On a broader note, policy makers should be careful to ensure that engagement is necessary to directly inform decisions, and staff should work to ensure that questions are appropriate for broad engagement.

If staff cannot clearly explain how community input will directly inform decisions or marginalized groups aren't fully represented, residents' frustration and skepticism can grow. A risk is "engagement fatigue" on the part of residents, where they feel they're being solicited over and over for input.

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

The Communication and Engagement Department will continue to work on the following strategies from its functional capacities to build trust in Town programs and projects, and to bring more voices to topics such as the Bolin Creek Greenway by the following:

- Ensuring that questions are appropriate for broad community engagement.
- Showing respect for residents' time and ideas.
- Being clear on what we are looking for when we seek to engage.
- Balancing the Town's need for participation with what's an acceptable level of engagement for our whole community and provide a variety of ways to engage.
- Defining basic goals before developing community outreach methods (surveys, public meetings, interviews, and focus groups).
- Making sure public engagement is necessary and will support decisions. Planning how useful data will be leveraged in decision-making and explaining the plan to participants.
- Contracting with local, community-based organizations in low-income communities and communities of color to conduct engagement processes.
- Clearly explaining how community input will directly inform decisions.
- Scheduling engagement at convenient times/locations, or "going where the people are."
- Providing surveys in languages that a diverse array of residents can understand.
- Building relationships with community networks.
- Engaging with residents at times when the Town is not looking for specific feedback or data. *Examples are Carrboro In Motion neighborhood block parties when residents are happy to see the party trailer show up with friendly staff faces. These are the people who, the next time we have transactional engagement requests, may come to the table because they recognize us.*
- Providing information back out to participants at the end of the engagement process, using the same tools and techniques used to collect the data in the first place.