

An aerial photograph of a city, likely Raleigh, North Carolina, showing a mix of urban development and green space. In the background, a dense cluster of high-rise buildings forms the city skyline. The middle ground features a mix of lower-rise commercial and residential buildings, interspersed with large, mature trees. In the foreground, a multi-lane highway runs diagonally across the frame, with a green median and trees. The overall scene is bathed in the warm light of late afternoon or early morning.

EQUITABLE DEVELOPMENT AROUND TRANSIT: EQUITABLE OUTREACH

EQUITABLE OUTREACH: GOING BEYOND THE "OFFICIAL" MEETINGS AND SURVEYS

In addition to the “official” plan in-person and online events, staff worked to be present at community discussions where they were taking place. This recognized the fact that conversations about displacement and community change are taking place at a grassroots level. Staff realized that to not acknowledge that these conversations are occurring and to expect that input to only happen at formal plan events is to miss critical community input.

This approach depended on staff’s ability to find out about and attend these meetings. To do this, staff regularly reviewed social media and worked to develop relationships with active community members.

Primary events staff attended included:

June 27, 2019. Partners for Environmental Justice. Walnut Creek Wetland Park. Staff presented an overview of planning efforts, with particular focus on the Equitable Development process. Approximately 10-15 attendees.

October 22, 2019. Gentrification Series: Preservation Not Displacement, hosted by North Carolina Black Alliance. St. Augustine’s University. Staff attended primarily to listen to concerns, but did mention upcoming plan events. Approximately 40 attendees. Topics included housing affordability, small business support, and other displacement-related issues.

October 26, 2019. Southeast Raleigh Community Engagement Session. Vital Link school. This event coincided with the date of the formal project meetings. Staff went straight from the plan meeting to this community event, which involved conversations and presentations about a broad range of issues, including food options, transportation, history and culture, health care and mental health, job

training and reentry programs, and youth-related issues. Dozens of people attended, and staff had one-on-one conversations with many attendees. Staff also discussed event planning with organizers in order to avoid overlapping events in the future.

November 14, 2019. Housing Consolidated Plan, Chavis Community Center. This was one of a series of events to receive input on the city's housing plans. Staff set up a table to provide information about the Equitable Development process. Several dozen people attended, and staff had one-on-one conversations with a number of attendees.

December 18, 2010. Advance Carolina/Wake County Housing Coalition. Crosby-Garfield Center. This event involved a focus on gentrification. It included approximately 15-20 attendees, generally people involved in housing or with a strong interest in housing and equity issues. As with other events, staff attended to listen to concerns, but did mention upcoming plan events.

Other Events

Staff attended a number of Citizens Advisory Council (CAC) meetings during the process, particularly those along the New Bern corridor, where transit planning for BRT is occurring first. These included the Central, North Central, East, and South Central CACs. These discussions ranged from quick updates to more detailed discussions of the Equitable Development plan. Affordability was a recurring topic.

Key Themes

Several key themes emerged that didn't necessarily come through as clearly during "official" plan meetings.

1) The first, and most fundamental, theme involved questions: What is meant by affordability? Affordable to whom?

Meeting participants were very aware of the varying levels of

affordability that are often combined in the overall umbrella term of “affordable housing.” In a well-off metro area such as Raleigh, the median income is relatively high, and units that are affordable at, say, 80 percent of median will not be accessible to workers in the service sector or other lower-paying jobs. The focus was on the need for deeper affordability – units affordable to households making 60, or 50, or 30 percent of the area median. This emphasis shaped final plan recommendations, which reflected that focus on deeper affordability.

2) A second major theme involved concern about predatory purchasing. Many people shared stories of a property owner who sold a house or land for less than the market value. As land values rise, the value of a property may be many times what was paid decades ago, or even the value from five or 10 years ago. Plan recommendations included stepping up efforts to provide homeowners about the true value of their property and city programs, such as for repair assistance, that can avoid the need to sell in the first place.

3) A desire to ensure that local businesses are helped, not hurt, by BRT and related investments. More residents and new development can provide a significant opportunity – but it also could mean higher rents. If existing businesses can’t access capital for, say, an expanded kitchen or new façade, they may not be able to take advantage of having more potential customers. Plan recommendations included a focus on ensuring resources are available for building improvements and ensuring that the construction phase of BRT does not hinder visibility and accessibility.

4) A last theme, and one that ties together multiple threads, involved acknowledging a legacy of discrimination against Black residents and communities. In Raleigh, as in other American cities, a legacy of racism in land use and regulations still shapes the city today. Deed restrictions, discriminatory lending, exclusionary zoning, and unequal facilities all played a role. Participants live in the places shaped by that history, and came to the project with a skepticism borne of past disappointment. The planning process recognized that, as a part of

a means to move forward, that history must be acknowledged. The final document included a section on that history in the instruction, and future planning processes will build upon that and dive more deeply into specific areas of the city.