



City of Takoma Park
Housing and Community Development, Planning Division:

Racial Equity Project Profile- We Belong Here: The Takoma Park Equity Walk

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City Website Link: <https://takomaparkmd.gov/government/housing-and-community-development/planning-and-community-development/we-belong-here-the-takoma-park-equity-walk/>

Project Goal

Aligning with the guidelines of the America Walks Community Change Grant, projects will create healthy, active, and engaged communities that support walking as transportation, health, and recreation, which includes:

- advancing safe, equitable, accessible, and enjoyable places to walk and move.
- providing support to the growing network of advocates, organizations, and agencies using innovative, engaging, and inclusive programs and projects.
- creating change at the community level.
- showing increased physical activity and active transportation in a specific community.
- demonstrating a culture of inclusive health.

Project Description

- Safe Routes to School was awarded \$1500 from America Walks to construct a one mile themed sensory/fitness route titled "Walk in Someone Else's Shoes," new title: "We Belong Here: The Takoma Park Equity Walk. The original scope of the project was changed slightly to advance the project during COVID-19. The route intersects with the two elementary schools, middle school, Community Center, and library. An additional route has been added to Ann Street near the Takoma Crossroads. Both routes have painted stencils on the sidewalk and QR codes that link to an interactive, online storymap. Walkers can scroll to any station on the storymap to pull up prompts for exploration and discussion. The project will launch on October 7th, Walk to School Day.

City Council Priorities

- A Livable Community for All, Environmentally Sustainable Community

Racial Equity Considerations Submitted to City Council

- NA, has not been a Council agenda item yet

Racial Equity Toolkit Questions

What does data tell us about who is likely to be impacted by the project? What data sources are you using and are there any data gaps?

A: The project is geared towards kids grades K-8 but intended as a family activity. When selecting the routes, we considered geographical proximity to Montgomery County public schools – the primary route is next to the Takoma Park Middle School, Piney Branch Elementary School and the Takoma Park Elementary School; students at those schools are from all over the City. The primary route is also intended to enhance the Library and Community Center’s draw as a community hub, accessible to all.

While the project originally had one route, we expanded to two routes after looking at the data. We wanted to make sure that the routes were distributed throughout the City to be accessible to residents of all Wards. Using ArcGIS maps from the Planning Division, the Ann Street route was selected to service other areas of the City (e.g. Crossroads Market) and to accommodate residents who do not live within walking distance of the Community Center.

What is your community engagement strategy for this project? How will you use community feedback to avoid unintended consequences?

A: The project is being advertised in the Takoma Park newsletter, the Takoma Insider, and City of Takoma Park social media platforms. Letters were hand delivered to individual households along the primary Grant Avenue route.

For residents who don’t have access to digital formats, we have a tri-fold printed brochure to distribute to residents using the Books-to-Go program and Free Little Libraries. The project manager will be reaching out personally to parent-teacher associations at local schools. While painting the route stencils, volunteers also engaged in in-person engagement (which has been somewhat limited due to the pandemic). In-person workshops are planned for post-pandemic promotion of the Equity Walk.

Feedback from the Montgomery County Public Schools Equity Initiative Unit, Safe Routes to School Partnership Community Engagement, Safe Kids Worldwide, Montgomery County Department of Transportation (Safe Routes to School) and the Takoma Park Library staff was incorporated into the Equity Walk content.

How are you evaluating the success of this project?

A: We will be tracking storymap and website usership. We will be partnering with teachers to schedule class trips, including in coordination with parent-teacher associations around Unity Day, as well as librarians and look for feedback that the Walk is changing walkers' mindsets. We will add a user survey on the storymap so that walkers can provide feedback; they can also email the project manager directly.

How might a successful project advance racial equity in Takoma Park, in a sustainable way?

A: The overarching theme of the walk is belonging. The goal is to ask young people how they feel about themselves, who they are, what makes them unique, what makes them proud, and what do they want other people to respect them for? Self-understanding can then lead to respect for other's perspectives. The line of questioning is intended to help children develop the knowledge that we each want to feel that we belong, regardless of what we look like or who we are. This discussion is timely in the current political climate. Kids and families will be connected to library and other resources through the website where they can dig deeper into identity and belonging, and continue the discussion.

Since it is walking outdoors and ADA accessible for the most part, no one is excluded. If the walk is popular, we can repaint in two years. It may lead to similar projects. The walk is also a way to simply have fun! and create a sense of community with neighbors of all backgrounds.

Report Back!

Project Outcome & Racial Equity Impact

TBD- this project is still ongoing.

Next Steps:

What were the challenges of this project? What further action and resources are needed?

TBD- this project is still ongoing.