

October 2023

Advancing Park Equity

Local Solutions, National Impact



*Summarizing the Work and Impact of the
ULI District Council Cohort for Park Equity Program*

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Discover transformative practices for real estate and land use at uli.org/sustainability. Connect with the center at sustainability@uli.org.

About the ULI District Council Cohort for Park Equity Program

The Cohort for Park Equity (CPE) was a network of ULI district councils, member experts, and community partners in five cities working together to identify strategies—and take action—to advance equitable access to parks, trails, and open space.

CPE provided on-the-ground technical assistance that leveraged ULI member expertise to advise on complex real estate, land use, and policy challenges related to park

and trail access, maintenance, and development. Over the course of the 12-month program, from May 2022 to May 2023, the Institute convened the cohort regularly to learn about national best practices and discuss peer cities' next steps to advance equity in their communities.

The five participating district councils included [ULI Austin](#), [ULI Charlotte](#), [ULI Dallas–Fort Worth](#), [ULI New York](#), and [ULI San Antonio](#).

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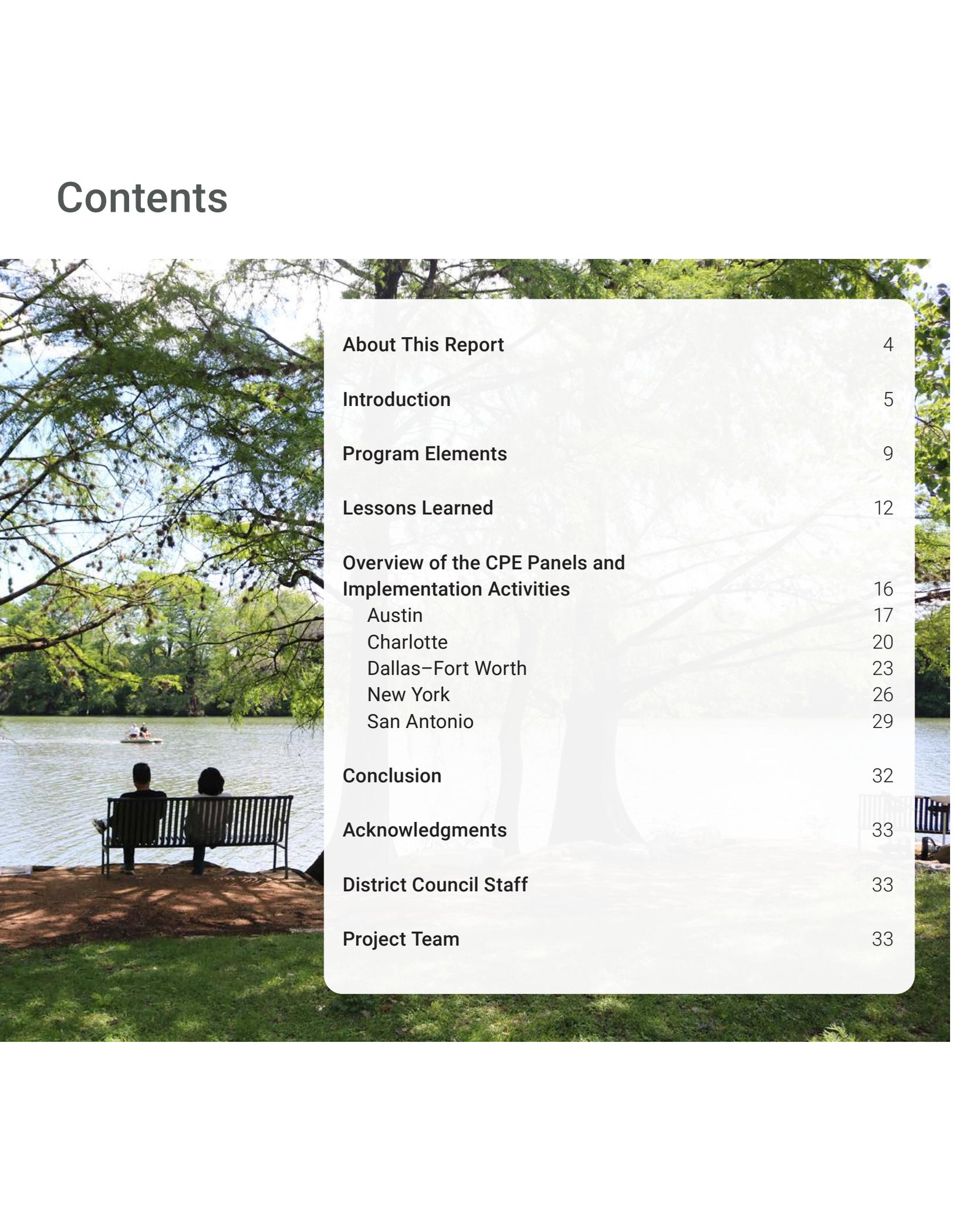
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About This Report

Advancing Park Equity provides a summary of the work and impact of the ULI District Council Cohort for Park Equity program to advance equitable access to parks, trails, and open space in five cities throughout the United States. Specifically, this report:

- Describes the purpose, goals, and timeline of the CPE program;
- Offers overarching lessons gleaned from CPE projects that can be applied in other communities; and
- Details each CPE project, including brief summaries of technical assistance activities, key recommendations, and implementation efforts.

According to the Trust for Public Land, over 100 million people in the United States, including 28 million children, do not have access to a high-quality park within a 10-minute walk from home.

In the largest U.S. cities, neighborhoods where most people identify as people of color have access to an average of 43 percent less park space than predominantly white neighborhoods.¹

Increasing park access and improving park quality, especially in historically underserved neighborhoods, is necessary to support healthy, equitable, and resilient communities throughout the country.

Advancing park equity is a complex undertaking, requiring collaboration across multiple stakeholder groups over long periods of time. Yet, with dedicated efforts that center health equity, acknowledge past (and current) trauma, prioritize inclusive community engagement, and involve public, nonprofit, and private partners, cities can ensure that high-quality, inclusive parks are available and accessible to all.



Parks are essential for thriving communities and provide space for arts, culture, and creative expression. (ULI)

Introduction

In May 2022, five of the Institute’s district councils—ULI Austin, ULI Charlotte, ULI Dallas–Fort Worth, ULI New York, and ULI San Antonio—began a yearlong effort to tackle issues of inequitable access to parks, trails, and open space in their communities. Their projects focused on a diverse array of topics, including reimagining underused park space, enhancing community engagement in park development, envisioning new trail connections, and more.

Collaborating with the ULI Randall Lewis Center for Sustainability in Real Estate, the district councils—which are ULI’s local chapters—explored and advanced tangible solutions to park access and equity challenges across the United States.

Parks, trails, and open space are critical infrastructure for cities. They provide access to nature, places for physical activity, and social connectivity. However, these essential spaces are inequitably distributed, with communities that are primarily home to people of color and those with low incomes having access to fewer, smaller, and lower-quality parks than more affluent communities with few people of color.

Park access is the just and fair quantity, proximity, and connections to quality parks, green spaces, and recreation facilities, as well as programs that are safe, inclusive, culturally relevant, and welcoming to everyone.

—National Recreation and Parks Association

In the United States, this trend is rooted in longstanding patterns of residential segregation resulting from intentionally racist policies and uneven public and private investments. These policies increased park access for white people, while drastically limiting it for Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC).

Inequities also exist in terms of feelings of safety and belonging within parks. Spaces might be designed or programmed in ways that are not inclusive across lines of race, income, gender, age, ability, immigration status, religion, sexual orientation, and more, all of which intersect. In addition, racist and discriminatory behavior may keep people of color from using parks even when they are accessible.



In New York, volunteer TAP panelists provided strategic advice on equitable greenway development throughout the city’s boroughs. (Bottomley Photography)



Parks are inequitably distributed. Communities that are primarily home to people of color and those with lower incomes have access to fewer, smaller, and lower-quality parks than do more affluent communities with few people of color. *(Detroit Riverfront Conservancy)*

Acknowledging these complex challenges, the selected district councils worked with local partners, city governments, nonprofit organizations, and ULI members to address specific park equity issues in their communities. Each district council organized local projects to provide on-the-ground advice for land use and policy challenges related to park and trail access, maintenance, and development. Over the course of the 12-month program, ULI convened the cohort regularly to learn from national best practices and discuss peer cities' next steps to advance equity in their communities.

Program Goals

- **Promote and improve equitable access to parks.**
- **Identify solutions to local park challenges.**
- **Support ULI district councils as leaders in park and open space issues.**
- **Support deepened partnerships centered on park development and/or operations.**
- **Identify opportunities for cities, towns, residents, and the real estate industry to support and benefit from park investments.**

Summary of the Cohort for Park Equity Panels

Austin, Texas: Embedding Equity in Austin’s Adopt-A-Park Program

ULI partnered with the city of Austin’s Parks and Recreation Department and the Austin Parks Foundation to conduct a robust analysis of the city’s Adopt-A-Park program (AAP), which is designed to enable neighborhood groups to initiate projects and activate parks in their communities. The technical assistance panel (TAP) analyzed the Adopt-A-Park program with an eye toward understanding unintentional barriers to participation in the program within historically underserved communities.



Charlotte, North Carolina: Building a Cultural Trail to Connect the Albemarle Road Corridor

ULI analyzed trail development opportunities within the Albemarle Road Corridor, one of the most demographically diverse neighborhoods in Charlotte and an area that is considered very high priority for investment in new parks and open space. The TAP explored a cultural trail concept for the Albemarle neighborhood that provides green space access and a safe, multimodal transportation route that is responsive to the diverse needs of the community.



Dallas–Fort Worth, Texas: Envisioning a New Future for “Shingle Mountain”

ULI evaluated future use opportunities for a four-acre parcel of land in the Floral Farms neighborhood in southern Dallas that was the former home of Shingle Mountain, a notorious illegal construction dump standing six stories high. In a TAP sponsored by neighborhood advocacy groups, ULI explored public/private partnership models, funding sources, and other redevelopment options that support the future viability of the site as a place for sustained economic activity and community engagement.



New York, New York: Establishing an Equitable Greenway Initiative

ULI provided recommendations for formalizing the NYC Greenways Coalition, a collective effort of more than 40 nonprofit, community, advocacy, and stewardship organizations focused on the implementation and planning for the 400-mile citywide greenway network. The TAP focused on embedding equity in the coalition’s cross-sector partnership models to ensure that all communities benefit from greenway investment and planning resources.



San Antonio, Texas: Remaking Rosedale as a High-Quality Park

ULI evaluated opportunities to redesign and activate Rosedale Park, a 60-acre park serving San Antonio’s Westside, historically a predominantly Hispanic and low-income area of the city. The neighborhood has seen a resurgence of economic and community growth over the last several years, and a coalition of partners is working together to transform the underused park into a celebrated community asset.



Program Elements

Throughout the 12-month program, participating district councils organized local technical assistance efforts and met with other cohort members through a series of in-person and virtual engagements.

Technical Assistance Panel Process

ULI technical assistance panels (TAPs) are intense, one- to three-day engagements in which a group of volunteer ULI members provide objective guidance to a city or nonprofit organization in regard to a specific land use, real estate, or policy challenge. As part of the CPE program, each of the five selected district councils organized its own TAP process to advance park access and equity in their community.

Each district council partnered with local Institute members, the ULI Randall Lewis Center for Sustainability, and a local sponsoring organization to scope its project and assemble a panel of experts. District councils selected panelists for their subject matter expertise in land use, urban planning, real estate, park management, health equity, and more to provide unbiased advice to answer questions presented by the sponsor organizations.

Mirroring TAPs that ULI delivers across the country, the CPE TAPs comprised the same key elements, including a briefing from the sponsor organization, a site tour, and interviews with local stakeholders. At the end of the workshops, panelists synthesized their findings and presented key recommendations to the sponsor organization. After each panel, the host district council published a report to further describe the panel's recommendations.



In San Antonio, volunteer TAP panelists envisioned a new future for Rosedale Park, a 60-acre green space in the city's diverse Westside neighborhood. (Kelly Annis/ULI)

Convenings

Leveraging the strength and diversity of the ULI member network, the Institute brought cohort participants together through in-person and virtual convenings to share best practices, build relationships, and advance solutions for enhancing park equity and accessibility throughout the country.

Denver Retreat

In July 2022, ULI organized a two-day retreat for the cohort in Denver. Programming included presentations by Denver Parks & Recreation staff, walking tours of several Denver parks, learning sessions on park equity, and time for teams to reflect on their projects. Denver was selected as the location for the retreat because of the city’s recent work to advance equitable park investments. Lessons from the city’s approach to park investments, community engagement, and arts and culture provided inspiration to cohort members.

“I had goosebumps touring Paco Sánchez Park in Denver! It’s such a perfect analog for our project in San Antonio. Thank you for organizing such a relevant and impactful program.”

—Ramiro Gonzales, President/CEO, Prosper West San Antonio

The retreat took place before any of the district councils had conducted their technical assistance panels, giving teams an opportunity to incorporate new knowledge and perspectives into their project scopes. One participant commented, “Candidly, the program enhanced and, in some ways, redirected our approach to the TAP. Very worthwhile!”

Reflection activities also facilitated bonding and cross-cohort relationships. On the second day, cohort members had an opportunity to contribute advice and extend kudos to other district council projects. Each team created a poster that described their project and included several questions they wanted to pose to their fellow cohort members. During a “gallery walk,” participants reviewed the other teams’ posters and offered notes of encouragement and suggestions on color-coded sticky notes. This activity helped establish an environment of trust and dialogue that carried through the remainder of the program.

“The cohort format of the Cohort for Park Equity program is valuable because it allows for collaboration among ULI members and park professionals who are all working on similar issues. I especially like that our team had a chance to meet the other CPE district councils before hosting our TAP, because it gave us an opportunity to learn from the other projects and reframe our own approach.”

—Jessica Rossi, Planner, Kimley-Horn and Associates

Virtual Convenings

ULI hosted four virtual convenings throughout the program in May, September, December, and February. Convenings included progress reports from each team and opportunities for reflection and cross-cohort learning and sharing. Topics included the following:

- Equity language and concepts, including an overview of social identities, stereotypes, and implicit bias;
- Social determinants of health and the root causes of health inequities;
- Equitable partnerships and community co-creation; and
- Examples and case studies of communities applying equity principles to address park access challenges.

Implementation Activities

Following their technical assistance panels, the district councils had an opportunity to apply for supplementary funding to support the execution of recommendations generated from their technical assistance activities. Local teams could leverage the funds for any purpose that supported the local TAP project and advanced local recommendations to achieve positive community outcomes.

All five district councils received implementation funding to pursue a wide range of activities. Activities include the following:

- **Austin:** Producing enhanced marketing materials to better reach diverse communities and attract potential participants in the city’s Adopt-A-Park program.
- **Charlotte:** Supporting inclusive marketing efforts to reach the non-English-speaking residents of the Albemarle Road Corridor.
- **Dallas–Fort Worth:** Engaging an appraiser and engineer to assess a site for transformation into a community center.
- **New York:** Hosting equity-focused strategy sessions to convene and advance the NYC Greenways Coalition.
- **San Antonio:** Developing a video to raise awareness about a new vision for Rosedale Park and attract potential funders.



Cohort members received feedback on their initial project ideas at an in-person retreat in Denver. (Victoria Oestreich/ULI)



During the Denver retreat, cohort members toured Paco Sánchez Park, a 30-acre park in West Denver that embodies equity in its design, planning, and execution. The park’s namesake, Paco Sánchez, started the first Spanish-language radio station in Denver. (Victoria Oestreich/ULI)

Lessons Learned

The diversity of challenges faced by the five participating district councils illustrates the range and scale of park equity issues across the United States. Although the details of the projects vary, several overarching lessons can be gleaned from these efforts. These takeaways may provide valuable insights for city officials, developers, and nonprofit partners working to address park disparities in their communities.

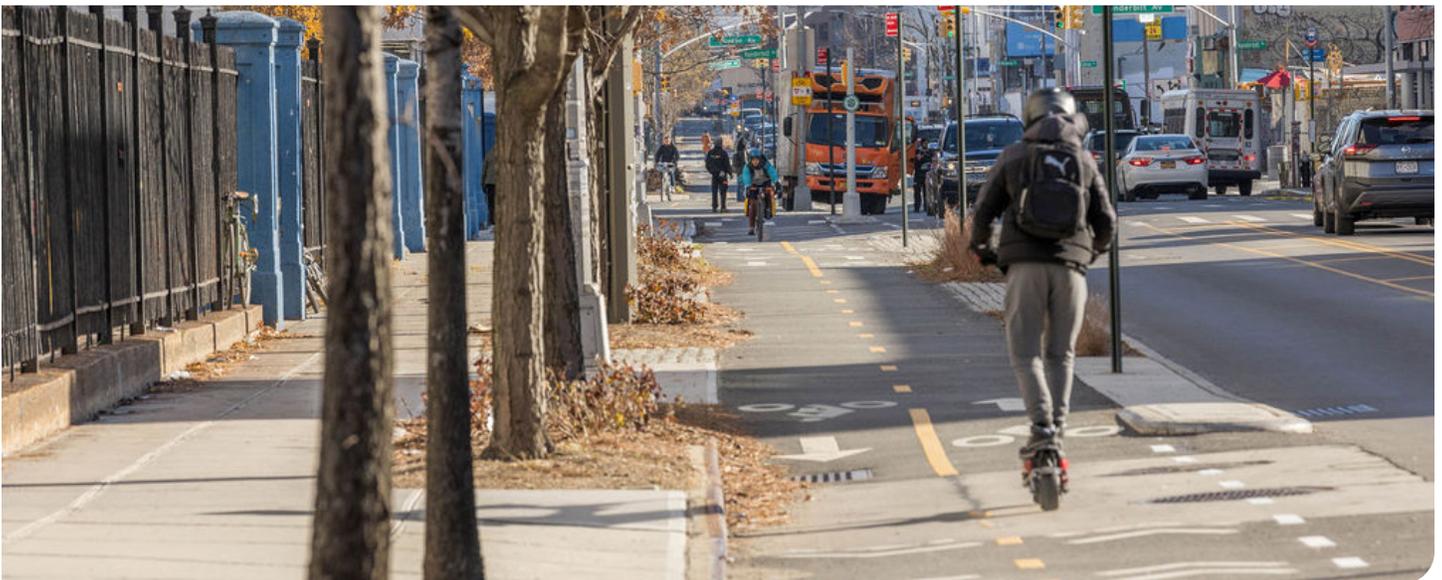
Leverage parks, trails, and open space as tools to advance health equity.

Parks are essential infrastructure to support public health. They provide access to recreation, nature, and arts and culture, all of which are crucial for physical and mental health. A vast body of evidence shows that spending time in or living close to natural green spaces and parks is associated with diverse and significant health benefits, including reduced stress, enhanced cognition and attention, and lower likelihood of developing chronic illnesses, such as obesity and

diabetes.² As a result, experts agree that access to parks and green spaces offers especially strong health benefits for people with low incomes, who are most likely to be in poor health.

In almost all the CPE communities, TAP recommendations emphasized the importance of parks and trails as tools to address health disparities, and the need for public agencies and nonprofit groups to embed equity and inclusion in all aspects of their programs and service delivery.

Highlighting the potential community health benefits from new park or trail development can also justify public investment in a specific area and attract external funding partners, such as health- and wellness-focused philanthropic organizations. In New York City, for example, the panel recommended leaning into public health as a core principle of the proposed citywide greenway network, both as a means to secure external funding and ensure that the health benefits of trails are enjoyed by all New Yorkers.



A vast body of evidence shows that spending time in or living close to natural green spaces and parks is associated with diverse and significant health benefits. *(Bottomley Photography)*

Acknowledge history.

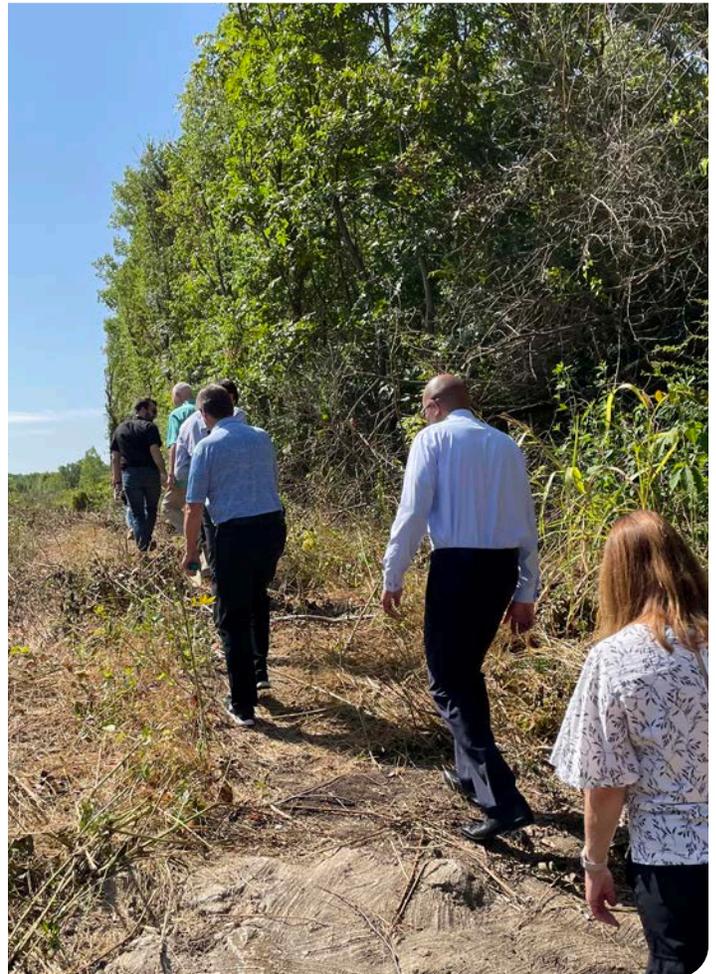
Communities across the country are grappling with long histories of racism, exclusion, and trauma for people of color. To create public spaces that center equity, local governments, nonprofit organizations, and others involved in park development must acknowledge past and current actions—and inactions—that have led to inequities in park distribution, investment, and maintenance.

In Austin, a history of redlining and other intentionally racist policies pushed people of color into the eastern part of the city, which has suffered from disinvestment and neglect over the years. While efforts are being made to address this disparity, many people of color distrust the government and are hesitant to engage in city programs, including the Adopt-A-Park program, which was the focus of ULI Austin's TAP.

The panel encouraged the city to build trust slowly through consistent, inclusive engagement, kept promises, and an authentic commitment to improving the lives of people of color. Given the history, it is essential for the city—and its partners—to acknowledge the inequities it has perpetuated, both intentionally and unintentionally. Although nothing can take away the trauma of the past, the city and its park programs can take positive steps toward a more equitable future.

Intentional community development and parks can also be tools to address injustices from the more recent past. In Dallas, an illegal dump of roofing shingles grew to more than six stories high in 2020, releasing toxic pollution into a neighboring community where most of the residents identified as people of color. A lack of regulatory enforcement by the city resulted in improper industrial uses in the neighborhood, including the shingle recycling center.

While the TAP client was a community-based organization, rather than the city of Dallas, the panel emphasized the importance of city officials acknowledging the environmental injustices that occurred in the neighborhood and taking action to make things right. As of 2023, the city had halted the recycling center's operations and removed the shingles. However, much more work is necessary to ensure that regulatory protections are in place to avoid similar situations in the future.



In Dallas, an illegal dump of roofing shingles grew to more than six stories high, releasing toxic pollution into a neighboring community where most of the residents identify as people of color. The TAP analyzed future use opportunities for the site, which is undergoing remediation. (ULI Dallas–Fort Worth)

Co-create parks with the community.

The planning, development, and operation of parks, trails, and green space should be embedded in inclusive collaboration with community. Residents who see their identities reflected in a space are more likely to feel a sense of ownership and become champions for the park's success.

This level of partnership goes beyond traditional city engagement and centers resident voices throughout all stages of park development. This two-way learning and sharing should occur well before key decisions are made so that resident input can shape plans and designs.

For example, ULI San Antonio's TAP project focused on Rosedale Park in the city's Westside neighborhood, where most residents identify as people of color. The TAP offered recommendations for transforming Rosedale into a high-quality park, with better amenities, recreation, and connection to nature. The panelists offered several design concepts but encouraged local stakeholders to start engagement as early as possible to ensure that residents contributed their perspectives on designs and plans.

Project partners should also consider different engagement strategies to reach those who are often left out of decision-making processes, including

people of color, people who have low incomes, people who speak nondominant languages, youth, seniors, and disabled individuals. As highlighted in ULI's [10 Principles for Enhancing Equitable Access to Parks](#) report, project partners should work to empower communities as co-creators and respect the ability of communities to decide their own futures.

Community engagement was also a key theme for ULI Charlotte's project, which evaluated trail development opportunities in the Albemarle Road Corridor, an ethnically and culturally diverse neighborhood east of downtown. The panel recommended examining why certain people or populations are commonly missing from conversations and finding ways for the city to go to the residents, rather than expecting residents to come to them.

Similar concepts apply to participation in city-managed park programs, like Austin's Adopt-A-Park program. Panelists offered several approaches for increasing participation in the program among people of color and those with low incomes. Recommended strategies included offering stipends to committed volunteers, providing child care during meetings to support families with small children, and working with youth, scouting, and church groups to attract people of different ages for volunteer roles.



Co-creating parks, trails, and green spaces with members of the community was a key theme throughout all the CPE projects. (Detroit Riverfront Conservancy)

Lean into public, private, and nonprofit partnerships.

Planning, developing, and maintaining parks can be complicated. Successful efforts engage cross-sector partners throughout all phases to ensure consistent funding, programming, and operations. Partners might include those with funding resources, technical expertise, staff capacity, strong networks, regulatory authority, and land or infrastructure ownership and management roles.

For the potential redesign of Rosedale Park in San Antonio, the panel recommended engaging a broad network of partners, including athletic clubs, the nearby YMCA, local community centers, residents, various levels of government, and private donors. These partners can take active roles in ongoing park

operations, activities, programming, and funding. As highlighted in ULI's [Successful Partnerships for Parks](#) report, partners are especially valuable for bridging the gap between community needs and available public resources for parks.

Similarly, in New York, partners are essential to the success of the NYC Greenways Coalition, which represents more than 50 individual greenway organizations focused on their respective neighborhood and trail segments. Any effort to advance the vision of a unified greenway will need to occur with the full buy-in and involvement of those partners, plus external funders and government agencies. While navigating this complex ecosystem may feel daunting at first, building consensus toward a shared vision can drive clarity and alignment for all.



Engaging cross-sector partners can ensure consistency in funding, programming, and operations of parks, trails, and green spaces. (BREC)

Overview of the Cohort for Park Equity Panels and Implementation Activities

The following section describes highlights from each of the CPE efforts.

[**Austin, Texas:** Embedding Equity in Austin’s Adopt-A-Park Program](#)

[**Charlotte, North Carolina:** Building a Cultural Trail to Connect the Albemarle Corridor](#)

[**Dallas–Fort Worth, Texas:** Envisioning a New Future for “Shingle Mountain”](#)

[**New York, New York:** Establishing an Equitable Greenway Initiative](#)

[**San Antonio, Texas:** Remaking Rosedale as a High-Quality Park](#)



Each of the five participating district councils hosted a TAP focused on park equity issues in the community. (Bottomley Photography)

ULI Austin

Embedding Equity in Austin's Adopt-A-Park Program

TAP date: January 2023

Clients: City of Austin Parks and Recreation Department and Austin Parks Foundation

[Link to TAP report](#)

ULI partnered with the city of Austin's Parks and Recreation Department and the Austin Parks Foundation to conduct a robust analysis of the city's Adopt-A-Park program, which is designed to enable neighborhood groups to initiate projects and activate parks in their communities. The TAP analyzed the Adopt-A-Park program with an eye toward understanding unintentional barriers to participation in the program within historically underserved communities.

Austin is a city known for its parks, trails, and green space. It also has been a city historically divided along racial lines, with lasting effects that exist today in housing, poverty, homelessness, health care, and education. Partially in response to this history and the city's ongoing rapid demographic and economic changes, the City of Austin Parks and Recreation Department (PARD) implemented an Equity Action Plan to advance equity throughout the department and the city.

Driven by the Equity Action Plan, PARD and the Austin Parks Foundation (APF) asked ULI to examine Austin's Adopt-A-Park program and offer recommendations for removing barriers to participation among people of color and those with low incomes. Co-managed by APF and PARD, the Adopt-A-Park program is one of several programs that encourage volunteers to work with the city to improve and help maintain pocket, neighborhood, school, and district parks included in Austin's large park system. The goal of the program is to build community pride and a sense of ownership around every local park throughout Austin.



The Austin TAP examined the city's Adopt-A-Park program and offered recommendations for increasing participation among people of color and those with low incomes. (ULI Austin)

During the TAP, panelists met with local stakeholders including PARD and APF staff, program participants, and community members. TAP panelists uncovered several issues that have hindered program uptake in communities of color, including insufficient communication, burdensome expectations for volunteers, misalignment with community needs, and distrust of government. To help address these challenges, the panel made the following recommendations:

- Defining and formalizing the PARD and APF relationship to delineate roles and bring leadership and consistency to the program;
- Conducting strategic, tailored, and frequent community outreach to raise awareness of the program in neighborhoods with higher concentrations of people of color;

- Facilitating easy and accessible volunteering opportunities to build interest in the program over time; and
- Leveraging alternative tactics to engage historically underinvested communities, like offering stipends to volunteer mentors, working with youth and scouting groups, and providing child care during meetings to help parents with small children.

“The TAP process connected us with community organizations that we had not previously interacted with and that could tie into future initiatives or programming. Many of these organizations are DEI-focused or interact with segments of Austin’s BIPOC population.”

—Barry Rivera, Senior Programs Manager, Austin Parks Foundation



Panelists suggested that the city of Austin and the Austin Parks Foundation conduct strategic, tailored, and frequent community outreach to raise awareness of the Adopt-A-Park program in neighborhoods with higher concentrations of people of color. (ULI Austin)



Since the TAP in early 2023, the city of Austin and the Austin Parks Foundation have used CPE implementation funds to create culturally relevant marketing materials for the Adopt-A-Park program. (ULI Austin)

Project Impact and Implementation

Immediately following the TAP process in January 2023, APF and PARD began thinking about implementing the panel’s recommendations to improve the Adopt-A-Park program. One of the recommendations highlighted the need for enhanced community engagement to better reach diverse communities throughout the city.

To accomplish this, APF and PARD proposed an overhaul of the program’s marketing collateral, with a focus on translating materials into nondominant languages and creating new flyers that highlight stories and testimonials from community members. With the support of CPE, APF and PARD are working together on this project, and plan to hire design and marketing consultants to produce the new materials.

The new materials will be translated into Spanish, Vietnamese, and Chinese to reach potential park adopters who speak nondominant languages. The team also plans to feature stories of successful park adoption and volunteers throughout the city to provide tangible examples of the program’s impact and attract new adoptees. Also, per the panel’s recommendations, APF and PARD plan to compensate volunteers who share stories for the marketing materials.

With this implementation grant, PARD and APF hope that clear and culturally relevant communication about the program will help build trust with communities and lead to enhanced program participation in the long term.

“The CPE implementation grant has provided APF and PARD with increased capacity to provide more easily digestible and applicable materials, in multiple languages, to community members in the underserved parts of Austin that we have been targeting for park adoption. These materials will aid community members in overcoming some of the challenges in taking on the responsibility of adopting a park, chiefly through highlighting the practical elements of the program and success stories of other Adopt-A-Park groups that seem otherwise daunting or unattainable when presented as a whole.”

—Barry Rivera, Senior Programs Manager, Austin Parks Foundation

ULI Charlotte

Building a Cultural Trail to Connect the Albemarle Road Corridor

TAP date: December 2022

Client: City of Charlotte

[Link to TAP report](#)

ULI analyzed trail development opportunities within the Albemarle Road Corridor, one of the most demographically diverse neighborhoods in Charlotte, and an area that is considered very high priority for investment in new parks and open space. The TAP explored a cultural trail concept for the Albemarle neighborhood that provides green space access and a safe, multimodal transportation route that is responsive to the diverse needs of the community.

Albemarle Road is a primary eastern corridor as well as a rapidly growing, diverse neighborhood in East Charlotte. It also has systemically high unemployment and poverty rates and lacks essential services and parkland compared with other parts of the city.

In 2020, the city of Charlotte selected Albemarle Road Corridor as a “corridor of opportunity” and conducted a robust community engagement process to understand its unique challenges and needs. During this process, community members explored the idea of establishing a multimodal path through the neighborhood. This path would honor the diverse ethnicities and nationalities present in Albemarle Road Corridor, serve as an essential connection between neighborhood destinations, and address the community’s lack of accessible parks and trails.

ULI Charlotte convened a TAP to provide the city of Charlotte with suggestions for the development of the trail. Specifically, the panel was asked to identify key neighborhood destinations for the trail to connect, a potential alignment or location for the trail, and guidance for incorporating equity, health, and open space.



TAP panelists offered several trail routes to connect existing neighborhood amenities and assets, including schools, a YMCA facility, and local retailers. (Victoria Oestreich/ULI)

Following a briefing from city of Charlotte staff, a tour of the Albemarle neighborhood, and interviews with community stakeholders, the panel proposed a set of recommendations including the following:

- Centering health equity in all aspects of the future trail’s planning, development, execution, and maintenance to make healthy choices easy for everyone;
- Incorporating consistent and continuous engagement to prioritize community voices, celebrate the cultural diversity of the neighborhood, and ensure that anticipated infrastructure improvements and programming benefit existing and future community members;
- Investing public dollars into infrastructure to spur economic development, attract foot traffic, and support small businesses along the corridor; and
- Improving Albemarle Road to make it a safer environment for walking, biking, and rolling, with possible consideration of streetscape changes to fully separate uses.

The panel proposed several locations and concepts for the cultural trail that would connect neighborhood destinations and amenities, including an elementary school, a YMCA, and shopping areas.

On the full concept plan included below, the main east–west dotted line represents the proposed trail along Albemarle Road. The main north–south line is another trail, which would connect existing green space and protected natural areas along Campbell Creek. The smaller dotted lines represent additional “fingers,” which are smaller bike/pedestrian connectors facilitating greater movement to and through the neighborhood.

“This discussion has given us something to work toward in our economic development goals. Engaging with the community around open space and trails, while elevating economic development, helps us get on the right track for future implementation.”

—City of Charlotte



TAP panelists sketched a concept plan for the Cultural Trail that connects the Albemarle Road community.



TAP panelists provided recommendations to the city of Charlotte on the design and implementation of a multimodal cultural trail in the Albemarle Road neighborhood. *(Victoria Oestreich/ULI)*

Project Impact and Implementation

The momentum of the TAP and the city’s Corridors of Opportunity initiative catalyzed local efforts to build on-the-ground community engagement in the Albemarle Corridor. Specifically, the city has launched a Corridors Connect initiative, which will bring a community-focused event to the Albemarle neighborhood in October 2023.

This event builds on the panel’s recommendation to engage Albemarle’s international community to gather input for the cultural trail concept. The Albemarle neighborhood has a history of hosting various festivals celebrating its diversity, but the COVID-19 pandemic and volunteer capacity challenges greatly reduced programming and community-focused events.

The Corridors Connect team is leveraging implementation funds from CPE to partially fund marketing activities for the event targeted at non-English-speaking residents in the Albemarle Corridor. The marketing plan includes ads in local media outlets catering to non-English-speaking residents, translation of marketing collateral, and paying local artists to perform and/or provide entertainment at the Albemarle Corridors Connect event. The goal is to ensure inclusivity and effective communication with the target audience in the promotion and activation of the upcoming event.

The Corridors Connect event will engage residents and visitors and invite them to explore the corridor’s unique neighborhoods, local parks, recreation centers, and local businesses. While details of the event are still being confirmed, the program is intended to celebrate the diversity and richness of the Albemarle Corridor while connecting residents to city and county programs and promoting and supporting local businesses.



With over 50 languages spoken and more than 60 countries represented from around the world, Albemarle Road is one of Charlotte’s most diverse corridors. *(Ernesto Moreno Photography/ City of Charlotte)*

ULI Dallas–Fort Worth

Envisioning a New Future for “Shingle Mountain”

TAP date: August 2022

Client: Friends of Floral Farms

TAP report coming soon

ULI evaluated future use opportunities for a four-acre parcel of land in the Floral Farms neighborhood in southern Dallas that was the former home of Shingle Mountain, a notorious illegal construction dump measuring six stories high. In a TAP sponsored by neighborhood advocacy groups, ULI explored public/private partnership models, funding sources, and other redevelopment options that support the future viability of the site as a place for sustained economic activity and community engagement.

In 2020, the Floral Farms neighborhood in southern Dallas attracted national attention when it became the home of “Shingle Mountain,” an illegal pile of old roofing shingles that grew to six stories high. Subpar code enforcement and outdated zoning laws led the predominantly Black community to become a center for industrial operations, many of which were illegal. Shingle Mountain and its associated “recycling” center released toxic pollution and fine particulate matter into the air, causing neighbors to develop respiratory issues and cancer. After years of resident complaints, months of litigation, and unpopular national attention, the city finally put a stop to the pollution and cleaned up the site in early 2021.

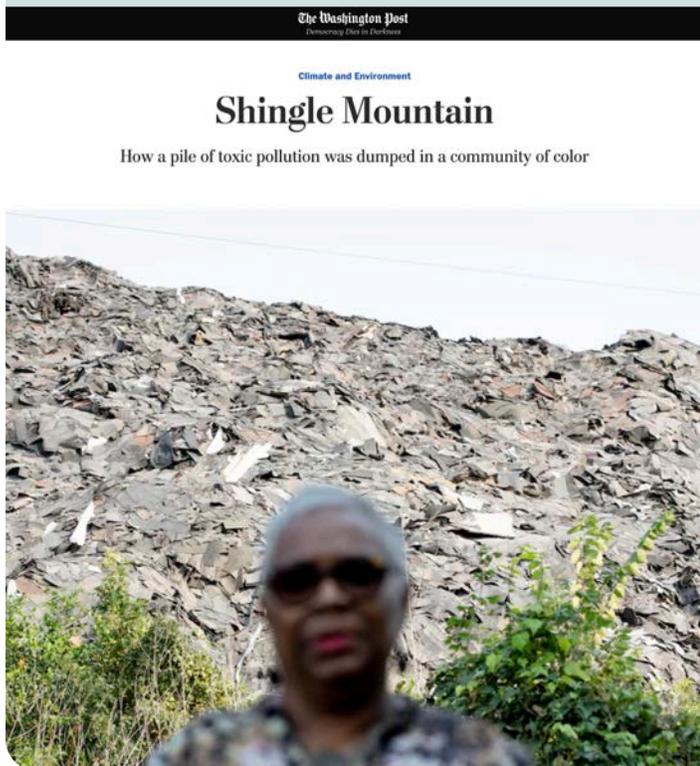
During this period, a group of organized residents worked together to envision a different future for the site—one that celebrated the community and provided essential services and amenities. Turning the parcel into a community park became a popular option in early phases, but various roadblocks—political, financial, and geographic—stood in the way. Resident community groups asked ULI to assess future use opportunities for the site and evaluate potential funding and governance options that support the site’s future as a place for sustained economic activity and community engagement.



The TAP in Dallas grappled with environmental justice issues at the site formerly home to “Shingle Mountain,” an illegal pile of roofing shingles in a neighborhood with a high concentration of people of color. (ULI Dallas–Fort Worth)

Shingle Mountain Receives National Attention

Since 2020, dozens of local and national news outlets have brought significant attention to Shingle Mountain and the Floral Farms neighborhood. Some of the features have included an article in the *Washington Post* and a segment in the late-night talk show, *Last Week Tonight with John Oliver*. Most coverage has highlighted the story as an example of environmental racism and the effects of insufficient regulation and improper zoning. This attention, while sometimes negative toward the city of Dallas, was essential for raising awareness around the human and environmental health issues caused by the Shingle Mountain pollution.



The Washington Post featured Shingle Mountain in an online article published November 16, 2020.

The panelists focused their recommendations on three aspects of the Shingle Mountain project: remediation of the site, protection from future illegal uses, and future opportunities.

- **Remediation:** The site requires extensive remediation, from both Shingle Mountain as well as past industrial uses. The panel outlined the full environmental remediation process the site will undergo, highlighting which remediation options might be considered, given the site’s history of contamination.
- **Protection:** The panel emphasized the importance of protecting the site from future illegal activities through code enforcement, acquiring an adjacent parcel that could be used for industrial development, and connecting Floral Farms to surrounding neighborhoods.
- **Future use:** The panel observed that it may be difficult for community-based organizations to secure the funding and political will to establish a park, and considered other options for the parcel that would be financially viable while providing community benefit. These options included establishing an urban farm/pea patch, a community solar garden, or a community center.

“The more we found out about the site and the more information we gathered, the more additional options became available, and there were more things to consider, especially given the history of the site.”

—Murphy Cheatham, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Manager, CBRE



The Floral Farms community is committed to transforming what was once an environmental hazard into a neighborhood resource. While the city embarks on the study area's remediation, the community, represented by nonprofit organization Southern Sector Rising, is working to advance the TAP recommendations. (ULI Dallas–Fort Worth)

Project Impact and Implementation

The Floral Farms community is committed to transforming what was once an environmental hazard into a neighborhood resource. While the city embarks on the study area's remediation, the community, represented by nonprofit organization Southern Sector Rising (SSR), is working to advance the TAP recommendations. Specifically, the panel recommended protecting the neighborhood from future industrial pollution by acquiring a 2.7-acre parcel that is adjacent to the Shingle Mountain site. The parcel is privately owned but currently up for sale for \$1.86 million. This parcel is zoned for industrial/research, which would allow heavy industrial uses by new ownership, potentially presenting similar issues to those of the Shingle Mountain parcel.

With the support of CPE, SSR is working to engage an appraiser to provide a true opinion of value for the 2.7-acre property. In the long term, SSR hopes to explore opportunities for purchasing, leasing, or renovating a community welcome center in the neighborhood. This process begins with understanding the true cost of the 2.7-acre parcel and exploring methods of protecting it from future industrial uses. During the process of engaging a professional to appraise the property, SSR learned that an engineering assessment must be completed first, since the site is within a floodplain area. Once the engineering assessment and appraisal are complete, SSR will take steps to explore the viability of a new community center at the site.

ULI New York

Establishing an Equitable Greenway Initiative

TAP date: December 2022

Client: Brooklyn Greenway Initiative

TAP report coming soon

ULI provided recommendations for formalizing the NYC Greenways Coalition, a collective effort of more than 40 nonprofit, community, advocacy, and stewardship organizations, focused on the implementation and planning for the 400-mile citywide greenway network. The TAP focused on embedding equity in the coalition's cross-sector partnership models to ensure that all communities benefit from greenway investment and planning resources.

New York City is home to a vast array of some 300 miles of greenways, yet each segment of greenway is individually operated and maintained by a separate organization or jurisdiction. Historically, there has not been a unified greenway network for New York, resulting in uneven and inequitable trail development and maintenance. Under the leadership of Brooklyn Greenway Initiative (BGI), disparate greenway organizations across New York City have come together to form the New York City Greenways Coalition.

With a goal of leading the coalition on an equitable and successful path from the start, BGI turned to ULI for assistance in building the framework of an inclusive greenway network that supports a healthy, green, and connected city. The panel studied the current system of greenways and the specific operational challenges posed by BGI. The panel's observations as well as insights from interviews with community stakeholders helped shape a series of recommendations that the greenways community and BGI can use to pursue a citywide greenway network for New York City.



During the TAP, panelists toured a section of the Brooklyn Waterfront Greenway near the Brooklyn Navy Yard. (Bottomley Photography)

The panel proposed a series of recommendations, including the following:

- Defining what “greenway” means, both for the coalition’s work and for references across New York City. The varieties in current use, the speeds of movement, and the intention of future use affect greenways today and will need to be identified, addressed, and defined for the city going forward.
- Transitioning BGI from a neighborhood-based organization into an unbiased convener of greenway organizations, sharing information, advancing the citywide greenway vision, and advocating for network funding.
- Working closely with public-sector leadership to advance the greenways network, facilitate citywide coordination, and ensure accountability.
- Exploring funding opportunities from a wide range of sources including philanthropic funding, corporate sponsorships, and government grants.

“The TAP helped us consider different aspects of equity within the work of the NYC Greenways Coalition. There’s the *distributional aspect*, which looks at whether greenways are providing equitable access to neighborhoods, and then there’s the *procedural aspect*, which examines the process by which the coalition is conducting its work. We’re trying to make sure that the coalition addresses both aspects, so that we are increasing access and making sure that people feel bought in on the process.”

—Amy Turner, Brooklyn Greenway Initiative Board Member



Panelists met with local stakeholders, public officials, and greenway advocates to understand key issues and opportunities. (Bottomley Photography)



The New York TAP provided strategic guidance to the Brooklyn Greenway Initiative, a nonprofit organization that is advancing equitable greenway development in New York City. *(Bottomley Photography)*

Project Impact and Implementation

A key aspect of New York's CPE TAP focused on defining, embedding, and measuring equity in the broader greenway network and the work of the NYC Greenways Coalition. As the central convener of the coalition, BGI is leveraging the TAP recommendations to establish and build consensus around an equity-focused vision and action plan for the coalition.

BGI is working to accomplish this goal through professionally facilitated strategy sessions with BGI's board of directors, staff, and members of the coalition. BGI has retained local consulting firm Julep Consulting for this work. BGI held several sessions dedicated to equity-focused strategic planning with the BGI board of directors and executive director in June 2023. In August 2023, BGI hosted an in-person retreat with coalition members to share the draft strategic plan and build consensus around a shared vision for the future. This plan will help guide investments and core priorities for the coalition in 2024 and beyond.

ULI San Antonio

Remaking Rosedale as a High-Quality Park

TAP date: November 2022

Client: Prosper West

[Link to TAP report](#)

ULI evaluated opportunities to redesign and activate Rosedale Park, a 60-acre park serving San Antonio's Westside, historically a predominantly Hispanic and low-income area of the city. The neighborhood has seen a resurgence of economic and community growth over the last several years, and a coalition of partners is working together to transform the underused park into a celebrated community asset.

San Antonio's Rosedale Park, 64 acres on the city's Westside, is a story of community pride and perseverance. Once platted for residential development, the area lay undeveloped and underused for decades. Thanks to the dedicated efforts of local champions and sporting leagues who used the space for pick-up games, the land was turned into the park in the 1970s.

Today, the park is an important piece of the community, but the facilities are old, there is little to do at the park outside of managed events, and much of the open space is a blank slate. Rosedale Park, the residents surrounding the park, and those who regularly use the park deserve more.



Once platted for residential development, the land that would become Rosedale Park sat undeveloped for decades. In the 1970s, a group of dedicated neighborhood leaders and sporting leagues advocated for the area to become a park. *(Kelly Annis/ULI)*

The panel’s observations, identifying the strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities for and within the park, helped shape a series of recommendations and design concepts that the community and Prosper West can use to pursue a more equitable and accessible future for Rosedale Park. In addition to the design concepts, the panel’s recommendations include the following:

- Prioritizing people in the redesign process and ensuring inclusive and consistent community engagement, especially for people of color and those with low incomes;
- Leaning into anti-displacement strategies to ensure that current residents remain in the neighborhood if property values and related property taxes increase; and

- Curating strong and lasting partnerships to shape the use of space, activate the park through programming, and raise funding to support the redesign and ongoing maintenance of the park.

“The Rosedale Park TAP was a fantastic opportunity to assess the conditions of the park through a professional lens and validate the concerns of the community and the inequities of park investment in our city. It has also given us something tangible that can be used to inspire the possibilities for Rosedale and the kind of asset this community deserves.”

—Ramiro Gonzales, President/CEO, Prosper West San Antonio



Panelists recommended prioritizing people in the redesign process and ensuring inclusive and consistent community engagement, especially for people of color and those with low incomes. (Kelly Annis/ULI)



Sixty-four-acre Rosedale Park on San Antonio's Westside is a beloved community amenity, but it needs dedicated funding and attention to realize its full potential. (Kelly Annis/ULI)

Project Impact and Implementation

The ULI San Antonio CPE TAP brought energy and excitement to the community around the possibilities for Rosedale Park. As the community works toward implementation, Prosper West—the TAP sponsor—hopes to capitalize on this momentum by building broad community awareness of and support for the redesign and attracting funding partners.

With implementation funding from CPE, Prosper West is producing a marketing video to share the vision of a high-quality, redesigned Rosedale Park that finally lives up to its full potential. Prosper West expects that

the Rosedale Park redevelopment project could be a strong contender for the upcoming 2027 municipal bond package. However, to be successful, Prosper West, in collaboration with local partners, must mount a funding campaign for a robust and inclusive master plan.

Prosper West will use the video to promote the project and attract funding from philanthropic organizations and private donors who want to see a new future for Rosedale. The new master plan will form the basis of the bond project proposal in 2026, when project proposals are due.

Conclusion

The Cohort for Park Equity program produced five panels in communities across the United States, with a special focus on advancing access to parks, trails, and green space for historically underinvested communities. Panels focused on each community's specific challenges and developed solutions in tune with their local contexts, recognizing that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to enhancing park equity. Several lessons can be learned from these efforts, including leveraging parks and trails for health equity, acknowledging history, prioritizing inclusive community engagement, and leaning into public, private, and nonprofit partnerships.

By working together as a cohort, the CPE participants developed connections with peers, member experts, and ULI staff to elevate their panel recommendations and brainstorm avenues for advancing recommendations through follow-on implementation funding and events.

Within the Institute's content and research center, programs like CPE underscore the power of the cohort model. These programs effect enduring impact in communities globally, build capacity locally, and foster meaningful relationships across borders. With each cohort ULI improves the model for even greater impact. Insights gained from CPE will help inform ongoing ULI cohorts such as the [Net Zero Imperative](#), focused on decarbonizing the built environment, and the [Resilient Land Use Cohort](#), which aims to prepare communities for the impacts of climate change. Together, these programs are working to create healthier, more equitable, more sustainable, and more resilient communities around the globe.



The Cohort for Park Equity advanced efforts to improve equitable access to parks, trails, and green spaces in five cities throughout the United States. *(Billy Hustace Photography)*

Acknowledgments

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