



# Atlanta Community Schoolyards

A Project of the 10-Minute Walk Campaign



Atlanta

An Urban Land Institute Atlanta  
Technical Assistance Project Workshop  
October 2021

## About ULI – Urban Land Institute

As the preeminent, multidisciplinary real estate forum, The Urban Land Institute (ULI) is a nonprofit education and research group supported by its diverse, expert membership base. Our mission is to shape the future of the built environment for transformative impact in communities worldwide.

## ULI Atlanta

With over 1,400 members throughout the Atlanta region (Georgia and Eastern Tennessee), ULI Atlanta is one of the largest and most active ULI District Councils worldwide. We bring together leaders from across the fields of real estate and land use policy to exchange best practices and serve community needs. We share knowledge through education, applied research, publishing, electronic media, events and programs.

## Technical Assistance Program (TAP)

Since 1947, the Urban Land Institute has harnessed the technical expertise of its members to help communities solve difficult land use, development, and redevelopment challenges. Technical Assistance Panels (TAPs) provide expert, multidisciplinary, unbiased advice to local governments, public agencies and nonprofit organizations facing complex land use and real estate issues in the Atlanta Region. Drawing from our seasoned professional membership base, ULI Atlanta offers objective and responsible guidance on a variety of land use and real estate issues ranging from site-specific projects to public policy questions.

## About the 10-Minute Walk Campaign

The 10-Minute Walk Campaign is a nationwide movement launched in October 2017 to ensure that there is a great park within a ten-minute walk of every person, in every neighborhood, in every city across the United States. Learn more and connect with 10 Minute Walk at [10minutewalk.org](http://10minutewalk.org) and [uli.org/parks](http://uli.org/parks).

## About Atlanta Community Schoolyards

Reimagining community schoolyards is one proven strategy designed to help cities reach the goal of having every resident live within a 10-Minute Walk of a park. While access to parks in Atlanta continues to improve, 29 percent of residents do not live within a 10-minute walk of a park. The Atlanta Community Schoolyards program aims to improve that number by reimagining schoolyards for public use during non-school hours. ULI Atlanta has partnered with the Trust for Public Land and Park Pride to pilot this project with Atlanta Public Schools.



*In partnership with*



## Acknowledgements

The Urban Land Institute would also like to thank the ULI Atlanta member volunteers who have spent countless hours leading this project to advance the goals of the 10-Minute Walk. This project could not have been completed with you. A special thank you goes to:

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## ULI's Building Healthy Places

The Building Healthy Places Initiative draws from the experience of ULI members and partners to explore issues of equitable access to parks and open spaces through partnerships for equitable parks, the business case for real estate investment in parks, park finance and construction, community engagement, park design, and other topics. A key body of work through this initiative is researching the importance of parks and open spaces. Key publications include:

- [Five Characteristics of High-Quality Parks \(2021\)](#)
- [10 Principles for Enhancing Equitable Access to Parks \(2021\)](#)
- [Pavement to Parks: Transforming Spaces for Cars into Places for People \(2020\)](#)
- [Successful Partnerships for Parks: Collaborative Approaches to Advance Equitable Access to Open Space \(2020\)](#)
- [The Case for Open Space \(2018\)](#)

### Ten Principles for Building Healthy Places



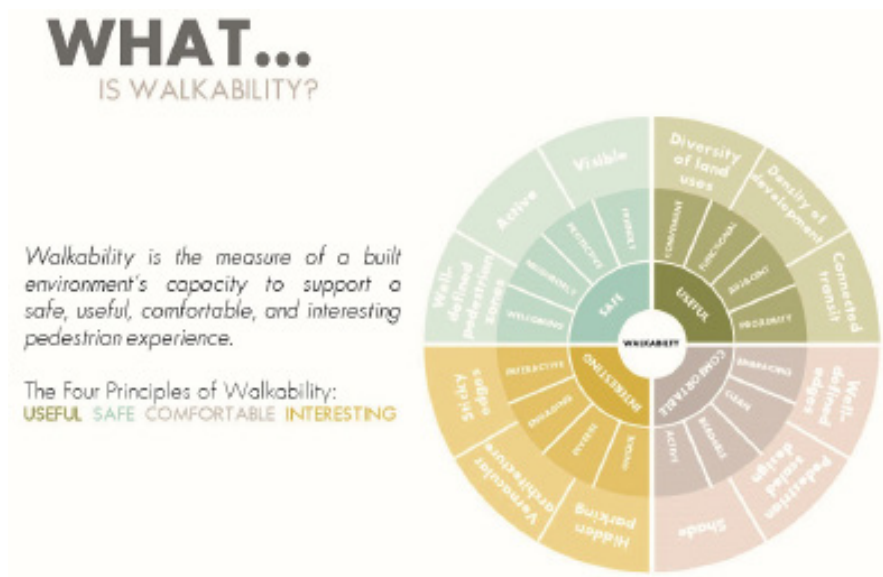
# Introduction: 10-Minute Walk Campaign and Atlanta Community Schoolyards

## What is the 10-Minute Walk Campaign?

The 10-Minute Walk Campaign is a nationwide movement launched in October 2017 to improve access to parks and green spaces for every person, in every neighborhood, in every city across the United States.

Research shows that one in three Americans—more than 100 million people do not have a park within a 10-Minute Walk of their home. That’s why the Urban Land Institute (ULI) is collaborating through a partnership with the Trust for Public Land (TPL) and the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) to advance the goals of the 10-Minute Walk campaign nationally. Increasing park access helps to transform local communities and the physical, social, environmental, and economic health of people who live there.

So far, the 10-Minute Walk has been endorsed by more than 220 U.S. mayors—from across the political spectrum and from cities large and small—who have committed to working toward universal park access. First Mayor Reed and now Mayor Bottoms have signed on to make Atlanta a 10-minute walk city and the Community Schoolyards initiative is a powerful approach to help achieve the goals city-wide.



## Atlanta Community Schoolyards Partnership

ULI Atlanta’s primary goal for participation in this project is to advance inclusive, welcoming, and sustainable communities, a commitment that was made in 2019 – and underscored most prominently by the events of 2020 and beyond.

At its most basic level, walkability adds value to a community, allowing children to walk safely to school and providing families with options to more easily access transportation alternatives. ULI has long advocated for the fact that a walkable community is key to a healthy community . The opportunity to walk and safely gather outdoors is inextricably linked to our individual and community health.

Each school selected represents a broad cross-section of APS school clusters and geographic diversity within the city (with schools in the north, south, east, and west). The information collected and related analysis by the ULI Atlanta team are intended to serve as the

foundation for the improvements needed to achieve the goals of the 10-Minute Walk Campaign in each school community – a walk that Jeff Speck, author of Walkable City, describes as useful, safe, comfortable, and interesting. The challenge for the Atlanta region is to find ways to create more walkable environments that incorporate these four key principles, which are simple in concept but challenging in execution.

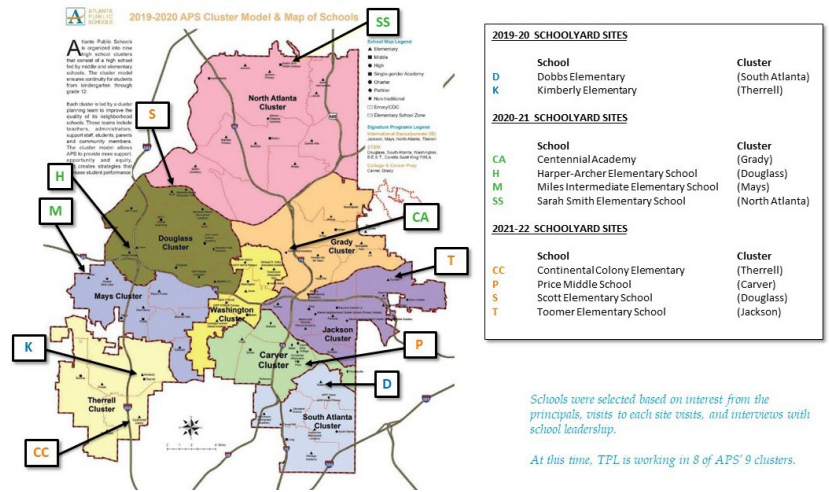
## School Selection Process For Atlanta Community Schoolyards

Each year a multi-step process is undertaken with all the Atlanta Community Schoolyards program partners, including Atlanta Public Schools, to determine which schools are selected for program eligibility. This starts with the Trust for Public Land running a ParkImpact demographic analysis to determine what need each school’s neighborhood has for a public park.

Next, schoolyard sites are narrowed down by considering metrics like new population served and proximity to an existing park. Discussions with APS Facilities leadership and with the school district’s new Center for Equity + Social Justice also help determine which sites would be most accommodating for use as a public park after school hours.

Finally, a list of schools is invited to participate in this program. School leadership is interviewed by representatives from TPL and Park Pride to help further determine program eligibility – as the school is an important partner throughout the process. The students and broader school community are consulted early on to help design and place where capital improvements are needed.

### Atlanta Community Schoolyards Pilot Sites



## ULI Atlanta's Walk Analysis Assignment

Through this project, ULI Atlanta members are lending their expertise to make sure that more people have access to good mobility options, including sidewalks and safe street crossings. Walkability adds value to the community in so many ways, including providing safe access for students walking to school or persons walking to mass transit stops and stations, providing options for recreation and social engagement, and promoting pride of place. Evaluating and promoting improvements to infrastructure within the 10-minute walk is critical to ensuring that all community members can benefit.

The primary focus of this project was to document the 10-minute walking conditions within a half-mile radius around the four APS schools that were selected for year three of the Atlanta Community Schoolyards program pilot. These schools were:

- Continental Colony Elementary School
- Price Middle School
- Scott Elementary School
- Toomer Elementary School

The major goal is to demonstrate feasibility of using schoolyards as shared public spaces. ULI Atlanta's scope was to assess and document conditions of the sidewalks, crosswalks, and general safety within a 10-minute walk radius of the schools. The information collected and subsequent analysis will be used to understand where improvements need to take place to make the objectives of the 10-Minute Walk Campaign a reality.

The scope of work focused on answering three high-level questions:

- What is nature of 10 minute-walk?
- What improvements are funded or what existing plans could be leveraged?
- What additional improvements are needed to make a desirable and effective 10-minute walk?

The first step in answering these questions was gathering background information to understand the demographic information of the areas surrounding the four schools. This helped to inform population density, land use type, number of school-aged children and families. The team compiled and reviewed existing information, maps, physical conditions and constraints, and demographic information for the study areas. Georgia Power provided spatial data on the 10-minute walkshed area, and the

Trust for Public Land provided data through its ParkScore tool which measures how well the 100 most populous U.S. cities are meeting their residents' need for parks. These tools allowed us to begin the assessment process fully informed.

The second part of the projects was to complete the walk assessments. Each site (school) had a small team of ULI Atlanta volunteers to walk the routes and analyze site conditions utilizing a standard evaluation matrix.

Each assessment began with a project briefing from the ULI Atlanta steering committee that included an overview of the study area/ streets to cover and the survey questions the volunteers were asked to answer. Teams were then organized around walk segments or quadrants depending on the street grid patterns to physically cover the walk assessment portion. Our primary methodology is outlined below.

The fundamental evaluations collected the following information and verifications:

- Existence of sidewalks
- Condition of sidewalks
- Existence of Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) ramps at crossings
- Presence of pedestrian walk lights
- Visibility ahead, behind and around pedestrian
- Presence of sudden drop offs, holes, or other safety hazards/ barriers
- Slope of road and impact on ease of walk
- Existence of trees for shade
- Presence of litter
- Feeling of personal safety

A standard was established for route assessment rating using a (A-B-C-D-F) classification system with a focus on the following attributes:

- Presence of sidewalks
- Condition(s) of sidewalk: Solid surface + Width
- Compliance with ADA
- Access to residential areas
- Presence of unique features





The (A-B-C-D-F) classification utilized the following rating system:

- A – Excellent (There is a continuous, usable sidewalk for the entirety of the walk)
- B – Little improvement needed (There is a continuous, usable sidewalk for the majority the walk)
- C – Significant improvement needed (The sidewalk is not continuous for the majority of the walk)
- D – Major improvement needed (The sidewalk is cracked and broken or not present, with significant accessibility challenges and ADA compliance issues)
- F – Failed (The sidewalk is not existent and/or completely unusable)

## Toomer Elementary School

### Background

Toomer Elementary School was dedicated in 1968 and serves the families of the Kirkwood, East Lake, and Edgewood neighborhoods. Fred A. Toomer, the school’s namesake, was born in small Byron, Georgia, but benefited from a family that valued education, eventually moving to Macon for high school and then to Atlanta. After paying his way through graduation at Atlanta University, Fred A. Toomer became a successful businessman at Atlanta Life Insurance Company and an important civic leader in the community, including roles with First Congregational Church in Atlanta, The United Negro College Fund, the YMCA and the Community Chest. The school was dedicated to Mr. Toomer posthumously and was established on April 21, 1968.

Located in Kirkwood, the neighborhood primarily features Craftsman-style homes in a tree-filled neighborhood with a number of commercial nodes primarily along Hosea L. Williams Drive and also at Pratt-Pullman Yard, which is an in-development mixed-use neighborhood amenity and cultural destination. A planned extension of the Eastside Trolley Line Trail will add enhancements along the current PATH multi-use trail to connect it with the Atlanta BeltLine in Reynoldstown.

Demographic information: The population of the area is less than 1,500 people with an average household of three persons. Slightly more than half of the houses are rentals with an average median income of about \$80,000. Owner-occupied homes make up about 40% of the housing inventory, and about 8% of the housing stock is vacant. Ethnic make-up is 59% black, with 64% of the adults having a bachelor’s or graduate degree. Employment occupations range with over 80% in the white-collar professional sector.

### Summary of Safe Routes to Parks Walk Audit

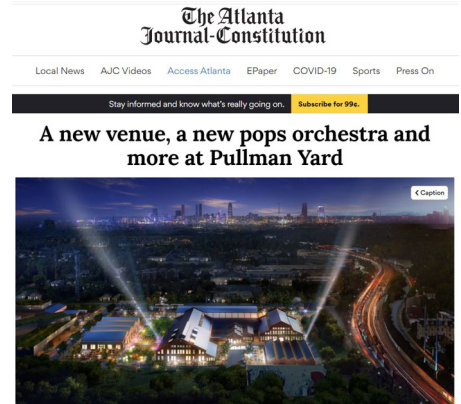
Toomer Elementary is located in the historic Kirkwood neighborhood. Publicly-available greenspace on the school’s campus borders the neighborhood’s main thoroughfare, Hosea L. Williams Drive. Vehicles access the campus via Rogers Street, a north-south street that provides access to DeKalb Avenue, which is a highly-trafficked road connecting downtown Atlanta to downtown Decatur. The neighborhood abounds in greenspace with a dedicated urban forest, an urban garden, dog park, tranquil cemetery, and multiple parks and public recreational spaces.



*Toomer Field*

## Pullman-Pratt District

*To the campus' north, a burgeoning arts and restaurant district is built around Pratt-Pullman Yard (now called Pratt-Pullman District), which is the redevelopment of a landmark site on the National Register of Historic Places that, most notably, was where the Pullman Company repaired their railroad sleeper cars beginning nearly a century ago. This 27-acre site was purchased by Atomic Entertainment in 2017 – who is proposing a \$100M mixed-use redevelopment.*



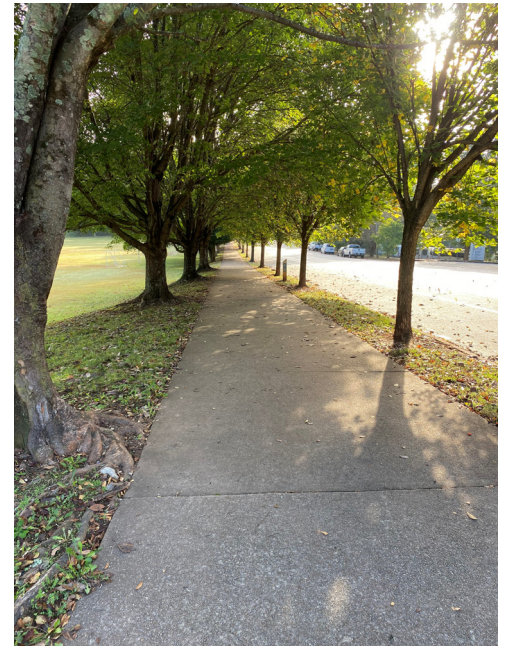
Sidewalks are in excellent condition along Hosea L. Williams Drive and the bountiful amount of investment and construction along Rogers Street means that its sidewalks are a work-in-progress but should eventually comply with City requirements to provide even more pedestrian resources in an increasingly walkable and bikeable neighborhood. The remainder of the neighborhood typically consists of sidewalks on both sides of the street and, except as noted in the recommendations below, walking in the neighborhood was pleasant and felt safe.

The detailed walk assessment findings are located in Appendix C, attached to the report.

## Recommendations

Since the focus of the recommendations is on the existing conditions within the study area, ULI focused on opportunities for minor maintenance and sidewalk repairs.

A primary recommendation is to add a mid-block and highly-visible crosswalk between Rogers Street and Warren Street along Hosea L. Williams Drive. Without this addition, it is a very large block along a primary thoroughfare that could provide more access and crosswalk points to the fields and playground fronting Hosea L Williams Drive on Toomer's campus. A mid-block crosswalk would also offer the opportunity for watershed and related environmental enhancements at the low grade point on the street. Related to this, there is an opportunity to utilize the wide sidewalks to create a pedestrian plaza that would allow for more passive recreational uses such as installation of additional benches which overlook the school field.



*Photo of the wide sidewalks along Hosea Williams drive at Toomer's campus*

Areas along the southern side of Wyman (south of Hosea L. Williams Drive) also offer areas for recommendation. The first two recommendations are to add ADA-compliant crosswalks at the corners where Paxon Street and Stanwood cross over Wyman. These enhancements would not only create additional points of accessibility throughout the neighborhood and to Coan Park, but also provide additional deterrents to slow the speed of cars, which we found to be one of the only areas in the neighborhood with somewhat uncomfortably fast at the time of auditing.

Lastly, we recommend minor sidewalk repairs along Hosea L. Williams Drive and added crosswalks at cross streets, including at Clay Street. These will have the added benefit of slowing traffic along Hosea L Williams Drive and benefit not only sidewalk pedestrians but bikers in the dedicated lanes along the street. Another improvement along the street could be to add additional covered MARTA bus stops that provide shelter and allow pedestrians with more limited mobility opportunities for rest on longer walks.

## Opportunities

Although ostensibly neither a heavily-trafficked area by either cars or pedestrians, near the Kirkwood Urban Forest accessible via a number of streets between Dearborn St. and Clay St., sidewalks should be improved. As this is one of the primary recreational resources of this portion of the neighborhood, better accessibility and signage could provide additional use of this unique preserve.

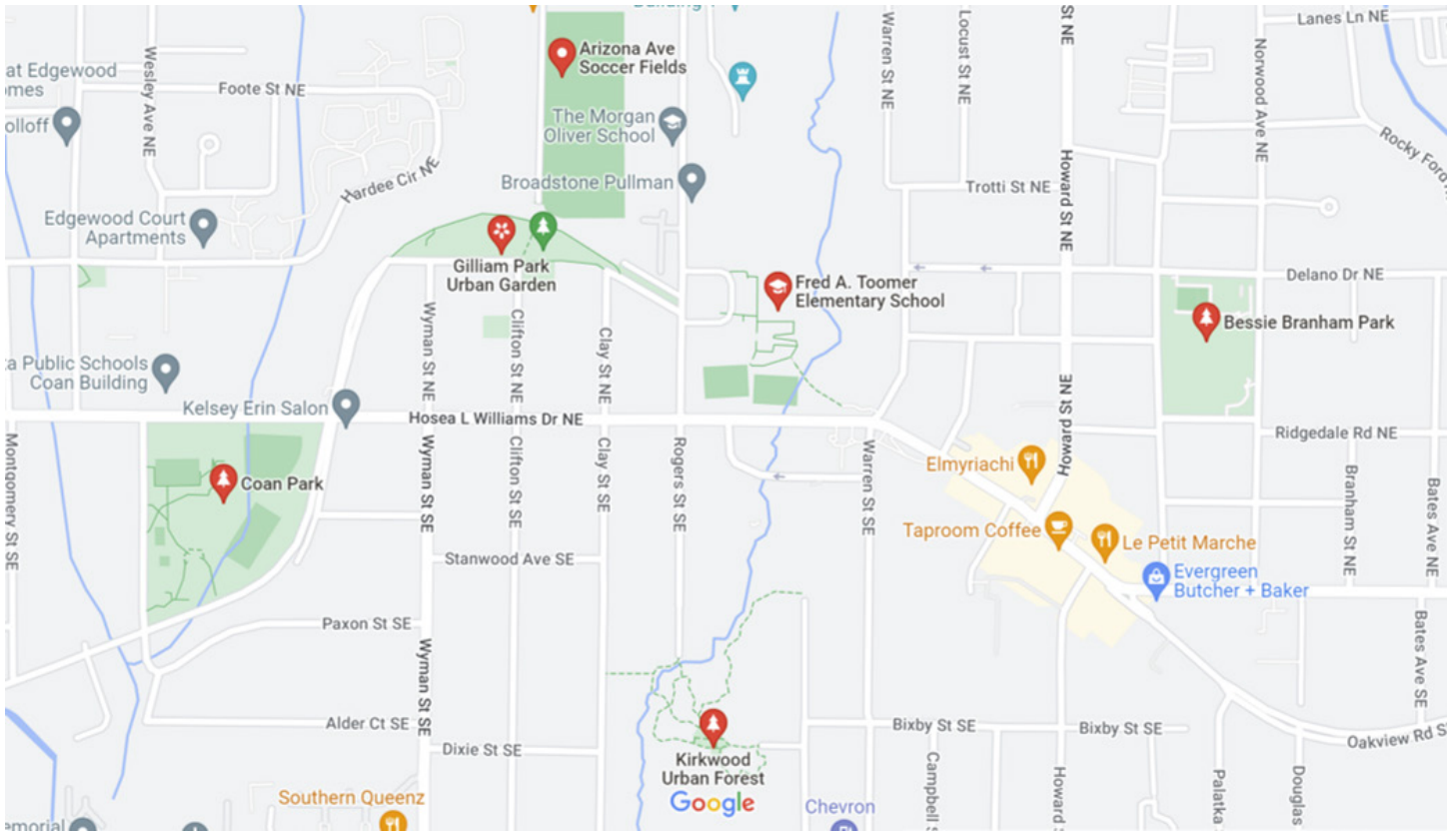
An interesting opportunity would be to landscape the area running along Hardee Creek to provide an additional path. This creek runs directly next to school property on its east side and could provide an amazing, placid connection from Pratt-Pullman yard to the commercial uses located on Hosea L. Williams Drive at the intersection of Warren St. Currently, the creek is heavily wooded and could remain so while also allowing more pedestrians to trek along a quiet corridor to more active destinations.

Pedestrian access along La France Street should be enhanced to better make the broader district feel like a walkable neighborhood. There are interruptions and sidewalk breakages along this route that limit the connectivity that should be exemplary given nearby developments, houses, and to the nearby Edgewood-Candler Park MARTA Station.

It should also be reiterated that the neighborhood boasts immense public recreational resources, many of which are tucked away on quiet streets. An obvious enhancement, therefore, could be accomplished by adding signage throughout the neighborhood to drive neighbors and Atlantans to these locations. Within the 10-minute walk area, there are the aforementioned Urban Forest, Coan Park, the PATH trail, Hardee Creek, the Gilliam Park Urban Garden, and there are also in the 10-minute walk area and surrounding vicinity the following recreational amenities: multiple tennis court sites, a baseball field, the Arizona Avenue soccer complex, covered basketball courts, a gravel bike trail abutting the MARTA line, and a dog park. Access is also enhanced by creating better visibility through signage to these destinations.



*Kirkwood Urban Forest*



*Kirkwood's immense public amenities and greenspace serving the community*

## Conclusion

Following ULI's walkability assessments, TPL and Park Pride are virtually engaging schoolchildren and residents from the surrounding communities to give input on design improvements to their communities' schoolyard. Construction will soon follow, bringing those designs to life, creating inviting, accessible, and safe spaces for school-day play, after-hours recreation, and much needed community greenspace, the importance underscored now by a global pandemic. All told, ten schools will participate in the pilot program over its three-year lifespan.

**ULI ATLANTA & ATLANTA COMMUNITY SCHOOLYARDS TO DATE**

*Since the beginning of the Atlanta Community Schoolyards program, ULI Atlanta has been primarily focused on the 10-minute walk to and from the community schoolyards. We have evaluated the 10-minute walk infrastructure from the perspective of access, safety and comfort and made detailed recommendations to improve residents' access to community schoolyards by foot and bike as well as those that impact the ability for students to walk to and from school. The entire program is founded on a belief is that a city in which students can safely walk to school is one that is healthier and more resilient.*

*Over the last three years, ULI Atlanta member volunteers have assessed the walking conditions for the following schools:*

- *Dobbs Elementary (2019)*
- *Kimberly Elementary (2019)*
- *Harper-Archer Elementary (2020)*
- *Centennial Academy (2020)*
- *Miles Elementary (2020)*
- *Sarah Smith Elementary (2020)*
- *Price Middle (2021)*
- *Toomer Elementary (2021)*

*In 2022, ULI Atlanta will complete assessments of the two final schools in the cohort at Continental Colony and Scott Elementary Schools. All archived reports can be found here: <https://atlanta.uli.org/resources/reports/atlanta-community-schoolyards-10-minute-walk-campaign/>*

# Appendices

# Appendix A - Route Maps of Price Middle School

## 10-Minute Walk Impact Report

The Trust for Public Land

January 5, 2022

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Project Areas	
ToomerElem	

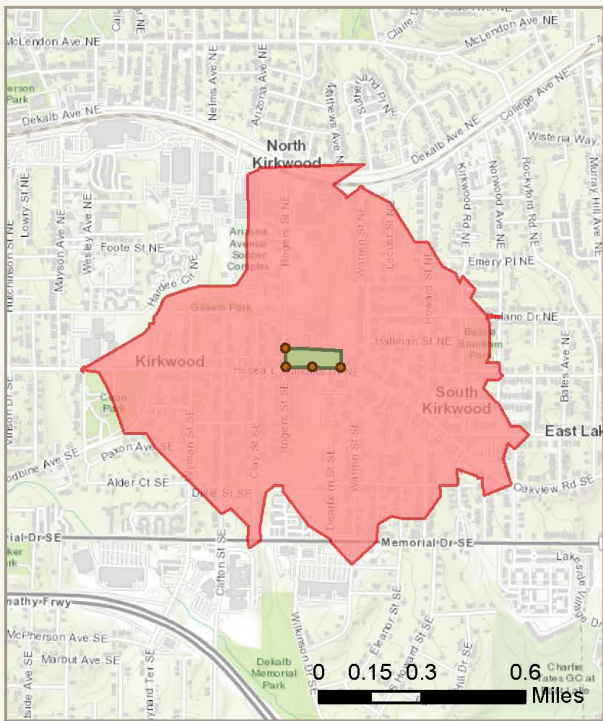
All statistical results are aggregated for the listed project areas and their service areas. Service areas are based on 10-minute (1/2 mile) walk times from project access points defined for each project area and based on the walkable road network. Accuracy of demographic calculation diminishes outside of cities, where population served may be underestimated.

For TPL staff only: Acres listed for Land Protection Projects are official from Finance, while Park Development Project acres are estimated based on GIS calculations.

Area Statistics	Value
Project Area Count	1.00
Project Acres	3.75
Service Area Acres	341.38

### Map Legend

- Access Points
- User-Defined Project Boundary
- 10-minute walk service areas



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# Appendix B - Detailed Demographic Information On The School

## 10-Minute Walk Impact Report

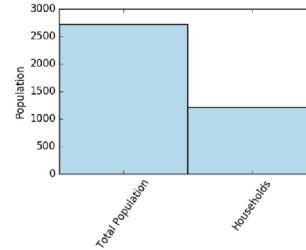
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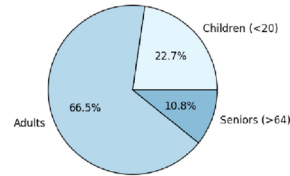
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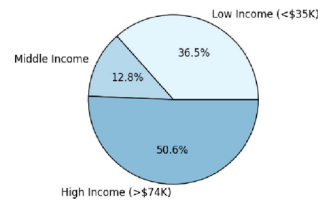
Population	Served
Total Population	2,718
Households	1,215



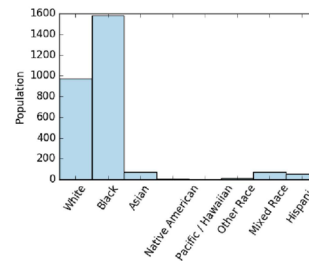
Age	Served	Percent
Children (less than age 20)	617	22.70
Adults (age 20 to age 64)	1,808	66.52
Seniors (age 65 and up)	293	10.78



Income	Served	Percent
Low (less than \$35,000)	444	36.54
Middle (from \$35,000 to \$75,000)	156	12.84
High (\$75,000 and up)	615	50.62



Race/Ethnicity	Served	Percent
White	973	35.80
Black	1,581	58.17
Asian	74	2.72
Native American	4	0.15
Pacific / Hawaiian	1	0.04
Other Race	9	0.33
Mixed Race	74	2.72
Hispanic *	53	1.95



\* US Census captures Hispanic origin separate from race

Demographic Information is derived from ESRI 2019 Demographic Forecast Block Groups data.

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