



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 1,500 members throughout the Atlanta region (Georgia, Alabama & 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 and 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



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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.

WHAT... IS WALKABILITY?

Walkability is the measure of a built environment’s capacity to support a safe, useful, comfortable, and interesting pedestrian experience.

The Four Principles of Walkability:
USEFUL SAFE COMFORTABLE INTERESTING



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.

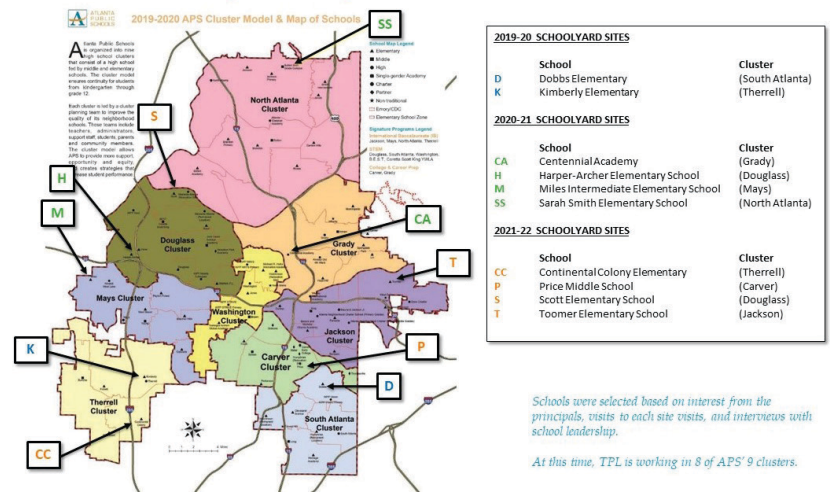
School Selection Process For Atlanta Community Schoolyards

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

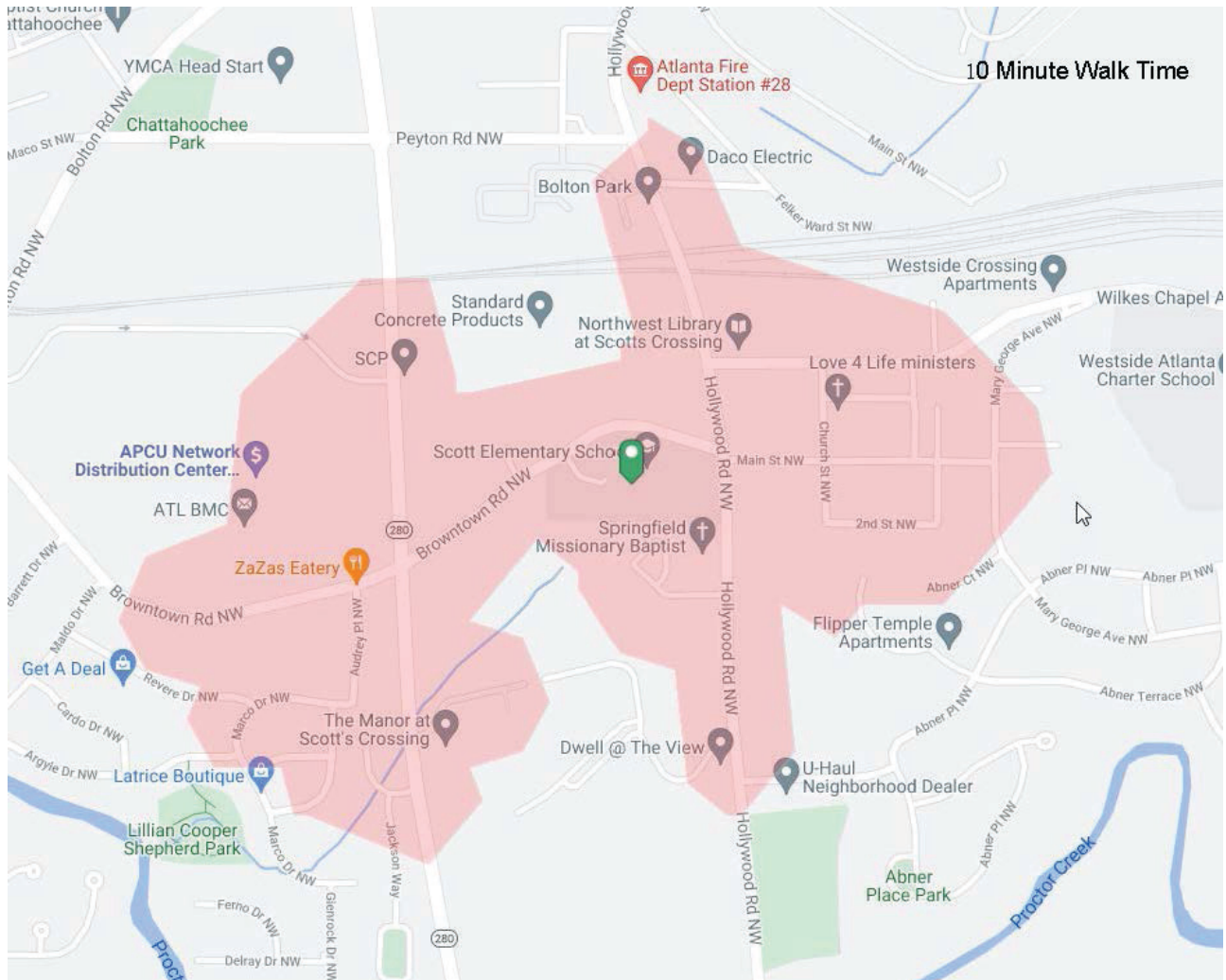
The (A-B-C-D-F) classification utilized the following rating system:

- 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)

Scott Elementary School

Background

William J. Scott Elementary School is located on Hollywood Road in the Scotts Crossing neighborhood in Atlanta's Upper Westside. William J. Scott was a Baptist minister who donated the property for the school because of his advocacy for elementary education.



Dating to the late 19th Century, Scotts Crossing was traditionally sustained by rail commerce, agriculture, and the mill industry. A Norfolk Southern rail line runs through the neighborhood, connecting to the large Norfolk Southern Inman Yard to the east. In more recent decades, the area has suffered from a lack of investment, population decline, and crime. Much of the housing stock is older, and there are a number of abandoned and dilapidated homes.

However, there has been renewed interest in the area following the housing recession of 2008, particularly due to the area's proximity to the city center and the availability of affordable land. Several new apartment and townhome projects have recently been completed or are in progress. In 2015, Fulton County opened the new Northwest Library at Scotts Crossing at the intersection of Hollywood Road and Perry Boulevard. The library was designed to serve as a cultural hub for the neighborhood and a catalyst for future development. The library includes some unique initiatives to serve the transitioning needs of the area's current and future

residents, including community business and business incubator space as well as a music studio that provides space for lessons, voice and instrument recording, editing and production.

Scott Elementary School serves about 399 students in pre-kindergarten through 5th grade, with most living outside the 10-minute walk radius. The school includes an after-school IMPACT program that can serve up to 120 students with the aim of increasing the student's academic performance in math, science, and literacy. The program also seeks to expose the students to positive opportunities and to develop their leadership skills and emotional and physical health. A Summer Academy of Mathematics and Science provides additional educational opportunities with more hands-on and project-learning experiences and field trips.

The 10-Minute Walk Area

The 10-minute walk area for Scott Elementary consists of a mix of single-family homes, apartments, and commercial areas. Recent demographic information indicates a population of 483 in the walk area, with 29% of the walk area residents being under the age of 18. More than half of the households include two or more people, with 36% including children. The neighborhood population dropped by almost 47% between 2000 to 2010 (going from 832 to 445 residents), but the area population has experienced a slight uptick since 2010. The median resident age remained about the same between 2010 and 2021 (32 and 34, respectively), suggesting that younger people continue to be drawn to the area.

Most of the housing stock is rental (49%), while 35% of the homes are owner-occupied and 15% are vacant. The area median income is \$32,904. The median home value is \$166,667. The 2021 unemployment rate for residents 16 years of age and older was 16.8%, although this figure still represents pandemic-related unemployment.

Summary of Safe Routes to Parks Walk Audit

The study area contained few sidewalks, and the ones that do exist are largely in moderate to poor condition. The chief exceptions are the sidewalks around the Northwest Library at Scotts Crossing, which are new and expansive. The two major roads in the study area are Hollywood Road and James Jackson Parkway. All other roads are classified as minor due to the limited traffic. There are also several unpaved, gravel roads in this area.

Both Hollywood Road and James Jackson Parkway are heavily traveled by vehicles and include MARTA bus stops. Segments of the sidewalk along Hollywood Road are in good condition, but the sidewalk is not continuous on both sides of this busy road, the crosswalks are not well marked, and curbing and ramps are sometimes crumbling. Ongoing construction plus a concrete plant on Hollywood Road contribute to a



Sidewalks around the Northwest Library at Scotts Crossing.



Unpaved, gravel road in the area.

high volume of large trucks traveling along this road. James Jackson Parkway has sidewalks, but the sidewalks are not continuous and swap sides of this high-speed, four-lane road. In addition, street lights are not present throughout James Jackson Parkway.



Ongoing construction plus a concrete plant on Hollywood Road contribute to a high volume of large trucks traveling along this road.



James Jackson Parkway has sidewalks, but the sidewalks are not continuous and swap sides of this high-speed, four-lane road.

Sidewalks are largely absent from the minor neighborhood roads in the study area. There is low residential volume on most minor streets, and it may be moderately safe to walk in the street in certain areas. However, the area to the east of the school (using Main Street as a spine road) presents several walk challenges that would be difficult to remedy. The streets are narrow, and cars are parked on both sides of the road, leaving only one lane width down the middle of the street for both two-way vehicular and pedestrian traffic. Unfortunately, there is little room to either install sidewalks or widen the road as the lots are small and homes are close to the street. To make this area even more pedestrian unfriendly, the terrain is quite steep, and there are significant drop-offs or inclines past the road surface.

Outside of the schoolyard, there are not any parks, playgrounds, or other areas for recreational use in the study area. Just outside of the 10-minute walk area is Lillian Cooper Shepherd Park along Argyle Drive next to Proctor Creek and the Abner Playlot at the end of Abner Place.



Narrow streets, cars parked in the road, small lots, homes close to the street and steep terrain make the roads pedestrian unfriendly.

Recommendations

ULI recommends focusing pedestrian improvement efforts on Hollywood Road, James Jackson Parkway, and Browntown Road, which serve as major connectors to bus stops, businesses, the library, and the school. Hollywood Road has sufficient volume and services that it should be served by continuous sidewalks on both sides of the road. Gaps in the sidewalk should be filled in, and attention should be paid to removing sidewalk obstructions. Most of the cross walks need to be repainted, and crumbling sidewalk ramps need repair or replacement.

Georgia Department of Transportation's traffic meters report an average of more than 7,100 vehicles per day traveling on James Jackson Parkway. This suggests that the road should be served by sidewalks on both sides of the road. For the existing sidewalks on James Jackson, gaps should be filled in, and broken sidewalk segments and trip hazards should be repaired. Painted crosswalks and pedestrian signalization should be installed at each intersection where it is presently absent. In addition, the area needs street lights, and overgrowth on sidewalks and the bus stop need to be cleaned up.

The sidewalks along Browntown Road are in need of cleanup and repair in order to make them more traversable. There was a significant amount overgrowth on the sidewalks. Tripping hazards need to be repaired.

The remainder of the roads are low-volume residential which serve few homes. However, due to the limited area in which to walk, sidewalks would be a nice feature if feasible. Although many of the roads present development challenges due to steep inclines and lack of space, ULI recommends studying the area further to see whether some street improvements could be made or sidewalks added as part of site redevelopment. There are still a number of abandoned homes, but there is some evidence of revitalization. As homes are redeveloped or demolished and re-constructed, owners could be required to install sidewalks where feasible.



Crumbling sidewalk ramps need repair or replacement.



An average of more than 7,100 vehicles per day travel on James Jackson Parkway.

Opportunities

Within the fenced library grounds is a large greenspace. We do not know whether Fulton County has future plans to construct a building in this area, but it could easily serve as a park or outdoor community space to increase available recreational area.

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.



Within the fenced library grounds is a large greenspace.

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)
- Scott Elementary (2022)
- Continental Colony Elementary (2022)

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 Scott Elementary School

10-Minute Walk Impact Report

The Trust for Public Land

April 11, 2022

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Project Areas

Scott Schoolyard

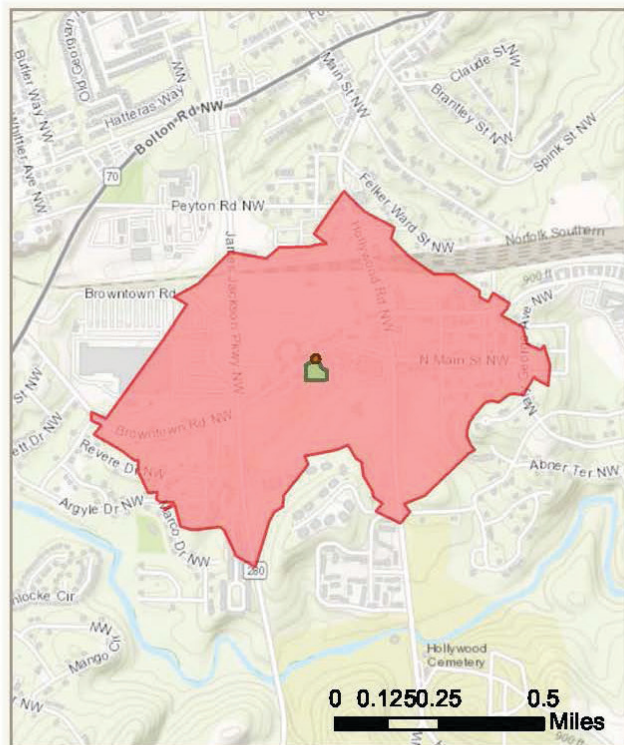
All statistical results are aggregated for the listed project areas and their service areas. Service areas are based on 10-minute (1/2 mile) walk times from project access points defined for each project area and based on the walkable road network. Accuracy of demographic calculation diminishes outside 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	0.84
Service Area Acres	209.28

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

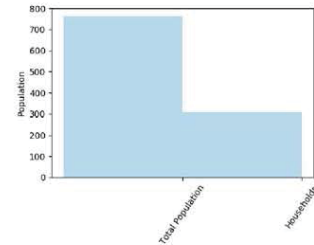
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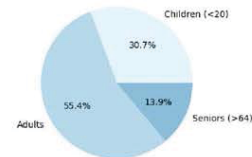
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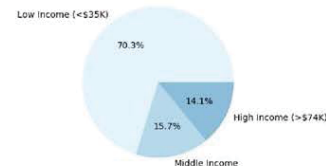
Population	Served
Total Population	762
Households	307



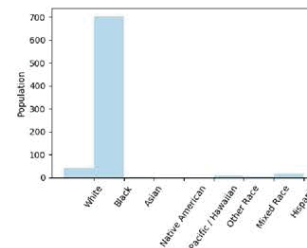
Age	Served	Percent
Children (less than age 20)	234	30.71
Adults (age 20 to age 64)	423	55.51
Seniors (age 65 and up)	106	13.91



Income	Served	Percent
Low (less than \$35,000)	215	70.03
Middle (from \$35,000 to \$75,000)	48	15.64
High (\$75,000 and up)	43	14.01



Race/Ethnicity	Served	Percent
White	40	5.25
Black	704	92.39
Asian	3	0.39
Native American	1	0.13
Pacific / Hawaiian	0	0.00
Other Race	8	1.05
Mixed Race	6	0.79
Hispanic *	16	2.10



* US Census captures Hispanic origin separate from race

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

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