

Partnering to Reduce Barriers

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In 2024, the average travel time to work in the United States was estimated to be around 27 minutes one way. So, it can be said that in a typical work week, Americans spend 5 hours commuting. If this commute is spent in a car, that's 5 hours spent alone getting to and from school or work. While it is convenient to be able to get into your car and travel directly to your desired destination on your time, there are ways to make our travel habits more than just trying to get from point A to point B. Active transportation are ways of traveling that rely on physical activity during a commute such as biking, walking or taking the bus. With active modes of transportation, you can travel to your destination, but you are also able to spend time moving your body and engaging with your community in a way that isn't possible from your car. Weavers Grove, a [Habitat for Humanity](#) community located in Orange County, has recently used active transportation as a way to improve tense relations with a neighboring community.

Plans for Weavers Grove have been in the making since 2002. Early in the planning process residents from the neighboring community, Chandler's Green, expressed concerns about the development of Weavers Grove, citing loss of trees or traffic impacts, and this anxiety continued during the next 2 decades even as homes in Weavers Grove were completed and residents began to move in.

In 2024, Habitat for Humanity of Orange County began working on the Transit Equity Project in partnership with the Food Fitness and Opportunity Research Collaborative (FFORC) with funding from the Central Pines Regional Council and USDA's SNAP-Ed program. The aim of this project was to encourage new homeowners to consider new travel habits that reduce single vehicle use as they move into their new homes. The FFORC team worked closely with a group of Weavers Grove residents to understand barriers to using active transportation modes such as transit, biking or walking and to explore opportunities to overcome and reframe those barriers. Much of this work was done during monthly meetings or during community events that were used to facilitate engagement with travel planning tools and resources.



Photo 1: FFORC and Habitat staff with the transit equity project pose with Weavers Grove community residents at a Chapel Hill Transit bus stop near their community

Increasing public transit ridership in Weavers Grove was one of the key missions of this project. Originally, there was a bus stop planned to be in the middle of the Weavers Grove neighborhood. This bus stop would have been more convenient for both Weavers Grove and Chandler's Green residents. Unfortunately, there were challenges incorporating this stop into the Chapel Hill transit route causing the plans for the bus stop to be abandoned. As of right now, the bus stop closest to Weavers Grove is a 13-minute walk away on East Chapel Hill High School property. A goat path that high school students had

been using informally to get to school was discovered and had the potential to be used by Weavers Grove residents. However, this shortcut goes through the Chandler's Green neighborhood. The possibility of having more convenient access to the bus stop was exciting, however it introduced concerns about exacerbating an already tense relationship.

To facilitate possible use of this informal path, the team of Weavers Grove residents, Habitat of Orange staff and FFORC team members decided that it would be good to build rapport with Chandler's Green residents by inviting them to the community events before beginning discussions of path use with them. Chandler's Green community members were invited to a community walk from Weavers Grove to the East Chapel Hill High School bus stop. While the stated purpose of this walk was to get community members familiar with where the closest bus stops are, this event was a great opportunity for community members to get to know each other and members of the neighboring community. To the FFORC



Photo 2: Walking to the bus stop

team's delight, some Chandler's Green residents expressed interest in the active transportation efforts being made in Weavers Grove. During this walk, it became known that Chandler's Green's members were disappointed with the cancelled bus stop plans as well. This inspired Derek Clark, the Habitat for Humanity Program coordinator, to use this as an avenue to invite Chandler's Green residents to take an active role in helping to create a more accessible and formal path.



Photo 3: Meeting to walk to the bus

Derek connected with members of the Chandler's Green Homeowners Association who were interested in working together to formalize the short cut to the bus stop located at the high school. Derek and residents from both neighborhoods met with the principal of East Chapel Hill High School and pitched their interest in creating a more accessible path. The proposal was well received by Principal Casey and following this meeting Mr. Casey agreed to run the plan by the school district to see what capacity the school district had to take on this project. With the school district's support, the team began strategizing what are feasible ways to make the short cut accessible.

Active transportation provides opportunities to make a commute more than just a way to reach your destination. The work being done to formalize the path to East Chapel Hill high will improve the commute for Weaves Grove residents; the path also created a space for neighbors to connect with each other and play an active role in participating in their communities.