



# Equity is Not an Afterthought: How to advance equity within the community

Equitable Transit-Oriented Development (ETOD) is an approach to building compact, mixed-use, pedestrian-oriented communities around new or existing public transit stations with a commitment to equity goals while ensuring low-income residents and residents of color benefit.

It includes using strategies to preserve and expand affordable housing, protect tenants and small businesses from rising costs, and expressly connect residents to jobs and economic opportunities. **Tacking equity considerations onto the process after shovels are in the ground is too late.**

## What is Equity in ETOD?

Equity is the fair treatment of all individuals regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, disability, or identification with any historically underserved or marginalized group or community. Racial equity is to right historic injustices toward Black and Brown communities. Many institutions in the United States were designed with apparent racist intent. Incorporating racial equity into policies and practices can remove barriers and create opportunities for Black and Brown communities. Equitable TOD projects recognize and ensure the resources associated with TOD are allocated based on the needs of those traditionally disenfranchised, while also righting historic injustices.

[See SGA's "Equity 101: How smart growth principles increase equity in our communities" for more information](#)



*"If the challenges are interrelated, so are the solutions."*

– Christian Dorsey, Chair of the Arlington County Board

## Equity Must Be Embedded in the Process

Transit-oriented development projects are invaluable assets for communities that host them—they provide an influx of jobs, housing, foot traffic, and increased accessibility to the area. If there is not a concerted effort to consider the current residents, including those historically disenfranchised by past land use decisions and developments, and the only attempt to implement equitable practices comes after the development has come online; it's too late. Equity in ETOD looks like ensuring that the process is equitable from the ideation stage to development.



*"Investments are about people, not just projects."*

– Senthil Sankaran, Principal, Amazon Housing Equity Fund

## ETOD Defined

Without equitable planning and policies in place, major transit investment can generate new demand for development that further exacerbates inequities. The role of ETOD policy is to incentivize developers to construct their projects with built-in mechanisms to introduce and preserve affordability for households and businesses. Incentives can include tax credits, density bonuses, subsidies, expedited permitting, and coordination for public-private partnerships to name a few. Every TOD project will have different needs according to the local context and costs, so careful planning is necessary to fill financing gaps to produce it equitably, by protecting existing residents and limiting economic displacement around transit stations.

Ensuring the maximum utility of an ETOD project involves intense collaboration with the community—they are the ones that know the area the best, and what will be the most useful to them. That being said, ETOD leaders should also be mindful of historic and current exclusionary land use and housing policies in potential ETOD locations and apply an equity lens to all communications to prevent a continuation of the inequitable practices. When ETOD sites are located in communities that have excluded low-income residents and people of color, the broader regional communities' needs should be considered alongside the desires of residents, who may oppose new affordable housing projects in the name of preserving the status quo. Incorporating equity into TOD projects involves considering what it will take to retain current residents, enticing new residents who have been historically disadvantaged to move to the new project, and creating a community asset where everybody is welcome.

## The following are examples of ETOD projects in the Washington, D.C. region:

**The Lindley in Chevy Chase, MD:** The Lindley (which opened in late 2018) is a 200-unit mixed-income apartment development with 20% of the units affordable to households at 50% of the Area Median Income sited next to Purple Line Transit station in Chevy Chase, MD.

**New Carrollton Joint Venture:** The New Carrollton project—a multi-phase joint project between WMATA, Prince George's County, Kaiser Permanente, and other developers—will create a mixed-use transit and housing development, serving as a hub and gateway to and throughout the region.

**Strathmore Square at the Grosvenor-Strathmore Metro Station:** A mixed-income residential community of 2,200 will be located atop the Grosvenor-Strathmore Metro Station and adjacent to the Music Center at Strathmore cultural venue.

View the recordings from the Equity Forum on our [Youtube Channel](#).





# Questions to ask

- 1 What will be the housing and economic development impact of the ETOD project on the wider community throughout all stages of the project?
- 2 Has the project considered all mobility modes? This includes but is not limited to rail, train, and streetcar, but also biking, scootering, as well as walking and accessibility needs.
- 3 How can the project support the needs and concerns of the community, considering both the needs of all residents and small businesses?
- 4 Which policy levers exist to support the identification of creative financing sources and foster authentic community involvement in ETOD projects?

## What's Next?

Actions communities, planners, policymakers, and stakeholders can take to begin advocating for ETOD projects in their communities.

- Community members can learn about housing needs for your community/region by attending local meetings, and communicating with planning staff and developers for an enumeration of what's needed and how your community plans to equitably address that need.
- Advocate for ETOD policies and related practices to support this need, considering levers such as your local comprehensive plan and zoning. Be persistent, build a coalition, and don't give up.
- Policymakers can work to create incentives and requirements for developers to build or retrofit residential buildings that are integrated with units at a variety of income levels.
- Developers should scope opportunities to utilize alternative funding sources and partnership models including with local governments, non-profit organizations, and land-owning entities, such as faith-based institutions. Planners and policymakers should enable a streamlined development process utilizing tools like zoning, permitting, and other regulations to support ETOD rather than hinder it.
- Community coalitions need to be loud, and persistent. You have the lived experience and understand what it means to live, work, and play in your community, and how future projects can complement your community's character while serving current community members—instead of displacing them. Share your experiences, expertise, and knowledge with developers and policymakers. Help educate your community about what affordable housing looks like and what it means to the community and region—including those resistant to it.

## Recommended reading



**Greater Greater Washington: Putting the "E" in Transit Oriented Development.** This collection of articles on ETOD projects in the greater Washington area shares the lessons learned and best practices. [Read more >>](#)

**AARP Livable Communities Webinar: Equitable Transit Oriented Development.** This webinar addresses the overall benefits of creating places that are equitable and transit-oriented; creative ways for providing and sustaining transit services in diverse communities; first- and last-mile access to public transportation; and how to build political will for equitable transit-oriented development. [Read more >>](#)

**SPARCC: Equitable Transit Oriented Development.** This resource page provides snapshot briefs, federal resources, and ETOD project priorities. [Read more >>](#)

**Advancing Equitable Transit-Oriented Development through Community Partnerships and public sector leadership.** This report spotlights four regional ETOD case studies and different approaches to support more inclusive growth. [Read more >>](#)

**Equitable Transit-Oriented Development: New opportunities for people of all incomes to live near transit.** This resource page from the Metropolitan Planning Council addresses ETOD issues, solutions, and case studies with best practices. [Read more >>](#)

**The Role of Equitable Transit-Oriented Development in Promoting Economic Opportunity.** This article provides an overview of ETOD, its effects on economic outcomes for workers, and a discussion of policy solutions for practitioners. [Read more>>](#)

The information included in the discussion guides came out of presentations at Smart Growth America's Equity Forum on Equitable Transit-Oriented Development from December 2022

View the recordings from the Equity Forum on our [Youtube Channel](#).

# Creative Approaches to Funding Equitable Transit-Oriented Development (ETOD)



Equity is not a given—it must be deliberately considered in all aspects of development by leveraging public-private partnerships and engaging local community partners throughout the entire process.

Creative financing approaches are needed to support ETOD projects since traditional financing has often led to inequitable approaches. Since inequity is the default, developers, policymakers, politicians, and practitioners must actively work to develop creative financing tools to reverse decades of systemic racism and support the development of affordable housing near transit, where options are accessible to Black, Brown, and low-income communities.

**D.C. Funding Commitments and Strategies**  
The District of Columbia (D.C.) has made a commendable (and replicable) commitment to funding affordable housing and preservation projects. In addition to sourcing funding from philanthropic organizations, the private sector, and financial institutions, the D.C. government under Mayor Muriel Bowser's leadership dedicated annual contributions to a [Housing Production Trust Fund](#), which has created \$440M in new money for affordable housing development.

## Examples of Strategies to Advance ETOD

Projects in the Washington, D.C. region can set precedents for the rest of the country by pioneering creative financing tools to support and execute ETOD projects. These tools include new approaches to tax credit/abatement programs, new partnership models with the private sector, and other entities that can initiate development such as faith-based institutions and invest in anti-displacement initiatives.

The priorities of the Amazon Housing Equity Fund (AHEF) are the preservation of affordable housing, centralizing equity, and creating formal and informal partnerships, and Washington, D.C. is one of the AHEF hometown communities, where over \$1B was intentionally invested across the D.C. region. AHEF's work in the region is a nationally notable example of leadership by a major regional employer, and it has spurred many public-private partnerships in both new affordable housing and the preservation of existing affordable housing. The Accelerator Program, a professional development program aimed to increase the number of professional real estate developers of color who are focused on affordable housing and inclusive community building, is also an example of how AHEF is investing in people—not just projects.



*"We can't be satisfied with the tools we've had for the past X number of years."*

– **Christian Dorsey**, Chair of the Arlington County Board



*"Funders are more likely to fund projects that can communicate priorities effectively."*

– **Senthil Sankaran**, Principal, Amazon Housing Equity Fund

**1** Enterprise Community Partners' strategic priorities to increase housing supply, expand racial equity, and promote resilience of the built environment create opportunities for low-income residents to stay or move near existing transit nodes. The Faith-Based Development Initiative, which provides resources to houses of worship to develop underutilized land into affordable homes and community facilities, is an example of how Enterprise's programming resources are directed at creating an enabling ecosystem for ETOD investments.

**2** Kaiser Permanente has invested \$5 million and recruited additional investors to support the production and preservation of affordable housing along the Purple Line Corridor in Prince George's County and Montgomery County, Maryland. This 16-mile light rail plan aims to improve transit connection, create jobs, reduce traffic, and lower greenhouse gas emissions—while maintaining 17,000 low-income and working-class family homes within one mile of the corridor.

**3** ETOD initiatives such as Thrive Montgomery 2050, the Montgomery County general plan that aims to increase accessible housing, improve transit, and strengthen businesses together in equitable, sustainable ways. Arlington County's work on Missing Middle Housing also addresses the area's shortfall in housing supply. These initiatives demonstrate the importance of changing the 'scarcity' mentality that has characterized land use decisions in the region by committing to changing land use regulation and zoning—particularly recognizing that these tools have been used to segregate communities.

View the recordings from the Equity Forum on our [Youtube Channel](#).



# Questions to ask



Have residents and elected officials upheld barriers to equitable development, such as exclusionary zoning?

- Jurisdictions must be honest about the impact of their current policies and efforts to maintain the status quo as a first step in advancing policy change for more equitable development outcomes.



Are the major employers in your area willing to financially partner on projects that support investments in people as well as places?



Are the major institutions in your community willing to advocate for and/or partner on ETOD projects in your community? Are there clear transit and/or housing priorities or goals in your jurisdiction or region that these partners can support?



What **new ways** you can leverage different partners and deploy more resources?

- How can your community engage small-scale developers, especially developers of color or others of traditionally under-represented backgrounds? Bringing in diverse expertise will support work to structure innovative and equitable projects.

## What's Next?

**Actions communities can take to begin ETOD planning and deploy resources with explicit intentionality to re-enfranchise people who have been historically left behind by systemic racism, inherent in traditional land use decisions.**



Identify existing communities of color and low-income communities near transit nodes to invest in anti-displacement initiatives.



Take a regional look at anticipated future development to anticipate how new businesses will impact future housing and transit costs and needs.

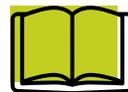


Set specific goals to create new units (e.g. D.C. set a goal to create 36,000 units by 2025, of which 12,000 would be affordable), or check in with housing partners to determine if they have a regional assessment of housing needs.



Consider opportunities for new potential financing and funding partners, such as major new employers in the region.

## Recommended reading



[Filling the Financing Gap for Equitable Transit-Oriented Development.](#) This report outlines a model equitable TOD financing system, highlights the necessity for an interdisciplinary approach to developing ETOD, and finally provides case studies of successful ETOD projects.

[Financing the Development in Transit-Oriented Development:](#) CDFI Case Study on the Denver Regional TOD Fund.

# Housing in the Right Place at the Right Price—for Everyone



Transforming rhetoric into action—coupling zoning and land use reform with actionable, practical public policy is the key to advancing equity within housing developments near transit.

**Everyone** should be able to enjoy the benefits of transit-oriented development, including reduced travel time to work or other destinations, reduced reliance on cars, and access to other amenities, such as retail or cultural facilities. But for so long, low-income families and communities of color have been explicitly prohibited from accessing these amenities due to systemic racism in land use decisions and community development patterns.

**Equitable TOD means creating and deploying intentional, pragmatic approaches to public policy that both make it easier to build attainable housing near transit and sustain affordability beyond the immediate development project.** Unless there is an intentional effort to ensure that these projects deliver affordable housing and preserve affordability, the pattern of disenfranchisement will continue and low-income community members will not have the opportunity to share the positive outcomes of TOD.

## Key discussion points

**1** There is a fundamental difference between increasing housing supply near transit and building equitable housing in transit-oriented communities. The first approach continues the status quo while the second supports the prosperity of the project to flow to traditionally disenfranchised residents.

While increasing housing supply is one step in addressing market demand and potentially improving long-term affordability, it is not sufficient to advance equitable development outcomes.

**2** Zoning in transit-serving areas is often the first systemic barrier to the creation of higher-density or more affordable housing. For example, a 2018 analysis of the greater Washington D.C. area by Dr. Tracy Hadden Loh found more than fifty percent of the region was zoned for single-family residential—a high percentage of which is within a half mile of transit.

**3** While efforts to implement equitable zoning practices are beginning at the local and state level across the U.S., much progress remains to be made. Christian Dorsey, Vice-Chair of the Arlington County Board, said rhetoric that underscores equity in housing and transit-oriented development often does not translate into action or tangible policy. Conversations and dialogue that highlight the need for equity within land use and housing near transit are necessary, but not sufficient; action is needed. Communities can help preserve or expand opportunities for attainable housing near transit through pragmatic policies and programs, including:

- **Inclusionary zoning**, which mandates that new construction include a percentage of units affordable to low and moderate-income households;
- **Form-based codes**, which are land development regulations that foster predictable built results and a walkable public realm by using physical form; inherently expand housing options by allowing communities to build everything from single-family detached housing to high-rise apartment buildings with little to no bureaucratic red tape;
- **Tax abatements**, which reduce or eliminate property taxes for households within certain income thresholds in areas where real estate values have risen rapidly;
- **Community benefits agreements**, which are legally binding between developers and residents in which developers agree to deliver neighborhood-serving amenities or affordable units within a larger-scale project.

**Equitable Transit-Oriented Developments** ensure that investments in places benefit traditionally underserved people—in addition to investors, developers and market-rate occupants—and that these projects do not contribute to historic inequitable practices. Instead, ETOD projects create places where people of all abilities, ages, incomes, and backgrounds can enjoy and traverse their community, without relying on cars.



*“We need to make it easier to build housing in the right place and harder to build housing in the wrong place.”*

– **Cheryl Cort**, Policy Director, Coalition for Smarter Growth



*“If you support TOD, why isn't it there?”*

– **Angie Rodgers**, Deputy CAO - Economic Development, Prince George's County

# Questions to ask

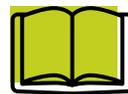


- 1 If your community has not taken bold action to eliminate the historic patterns of segregation that continue to harm American families, ask “why”?
- 2 What is your community's housing need and how can much of this need be addressed in sites near transit?
- 3 Will this project support affordable housing by investing in people by creating high-quality jobs, sustainable wealth-building opportunities, and safe and sound places to live?
- 4 Are there existing examples of policies, programs, or projects in your community that preserve affordable housing near transit and/or expand opportunities to build Black home ownership that can be used as a template for future initiatives?

## What's Next?

- Be a transparent and receptive advocate for your constituents. Entry-level to mid-career planners can uniquely apply and implement an equitable lens in the planning process due to their regular access to their community's land use documents. They can carefully review these documents (including zoning codes and comprehensive plans) to determine if these documents and the land use policies contribute to discrimination and/or serve as barriers to ETOD in their regions by continuing to advance inequitable land use strategies. After review, these planners can then advocate for an equitable lens and/or the revisions of these documents, policies, and programs.
- Developers can be an effective part of the advancement for zoning reform and can make the business case to illustrate how zoning and land use policy change would eliminate barriers to developing mixed-income, mixed-use ETOD projects. These development projects can include units for households of varying income levels, and mixed-use including opportunities to support small businesses.
- Community members/coalitions should make proactive efforts to uplift and amplify the voices of underserved residents, and design outreach to meet the needs of those residents. Activism can raise awareness about the need for affordable housing, including both new housing developments and the preservation of existing affordability. Building a coalition of resident support may include connecting different constituencies such as youth and faith-based groups as well as social justice and climate advocates.

## Recommended reading



[Smart Growth America's "Commonwealth Communities: Zoning for Equity"](#) guide summarizes strategies to make zoning more equitable while addressing the discriminatory history of zoning and land use within the country.

[Greater Greater Washington's "Where the Washington region is zoned for single-family homes"](#) article analyzes and compares different counties and their prevalence of single-family zoning around transit stations in the Washington, DC metropolitan region.

["Equipping Communities to Achieve Equitable Transit-Oriented Development"](#) uplifts three ETOD projects and discusses how the equity provisions within each development could be replicated in other communities.

[EPA's "Encouraging Transit Oriented Development: Case Studies that Work"](#) report highlights several national examples of transit-oriented development and best practices that promote equity within transit-oriented development projects.