



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](#).



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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, scooting, 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](#).