

TITLE: Community Health and Our Environment - Local Greenways and their Uses

AUTHORS: Isabella Leonard, Seth LaJeunesse, & Molly De Marco

Abstract:

Access to greenspace and local trails encourages physical activity through recreation and by using alternative transportation methods like walking and biking instead of driving. These resources have the potential to establish more sustainable relationships with the environment. The Bolin Creek Greenway (BCG) is a trail network in the Chapel Hill and Carrboro communities. Some segments of the BCG are paved, while others are less developed. This study is seeking to understand how the community values and uses different portions of the BCG trail network as it awaits pavement plans. Methodology includes the SOPARC tool for observing recreation in public spaces (McKenzie 2006) and intercept interviews. The SOPARC tool is used to collect participant counts, as well as their demographics, and activity levels. We conducted these observations at two specific locations (one paved and one unpaved) throughout four times each day and four days of the weeklong observation period. The intercept interview tool asks users about their activity levels, frequency of trail use, feelings of safety, and transportation intentions on the BCG. Data is in early stages of collection and will continue throughout the following months to get a more comprehensive understanding of community values. The intercept interview has had a promising response rate so far at 71%. A few notable preliminary environmental/public health findings are activity level and transportation intentions. Out of the four activity options (light, medium, high, and strenuous), 48% of respondents report their activity level as medium (fast-paced walking), 15% report light activity level, 26% high, and 11% strenuous. These initial statistics show a general tendency towards medium activity levels on the BCG among respondents of the interviews. Continuing to study these activity levels along the trail has implications for the community's public health status. Regarding transportation intentions, 56% of respondents are interested in using the BCG as a means of transportation from one place to another, while 22% of respondents already use the trail with this intention. Continued observation and interview data collection will provide a better understanding of community use and values as the BCG awaits further development plans. Future city planning should seek to serve the needs and preferences of the community surrounding the BCG.

References

McKenzie, T. and Cohen, D. (2006, January 10). SOPARC (System for Observing Play and Recreation in Communities) – Description and Procedures Manual. *San Diego State University*.