



**PRESIDENTIAL CITIZEN  
SCHOLARS PROGRAM**

# **Accessibility in Salisbury's Community Centers**

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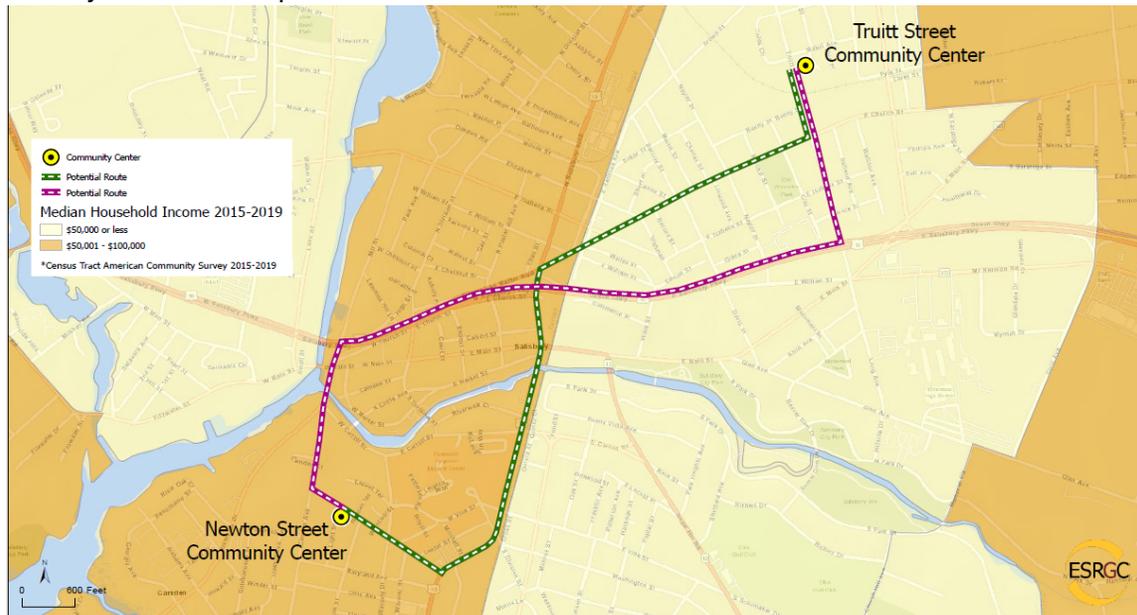
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## Introduction

The Newton Street Community Center aims to be a safe space where tutoring, after-school activities, and adult professional development may be utilized by members of the community. The Historic Camden Neighborhood is earmarked with barriers, including lower-income tax contributions compared to surrounding areas, 16.9% of residents who identify English as their second language, and gentrification from college student housing (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015-2019). For the Newton Street Community Center to achieve its highest level of success by fulfilling the utmost potential of all Salisbury residents, transportation and accessibility programs must be expanded to ensure that this center can serve as many residents as possible. Addressing transportation will require strategic action, including service, advocacy, and policy change (Musil, 2009).

Transportation is among one of the most prominent barriers for accessing the Newton Street Community Center. In a survey of nearby residents, 42.4% have identified a lack of access to reliable, free public transportation to the community center (Blake et al., 2020). It is important to ensure that access to the Newton Street Community Center is as equitable as possible. Equitability requires the addition of accessibility options so that lower-income residents of Salisbury that do not own private vehicles can access the center at the same rate as community members that do own private vehicles. Community centers provide multiple benefits which could create inequities if the center is not accessible to all of the community. One study shows that community centers provide a “substantial contribution [to the] user’s health and well-being [through] access to information, resources, and services” (Colistra, Schmalz, Glover, 2017). Reliable public transportation to and from the Newton Street Community Center will help to foster these benefits for as many community members as possible.



*ESRGC Intra-Community Center Route (Median Income Level Highlights)*

## Proposed Solutions

One of our proposed solutions to help address this lack of accessibility was by installing a bike rack. After multiple visitations, one can observe residents within the neighborhood commuting via bicycle. Placing a bike rack on site would allow residents to bike to the community center if that is their preferred method of transportation. After coordination with the local historical commission and Director William White, two bike racks were installed, one on the South side of the building 5 feet from the edge of the building, and one was placed on the East side of the building two feet from the end of the structure.

Another proposed solution would be launching an Intra-Community Center Bus Route. Addressing the transportation needs of the community necessitates a reliable system of free public transit. A public bus route utilizing the currently unused downtown trolleys would ensure that residents would have access to both the Truitt Street Community Center and the Newton Street Community Center. They would also not need to cross U.S. Route 13 to access the center. Research shows that both cyclists and pedestrians are safer when traveling by bus instead of a car (Morency et. al, 2018). It would be appropriate to supply two bus benches along with two bus stops for the closed-loop route that will run between both centers. This will not only make it visibly clear that there will be a closed-loop bus available, but it will help those who may be elderly or disabled have a place to sit. We are currently working within the parameters of the historical commission to get this done.

Children that access both the Newton Street Community Center and the Truitt Street Community Center after school will benefit tremendously. Examples of some services provided to them will be academic tutoring, daycare, and musical education. Occupational barriers or other unforeseen circumstances regarding guardians may further inhibit transportation barriers for children, therefore we have attempted to partner with Pinehurst Elementary School to allow a drop-off location at the community center. Unfortunately, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, this resolution will not be put into effect this school year.

Lastly, the Newton Street Community Center is suffering from parking insufficiency. There are few parallel parking spots available. After taking into account employees, volunteers, and community members who might drive themselves to the Community Center, it is clear more parking will be necessary. It was our original plan to negotiate a deal with GNI Properties at the 306 Newton Street Lot adjacent to the property. After Salisbury's Community Relations Manager was redirected to other obligations, planned negotiations were stalled. AmeriCorps team members thereafter attempted to contact GNI Properties for the lot but the messages were not returned. At this moment in time, we felt it would be more productive to focus our time elsewhere, but this will not change the parking debacle once the community center opens.



*South-side Bike Rack*



*East-side Bike Rack*

## Future Recommendations

The next cohort of Presidential Citizen Scholars will need to utilize recommendations to continue our work with transportation and accessibility to the Newton Street Community Center. The most essential piece of this project is the intra-community center bus route. As of April 21st, this project has not come to fruition but there is a job listing posted by the city for a bus driver. This is a part-time position starting at \$15/hour with no benefits. Two city trolleys will be available for use in this project. A continued relationship between PCS scholars and the City of Salisbury transportation officials will ensure that this piece of the project does not fall through the cracks. Secondly, the COVID-19 pandemic has complicated the ability of children that attend Pinehurst Elementary School to be dropped off at the Newton Street Community Center by their school bus. We recommend that once experts have concluded that Wicomico County, Maryland has reached a satisfactory level of herd immunity, future scholars will contact the Wicomico County Board of Education and negotiate a plan where Pinehurst students will be able to access the community center via school bus after school. Thirdly, the Historical Commission still has yet to approve the placement of a bench on the property for the bus stop. A follow-up will need to be done and then once an approval is granted, the Salisbury University Public Affairs and Civic Engagement office will have grant money to utilize. Fourthly, we recommend that future scholars will address the parking insufficiency at the Newton Street Community Center. Scholars are more than welcome to pursue negotiations with the GNI Lot or potentially create a new plan that will increase the accessibility for drivers.



*L to R: James Reedy, President Wight, Abbi Pettinati*

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