

HEALTHY COMMUNITY PLANNING DIALOGUE JULY 14-23, 2008

This online dialogue connected local and school officials and staff from throughout California to share information and resources about how cities, counties, and schools can take steps to plan for better resident health.

Question:

Lack of physical activity is associated with a number of public health concerns, including obesity.

How can neighborhoods and communities be planned and designed to promote rather than discourage physical activity?

Answer:



Teri Duarte, Sacramento
County DHHS

Research has found that communities with high rates of walking and bicycling – and lower rates of obesity – are characterized by compactness. In land use planning, this would mean a grid street pattern with short blocks, high residential density, and good integration of uses. The short blocks yield lots of intersections and many different routes between destinations; the integrated (mixed) uses and high density create many destinations proximate to residences. Attached is a link to a study of over 10,000 residents in Atlanta that led to the identification of mixed use, high street connectivity, and high density as community design features that reduce obesity. They also reduce the generation of air

pollution.

Here is a link to a report called "Linking Land Use, Transportation, Air Quality and Health in the Atlanta Region":

[Active Transportation Collaboratory SMARTTRAQ report \(takes a while to download be patient\)](#)

Answer:



Steve Sanders, Institute
for Local Government

It is good to see some empirical research on the connection between compact land use layout and physical activity. Another good resource is the book *Urban Sprawl and Public Health* by Frumkin, Frank and Jackson.

Answer:

Create great access to walking and biking trails, as in Davis, CA.

-Brent Pottenger, GoDoGood

Answer:



Urban agriculture including community gardening is back in full force. Land use and parks plans should allocate space for these programs and development standards should take local food-growing into account. We can set targets for the percentage of locally-consumed produce that is grown locally and simultaneously impact climate change, public health and community building - it is truly multi-objective!

Daniel Iacofano, MIG

Answer:

Prioritizing accommodations for physically active transportation, including pedestrian, bicycle and transit accommodations contributes to creating neighborhoods and communities that promote physical activity. Many current practices, policies and laws prioritize motor vehicle access resulting in overly wide, overly fast motor vehicle traffic, along with inconvenient and dangerous conditions for walking, bicycling or reaching transit stops.

-Lindel Price, WALKS Sacramento

Answer:



Greg Keidan, Institute for
Local Government

The city of Chino is currently undergoing a general plan update (scheduled to be completed in 2008), which will include a separate element specifically addressing public health.

Check out this article about the "Healthy Chino" General Plan Element written by panelist Heather Wooten from PHLP featuring interviews with panelist Linda Reich, Community Services Manager of the City of Chino.

[A Healthy Planning Profile: Chino, CA](#)

Answer:



Teri Duarte, Sacramento
County DHHS

Zoning can be an obstacle in designing communities for health. Zoning originated as a public health measure to separate people from health hazards such as factories (see the Public Health Roots of Zoning, attached.) But as times changed, the rigid separation of uses failed to evolve, and now, in most communities, all commercial uses are segregated from all residences. This creates large distances between housing and businesses, forcing most people to drive a long distance just to pick up a few groceries.

Reforming zoning policies can help create communities that make walking and bicycling safe and convenient as everyday transportation. See [Creating a Regulatory](#)

[Blueprint for Healthy Community Design](#).

Answer:



Dr. Rajiv Bhatia, S.F. DPH

Physical activity can be promoted through the shift from motorized to non-motorized means of transportation so it is critical to improve the integration of land use and transportation planning. Current land use decisions and transportation planning are handled by different agencies and often at different levels of government. The planning process for land use and transportation facilities needs to be aligned and integrated at every level of government or we will not achieve the goal of healthy communities.

Notably, it often seems responsible agencies have different and often conflicting goals and priorities. Even though many land use professionals are actively struggling to create livable, walkable communities; however, mobility and speed for vehicle drivers still appears to be the highest priority for transportation agencies. As we found with the Eastern Neighborhoods Health Impact Assessment, looking at planning from a health perspective can help provide a useful framework for bringing diverse planning objectives together.

Answer:

I agree with Dr. Bahtia on the issue of integrating transportation and land use planning. For most of the time that the profession of planning has existed, the automobile has been a major design constraint on the layout of communities. In a sense, the modern profession "learned" to plan with the car in mind. This has worked its way into the structure of our local governments, with land use acting ancillary to traffic/transportation decisions.

Part of what the City of Chino is doing in our comprehensive General Plan Update is to incorporate "complete street" intersections into the circulation element, so that all City departments can see what our expectations are for the ROW behind the curb, which is traditionally not addressed.

While we will also be focusing on sidewalk and bike lane/trail connectivity, one of the areas that needs improvement is on the perception of safety. Even if we create the

facilities for people to use, they will not use them if they don't feel safe while they are using them. This is where our programs, such as Chino Walks, will come in: getting community members familiar with their streets again from a pedestrian viewpoint. This will hopefully increase their use, as well as alert the City to problem areas that could be remedied with design fixes. Recently, the City began a survey of all uncontrolled crosswalks in the City, and we are trying to sign and stripe them for safety as appropriate. Some of these were brought to our attention from residents.

I think that we could go a lot further in public involvement on this issue, however. It will probably happen on its own if fuel prices continue to increase, and people continue to look at alternate ways of making trips.

-Nick Liguori, Pricipal Planner, City of Chino

Answer:

Steve Sanders had mentioned the book by Frumkin, for a shorter read here is a fantastic article "Urban Sprawl and Public Health"

<http://www.cdc.gov/healthyplaces/articles/Urban%20Sprawl%20and%20Public%20Health%20-%20PHR.pdf>

-Lianne Dillon, San Diego County

Question:

What are some ways to involve residents in healthy community planning?

Answer:



Here are some great techniques for involving community members in planning for healthy environments:

1. Photo Recon. Provide members of the community with a walking tour map (and perhaps low cost cameras) to document positive and negative examples of healthy environments. They can be furnished with a set of criteria for defining the types of things you are looking for or it can be self-defined. This is also a great activity for engaging children and youth.

Daniel Iacofano, MIG

2. Plan Van. Wrap a van with healthy environment graphics (not that expensive) and set up an outreach program taking the van into neighborhoods to engage residents in various activities for fun and learning about health and the environment.

3. Community Forums. Invite guest speakers and elected and appointed officials to attend an interactive forum. Acknowledge and celebrate efforts already underway which contribute to healthy environments and ask participants to brainstorm additional projects and programs for expanding these efforts. 4. Policy Documents. Initiate work on a health policy element in conjunction with a municipality's general plan update or as a separate effort leading to adoption of a new element for an existing general plan. Some planners may dread the extra work and responsibilities this might entail but that need not be the

case. It can be a way to further highlight existing efforts and bring additional focus to the topic of making cities more livable, safer and sustainable.

Question:

Please share your thoughts on encouraging productive community participation in planning for healthier communities.

-Lindell Price, WALKSacramento

Answer:

We note the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration in preparation of the Health Policy Element for the City of Richmond including urban planners, public health professionals and experts in environmental and social policy. Our partnership with the Contra Costa County Public Health Department is also critical. Public health professionals supply much of the data we need as urban planners to establish sound and defensible policies.

-Daniel Iacofano, MIG

Question:

I am very interested in the efforts that are currently occurring around land planning and the built environment. I am hoping that you can shed light on the most common challenges in moving these efforts to fruition, as well as discuss similarities/differences in working with urban versus rural communities - incorporated and unincorporated areas.

-Amy

Answer:

Hi Amy! From a County Public Health Agency point of view, one challenge is getting stakeholders on board with the idea that the built environment or the physical environment determines health status as much as (if not more than) genetics and personal choice. In order for planners and developers to adopt a healthy community planning approach they need to see the evidence that shows the positive effects of healthy development (including the economic benefits). Public Health professionals need to be involved to advocate and educate at a policy level and at the community level. This idea for many is a departure from everything they thought they knew about individual health status and interventions to address chronic disease.

Another challenge we face is the intimidation that both public health professionals and community members may feel about involving themselves in the planning process. Even when you can sell a health professional or a community member on the idea of creating a healthy community, convincing them they belong at the planning and developing table to advocate for change in their community/city/county general plan is another challenge.

(from Lianne Dillon, lianne.dillon@sdcounty.ca.gov)

Question:

What are some other examples of city and county plans that address health issues besides the city of Richmond that we can learn and borrow from?

Answer:



Dr. Rajiv Bhatia, S.F. DPH

In San Francisco, area plans for four mixed use and historically industrial neighborhoods were subject to a comprehensive and participatory health impact assessment, ultimately resulting in substantial health promoting plan policies and implementing actions. Initiated in November 2004, Eastern Neighborhoods Community Health Impact Assessment (ENCHIA) was a multi-stakeholder assessment process convened and facilitated by the Program on Health, Equity, and Sustainability at the SF Department of Public Health. Guided by a Community Council of over twenty diverse San Francisco organizations and public agencies, ENCHIA's overarching goal was to ensure that land use planning occurring in the Mission, South of Market, and Potrero Hill/Showplace Square neighborhoods took into account, protected, and improved community health. After 18 months of research and deliberation, ENCHIA produced San Francisco's first Healthy Development Measurement Tool. The HDMT provided a methodology to evaluate the Eastern Neighborhoods plans as well as other land use policies, plans, and projects in San Francisco. The Departments of Planning and Health collaboratively used the tool and the current draft plans reflect numerous specific policies and actions suggested or written by public health staff. A case study of this collaboration and analysis is available at www.thehdm.org.

Answer:

In Chino, we are currently working with our consultants, Design, Community and Environment in Berkeley, to develop draft goals, policies and actions that relate to public health in each element of our General Plan. These draft policies will be available for review at the beginning of next year- sorry they are not more timely for this discussion.

One the things I can say about our plan however, is that instead of having a single element that focuses of health, we are going to have all elements address public health issues, so that the focus of the General Plan is on health. So far, the planning/public health profession connection has tended to focus on the urban design/walkability connection, but public health issues that a city or county can address go much farther. Toxicity is an important, but often overlooked, topic that can be addressed in General Plans. Lead-based paint abatement, regulations on herbicide and pesticide use, and use low/no VOC building materials are areas that could be addressed by local government in a Plan that also could have beneficial impacts on public health. And this is just one area!

-Nick Liguori, Principal Planner City of Chino

Answer:

The General Plan best known nationally for promoting public health is that of King County, WA. ([King County, WA Comprehensive Plan Website](#))

Key policies address public health by concentrating growth in the urban area, increasing housing density and mixed-use development, and creating good pedestrian linkages.

Jurisdictions within California that have adopted policies that promote health are identified in the California Office of Publishing and Research's California Planners' Book of Lists 2006. (www.opr.ca.gov/planning/publications/2006bol.pdf) Although the list is older, it's worth taking a look. Also, the following year's (2007) Book of Lists provides information on jurisdictions that have adopted form-based codes, utilized inclusive community planning, or undertaken other planning activities that would have a positive effect on community health.

-Teri Duarte, Sacramento County DHHS

Other examples of city and county plans that address health issues that were posted:

1. Chino is developing a new general plan that will include a public health, or "Healthy Chino" element.

More information on the city's website at: [City of Chino General Plan Website](#)

Also an article on the Healthy Chino element by panelist Heather Wooten with interviews of panelist Linda Reich is available at:

[Chino Healthy Planning Profile](#)

2. The city of El Paso de Robles 2003 General Plan includes an open space element that preserves existing agricultural, scenic, and recreational land and specifically protects wine grape producing areas.

View El Paso de Robles General Plan open space element: [CLICK HERE!](#)

3. In 1996 the city of Los Angeles adopted a Bicycle Plan as part of the Transportation element of their general plan.

"The purpose of this Bicycle Plan is to provide a guide to the development of a citywide bicycle transportation system. The Plan is to be used by the City Council; the Mayor; the City Planning Commission; the Board of Transportation Commissioners; the Board of Public Works; the City Bicycle Advisory Committee; other concerned governmental agencies; residents and property owners throughout the City; and private organizations concerned with urban planning, civic betterment, transportation and recreation. For the City Council, the Mayor, the City Planning Commission, and the Board of Public Works, this Plan provides (1) a reference to be used in connection with their actions on various City development matters as required by law; and (2) guidance for decisions regarding allocation of funding for bicycle projects and programs." see the complete plan and maps: [CLICK HERE!](#)

Question:

Hi Daniel,

Would you mind sharing some lessons learned (best strategies, common pitfalls)

about involving a diverse and representative cross section of the general public in a meaningful way in a city or county planning process?

Thanks!

Answer:



The topic of how community design influences community health provides an excellent vehicle for engaging community members. Beyond air and water quality issues, people now understand that the design, layout and configuration of the built environment can have a profound effect on personal health and feelings of well-being. It is also a great way to engage young people who in turn can be instrumental in getting parents involved as well.

Daniel Iacofano, MIG

Question:

Many local health departments are getting involved in land use and transportation planning to create healthier living environments. It takes great leadership to develop funding streams that allow public health staff to influence land use and transportation decisions to reduce obesity and chronic disease. I believe the most important land use strategy to improve health is infill development. It shortens distances between destinations and makes walking and bicycling more feasible. But... why is infill development so difficult to carry out? Why are there new developments being built in open space on the urban edges, while large amounts of open space inside the cities sit vacant? Land use decisions are often based on economics, but if these decisions are leading to more air pollution, a more sedentary lifestyle, more obesity and diabetes, and higher health care costs, then what can be done to change the economics?

-Teri Duarte, Sacramento County DHHS

Answer:

Panelist Dr. Rajiv Bhatia, Director of the San Francisco Department of Public Health's Occupational and Environmental Health Section, wrote this editorial on Infill Development, Housing Costs, and Public Health.

While acknowledging the great potentials of infill development to curb sprawl and revitalize city centers, Bhatia calls attention to the great need for decision-makers to consider the needs of existing residents. Among other things, he recommends a Health Impact Assessment (HIA) for affected communities during the planning process.

[Infill Development, Housing Costs, and Public Health](#)

Question:

Is all infill development healthy development?

Answer:



Dr. Rajiv Bhatia, S.F. DPH

It is very important to make the distinction between infill and healthy infill, particularly because ensuring the healthfulness of infill, TOD, and smart growth strategies is critical to their acceptability and success. Economic and transportation efficiency and natural resources conservation have been the primary drivers behind infill development and health has so far been a secondary consideration. Many now understand the significant health benefits of walkable neighborhoods, but it's important to remember that there is resistance to upzoning in established neighborhoods and many infill opportunity sites will not provide health benefits without substantial infrastructure development or environmental mitigation. Infill is often considered in historically industrial areas near freeways or busy roadways. In these situations we need to attend to health and safety hazards from poor air quality, noise, and traffic. Infill in non-residential neighborhoods will also need parks, schools, and transportation infrastructure retrofitted for pedestrian needs.

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Question:



Teri Duarte, Sacramento
County DHHS

Rajiv -

I appreciated your comments last week about infill development - the need to take into consideration the impacts on low-income families. However, I think that in San Francisco, infill development tends to replace existing buildings, while in areas such as Sacramento, infill has the potential to make use of large tracts of vacant land that are skipped over in favor of development of open space that is distant from existing services. **Do you have any suggestions or advice about advocating for better use of vacant land inside of cities?**

Answer:



Dr. Rajiv Bhatia, S.F. DPH

The issues for San Francisco, Oakland, and Sacramento are not too different and the use of vacant or underutilized sites seems to be the primary mechanism of infill in most places. I think there are many forces that have been lining up that will ensure the increased utilization of vacant infill but it isn't necessarily the job or role of public health to be simply unqualified infill advocates. Currently, many infill sites lack good environmental quality and infrastructure and many may not be compatible with residential uses.

This limits their attractiveness and healthfulness and limits and the success of the infill paradigm. I think public health can play a much more important role in helping to design specific projects or neighborhood plans to meet local needs based on our understanding of the health needs of the population. PH can also help analyze and mitigate environmental quality concerns. This directly addresses some of the challenges of infill, productively uses our expertise, helps mobilize neighborhood support for infill, and overall helps infill succeed.

Question:

I am wondering what kind of changes people would like to see as far as state-wide policy that would support healthy community planning.

I am excited to see these conversations taking place at local levels, but I think these same conversations need to move forward to have greater impact on all Californians across the state.

-Julia Van Soelen, Planning and Conservation League/ UC Davis Grad Student

Answer:



Dr. Rajiv Bhatia, S.F. DPH

I strongly agree with the need for State structures and models to support interdisciplinary health and planning practice. Introduced in 2007 and currently active in the California Senate, the California Healthy Places Act (AB 1472, Leno, San Francisco) would provide technical assistance through the new California Department of Public Health to local health agencies and community organizations to evaluate land-use planning decisions to ensure that they consider and promote health. The bill would require the California Dept of Public Health to develop broad guidelines health impact assessments of

planning policy. Local health agencies will be able to inform the guidance as well as directly participate in the assessments themselves, giving them a meaningful role in determining the findings and recommendations. This legislation builds on existing innovative health impact initiatives at the local level in California, and provides local health agencies with resources and tools to have a voice in planning their communities.

Question:

How can local governments address both resident health and take action to address climate change crisis/ reduce greenhouse gas emissions in their city or county plans?

What are some ways to address both of these problems with common solutions?

Answer:



We had several excellent speakers at our 2008 CA Healthy Cities and Communities Annual Conference that looked into these issues. Here are the links to their presentations from the panel entitled: How Planning Standards Can Be Tools for Improving Community Health. Both presentations had a focus on climate change and environmental issues.

Nicole Hara, Center for Civic Partnerships [Planning Healthy Communities in Marin](#) - Alex Hinds, Director, Marin County Community Development Agency

[The California Story: A Partnership for Change](#)

Julia Lave Johnston, Senior Planner

The Governor's Office of Planning and Research, State of California

Answer:



Thanks Nicole for posting those great presentations.

One thing that cities and counties can do to address both climate change and resident health is to plan in a way that will reduce commuting times and traffic. Long commutes and vehicles idling in traffic contribute a large percentage of GHG emissions that are predicted to lead to climate change and resulting negative health consequences. Also, time sitting in a car is time someone is not doing something more active like walking or biking.

Greg Keidan, Institute for Local Government

The problem of people not living near where they work is illustrated by two maps of population density and predicted job density in LA. The maps and an interesting discussion of how to address this problem (some people suggest Prop 13 is to blame for holding homeowners hostage) are posted in this LA Times Blog sent to me by Kathy Les: [CLICK HERE!](#)

Answer:



Dr. Rajiv Bhatia, S.F. DPH

and improve environmental quality and safety in the area subject to congestion pricing. Reducing traffic also improves opportunities for biking and walking creating a virtuous cycle.

Congestion pricing in downtown business districts can reduce greenhouse gas emissions and improve the health conditions in those areas. San Francisco is a regional job center and several hundred thousand workers commute to San Francisco each day. While transit to SF is abundant, a substantial share of workers drive adversely affecting environmental quality and safety hazards for workers and residents alike. San Francisco is now studying a congestion pricing scheme to help limit driving within and around the downtown business district. This strategy can reduce vehicle fuel use and air pollutants regionally and locally

RESOURCES:

1. Here are some books recommended by Steve Sanders that are available for purchase at www.planningbooks.com:

"Urban Sprawl and Public Health"

"Planning Active Communities"

"Integrating Planning and Public Health"

"Improving the Pedestrian Environment through Innovative Transportation Design"

2. PolicyLink has many free online publications related to Healthy Community Planning and Policy. One recent publication by Victor Rubin is of particular interest: [The Impact of the Built Environment on Public Health](#) (August 2007). Here is a short description: The way we plan, shape and create our urban environment impacts the health of the people who live, work, play and move through these communities. The symptoms of poorly planned neighborhoods are often poor health outcomes. Communities of color and low-income communities face disproportionately greater health impacts related to poor land use planning. There is an effort, by the field of public health, to integrate health considerations into planning and land use to yield improved health outcomes. This report provides both a framework for understanding the necessary elements for building a movement for policy change and better planning, as well as numerous illustrations of innovative practices, projects and networks of advocates and professionals.

Another 2007 report from PolicyLink is [Why Place Matters: Building a Movement for Healthy Communities](#). Where you live determines how well you live; and available resources are not equally distributed. Communities of color and low-income communities face harmful community environments, such as poverty, toxins, or economic disinvestment, that compromise individual and community health. The framework described in this report provides a way to understand the relationship between community conditions and health, analyzes the connections among all the environmental factors that

contribute to a healthy community, and identifies environmental effects on community health.

For a complete searchable list of PolicyLink publications, see:

[PolicyLink Publications](#)

3. Here are a couple of toolkits from the folks at Public health Law Policy about Healthy General Plans and Zoning:

[How to Create and Implement Healthy General Plans](#)

[General Plans and Zoning: A Toolkit on Land Use and Health](#)

4. These are short fact sheets from Public Health Law Policy relating to Healthy Community Planning:

[Complete Streets Talking Points](#)

[Zoning Talking Points](#)

[The Planning Perspective on Health: Community Health as a Goal of Good Design](#)

5. Here are documents and resources on the City of Richmond General Plan Update from Daniel Iacofano:

Documents and Resources on the Project Website:

www.healthycommunitiesbydesign.org

Analysis Maps

<http://www.healthycommunitiesbydesign.org/docs.php?oid=1000000181&ogid=1000000009>

Existing Conditions Report

<http://www.healthycommunitiesbydesign.org/docs.php?oid=1000000125&ogid=1000000009>

Policy Framework (graphic)

<http://www.healthycommunitiesbydesign.org/docs.php?oid=1000000135&ogid=1000000047>

Discussion of Community Health Impacts (by the 10 topic areas)

This is a web page that lists why we chose certain indicators for analysis

<http://www.healthycommunitiesbydesign.org/Content/10010/HealthImpacts.html>

Tools and Resources

This is a web page that lists the major online resources available for reference

<http://www.healthycommunitiesbydesign.org/Content/10032/ToolsandResources.html>

Newspaper Articles

This is a web page that lists recent articles related to community health

<http://www.healthycommunitiesbydesign.org/Content/10033/NewspaperArticles.html>

6. The CA Healthy Cities and Communities Program at the Center for Civic Partnerships has many publications/information sheets available on-line around cities in California that are taking steps to plan for better resident health. Here are two:

[A Healthy Community Perspective on Aging Well: New Ideas for an Older California](#)

This publication features promising practices, strategies, and resources that can help civic leaders transform their approach to aging and find new ways to help their older residents live healthier, more independent and more fulfilled lives.(2006)

[Cross-Sector Dialogue on the Impact of Housing/Land Use and Mobility on Physical Activity and Older Adults](#)

On June 22, 2006, the Center for Civic Partnerships organized and hosted a facilitated cross-sector dialogue in Glendale, California on land use, mobility and public health. The purpose of the meeting was to identify promising strategies and resource opportunities involving multi-sectored collaboration. The 13 participants represented a cross-section of geography, disciplines, community size, and population demographics.

An overview of the key issues included the relationship of land use and travel behavior to health as well as the problems associated with the decline in vigorous physical activity, e.g., rising obesity rates, and the unprecedented growth in the older adult population.

7. The [UC Berkeley Health Impact Group Website](#) provides a link to Health Impact Assessments of land use and economic development proposals in Oakland California conducted by the UC Berkeley Health Impact Group.
8. The [San Francisco DPH Health and Place Team](#) is developing and utilizing original inter-disciplinary health assessment and forecasting tools in land use planning and San Francisco. This site provides documentation on the development and application of those tools
9. The [Healthy Development Measurement Tool](#) is a comprehensive evaluation metric to consider health needs in urban development plans and projects. Developed through a multi-year community partnership by the San Francisco Department of Public Health, the HDMT explicitly connects public health to urban development planning in efforts to achieve a higher quality social and physical environment that advances health.
10. The [NACo Healthy Counties Database](#) is a tool you can use to search for model policies, programs and initiatives that counties nationwide have enacted to promote wellness and help prevent childhood obesity. No need to reinvent the wheel. Find out what peer local government leaders have done to enable and encourage nutritious diets, physical activity, and healthy built and social environments. Stories include contact information for local officials and staff who were involved.
11. This flier from the National Association of Counties is designed to give county officials and staff tools to combat childhood obesity, but implementing these ideas could improve the health of all residents.

[Transportation Solutions for Active, Health Communities](#)

12. I had dinner at a friend's home in "The Village" last night in Davis. I was really impressed by how healthy and happy and community oriented everyone there seemed. There was a bike/walking trail running between the houses and it was lined with community gardens full of beautiful vegetables, flowers, and fruit trees. And there was one large field instead of many lawns, where people were running and playing games. Here is a link to a website about the community. The designer, Michael Corbett, is busy working on a new project in Davis.

[Village Homes example of a community planned with resident health in mind](#)

ARTICLES POSTED:

1. Richmond Plans for a More Healthy Future by Greg Keidan

The city of Richmond is employing innovative methods to involve a diverse cross section of residents in updating their general plan. The resulting plan will be one of the first in the nation to include an element that addresses the link between public health and the built environment.

According to Vikrant Sood, project manager for MIG (the consulting firm hired by the city to lead the two-year plan update process), engagement efforts began by asking people how the general plan could be reformulated to address issues that were important in the community. "We heard concerns about a liquor store creating safety problems, a lack of grocery stores, crime, children not able to safely walk to schools, toxins in the environment, a need for economic development, pedestrian collisions, and a lack of investment in community facilities. Public health is a common denominator in all of these problems."

Over a third of Richmond residents live in poverty and almost two thirds are black or Latino. Studies have shown that Richmond residents experience higher than average levels of diabetes, asthma, heart disease, cancer, stroke, mental illness and substance abuse. Richmond and MIG applied for and received a \$250,000 grant from The California Endowment to fund a general plan update process that would connect health and wellness issues that residents were experiencing with the built environment. By creating a new general plan element to focus on ways that Richmond could address health concerns of residents, funders hope to correct health disparities in Richmond and to create a model or toolbox that other communities can use address public health.

With generous funding and a partnership with an experienced consultant, city officials were able to ensure that the entire community would have a voice in the general plan update process. Special efforts are required to overcome barriers and to ensure demographically representative participation. Civic engagement organizers attempted to overcome these barriers in Richmond in the following ways:

- Created a "plan van" with information in Spanish and English that traveled to

community events, schools, and shopping centers to survey and talk to residents about their thoughts on the general plan and their vision for their city.

- Involved representatives from nonprofits, faith based groups, local businesses, neighborhood organizations, and city government in designing community workshops and conducting outreach.
- Created a Richmond general plan interactive website with computerized land use simulations that residents could use to weigh options in city planning in Spanish or English. (www.cityofrichmondgeneralplan.org)
- Mailed a newsletter written in Spanish and English to all residents, with robocalls from the Mayor inviting people to participate in workshops.
- Held separate community workshops for young people in schools and for Spanish speaking people at a Catholic Church where children's activities and food were provided.
- Held a workshop designed to illustrate the common challenges that African Americans and immigrants face in order to identify common causes that these Richmond residents could work on together.
- Created large pictorial wall graphics at workshops to help people reflect on the dialogue and to let participants know that organizers really "got" what they said.

Richmond City planner Lori Reese-Brown says that Richmond's established tradition of public engagement helped make it possible to involve residents in creating the new general plan. "I think that Richmond residents are just really concerned about the community. Many people have been here for a long time and have been engaged via neighborhood councils. People are proactive here in planning for development and wanting to make sure they came out with a viable city. As new residents came in the older residents got them involved."

With input from hundreds of residents representative of the community, including those who have historically experienced the most negative health and wellness effects related to the built environment, organizers developed a list of ten factors that the Community Health and Wellness element of the general plan would address. A technical advisory group composed of 12 experts and community members helped to inform this set of objectives.

Richmond's innovative plan and the way it was developed has generated interest around the world. Dr. Richard Kreutzer of the California Department of Public Health presented the Richmond general plan update story at an international public health forum in December of 2007. "Richmond is at the forefront of new thinking about the impact of the built environment on humans," said Richmond city manager Bill Lindsay.

Other cities are starting to follow Richmond's example and finding ways to involve diverse residents in their planning processes. According to Sood, and increasing number of local governments are seeing public involvement as a critical piece of their planning process. "There is recognition that the usual three public workshops that don't engage enough of the community are not sufficient."

Richmond's local elected officials are very excited about the health and wellness general

plan element, and are working with residents to develop another plan element to address climate change. “If other cities can adopt some of the inclusive planning efforts we are using in Richmond I think it will make a better nation” says Reese-Brown. She hopes that the new general plan will be approved in January of 2009.

For more information about the link between community planning and public health, visit www.healthycommunitiesbydesign.org and www.cacities.org/healthycommunities

2. Someday vertical hydroponic urban farms could provide locally produced, fresh, pesticide free produce to urban city dwellers. By producing food locally, greenhouse gas emissions associated with shipping food from farming areas to the city could be eliminated.

Here is a story about this emerging technology from the New York Times:

[NY Times Story on Vertical Farms](#)