

Integrating Health into Community Design: Strategic Points for Public Health Intervention



**Hawaii Department of Health
July 2006**

“The principal role of public health is to get to the table and raise health concerns as a priority issue in the land use and transportation planning process.”

NACCHO Focus Group Report, 2002

Public health efforts to change the built environment



Existing Conditions



Safe, Active, Healthy,
Equitable Communities

Public health efforts to change the built environment



Existing Conditions

Land Use & Transportation Planning Policies and Process



Safe, Active, Healthy, Equitable Communities

Determinants of the Built Environment

- Land Use Planning
- Traffic Engineering
- Regional Transportation Planning

Land Use Planning

- How communities decide what gets built where and what it looks like
- Local government level
- HI Land Use Commission, planning dept., planning commission, elected officials, neighborhood planning groups
- Key policies & processes:
 - General plan
 - Area Specific & Redevelopment plans
 - Zoning
 - Development Review
 - Subdivision Plans
 - Bike and Pedestrian Master Plans



Traffic Engineering

- Designs, standards and processes for traffic operations, facilities and safety (streets, sidewalks)
- Local government level (guided by natl. standards)
- Public works/traffic engineering department
- Key policies & processes:
 - Street design standards
 - Capital Improvement projects
 - Traffic calming protocols
 - Maintenance programs



Regional Transportation Planning

- How regions decide what types of transportation systems are built and/or improved
- Federal, state & regional level
- OMPO, County Public Works
- Key policies & processes:
 - Regional Transportation Plan
 - Regional Comprehensive Plan
 - Design guidelines and incentive programs



Top Nine Strategic Points for Public Health Intervention

1. General Plan
2. Zoning
3. Regional Transportation Plan
4. Regional Comprehensive Plan
5. MPO/RTPA
6. Street Design Standards & Policies
7. Area Specific & Redevelopment Plans
8. Development Projects
9. Retrofit Existing Streets

Strategic Intervention #1

The General Plan

- State law requires one of all cities & counties
- The “blueprint” and vision for future development (& redevelopment), but not very specific
- Serves as basis for land use decisions by local legislative body
- Includes seven elements: Land Use, Circulation, Housing, Conservation, Open-Space, Noise, Safety
- Major overhaul every 10-15 years; minor changes more often
- Approved by City Council or County Board of Supervisors

Why intervene here?

- Public health goals are usually implied but not explicitly stated
- “Health” defined very narrowly
- Opportunity to shift overarching land use policy and vision of a city/county towards Smart Growth/walkable communities
- Lays foundation for changing other policies, practices to support healthy community design

What can Public Health do?



- Promote Smart Growth vision and strategies
- Integrate “public health” as a goal and as a rationale for key policies
- Engage marginalized communities

Health as a General Plan goal in King County, WA



Seattle, Washington

- Health & Transportation departments collaborated
- Commissioned study on health/transportation links
- The first Comprehensive Plan with physical activity/health as a goal and policies in the Urban Form and Transportation Elements
- Cities of Chino, Benecia, Chula Vista and more!

“King County supports land use and zoning actions that promote public health by increasing opportunities for every resident to be more physically active. Land use and zoning actions include: concentrating growth into the Urban Area, promoting urban centers, allowing mixed-use developments, and adding pedestrian linkages.” U-107

“King County should seek to improve pedestrian safety both within residential areas and at arterials near pedestrian activity centers such as schools, retail centers, concentrations of housing, transit facilities and trails.” T-322

King County Comprehensive Plan

Decrease disparities: engage marginalized residents in planning decisions



Farm workers advocated for Smart Growth policies

- Local CBO provided farm workers with classes on General Plan process
- Formed “Lideres Comuntarios de Salinas”
- Developed policy recommendations for City of Salinas GPU
- City Council adopted ten of the group’s recommended policies

Strategic Intervention #2

Zoning Codes

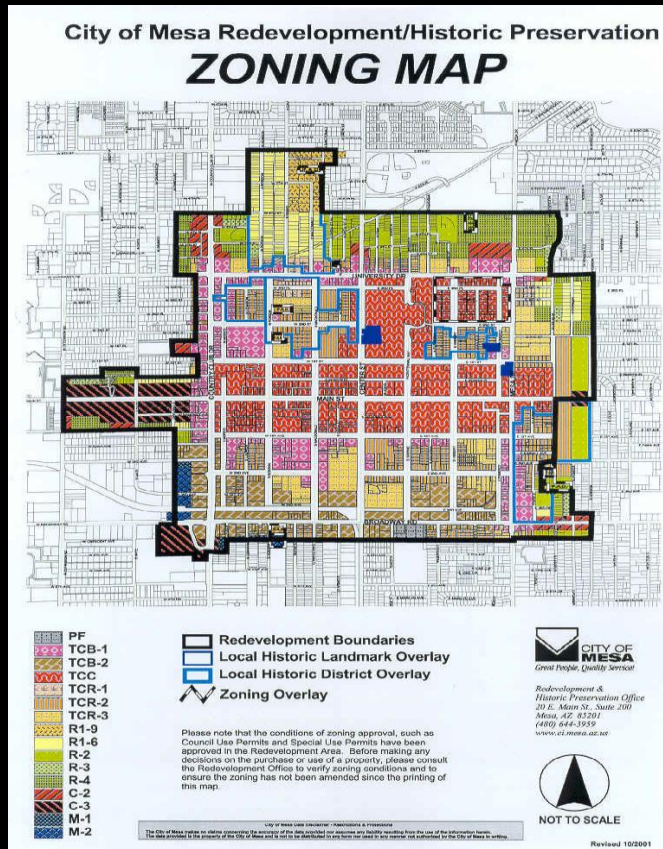
- The tool for putting General Plan goals, objectives into action
- Conventional zoning codes divide land into “zones” & specifies:
 - the “uses”
 - densities
 - some design elements
- General Plan is broad; zoning code is specific
- The legal regulatory tool with “teeth”

Why intervene here?



- Most codes are antiquated; promote auto-dominated development
- “Bad codes can make good General Plans fail”
- Developers cite them as the key barrier to building compact, mixed-use projects

What can Public Health do?



Advocate and encourage cities/counties to adopt “form-based codes” (Smart Codes)

Form-Based vs. Conventional Codes

- Form-based codes focus on the relationship between building facades and the public realm, the form and mass of buildings in relation to one another, and the scale and types of streets and blocks.
- Conventional zoning focuses on the segregation of land-use types, the types of uses that are permitted, and the control of development intensity (e.g., dwellings per acre, height limits).

Strategic Intervention #3

Regional Transportation Plan (RTP)

- 20-30 year long-range plan; updated every few years
- Determines the region's vision and priorities for investing in the transportation system
 - Allocates millions of dollars (federal, state and local funds) throughout the region
 - Important source of funding for city/county pedestrian & bike projects
 - Bike & pedestrian portion has grown, but still very small relative to funding for roads/freeways

What can Public Health do?

Promote and encourage adoption of:

- “Public Health” as a transportation goal
- Pedestrian-oriented & Smart Growth design
- Routine Accommodation (complete streets) policy
- Increased funding for bike & pedestrian projects



Public Health influences Sacramento's RTP priorities



Photo: www.pedbikeimages.org / Dan Burden

- Diverse coalition of advocates
- ALA as the public health stakeholder
- “Health” seen as a transportation issue
- Result: 3% of RTP for pedestrian/bike facilities (\$631M)

Strategic Intervention #5

Harness the Power of Your MPO/RTPA

- Agency with no “teeth” but lots of potential for influence
- As a granting agency, they can “apply the carrot approach” to encourage change
 - “Incentives programs” (e.g., Smart Growth, affordable housing)
- Develop & promulgate design guidelines
 - Integrate into MPO/RTPA’s funding criteria

Strategic Intervention #6

Street Design Standards



- Local guidelines for street and roadway design (and re-design)
- Addresses lane widths, number of lanes, crossing treatments, traffic calming, lighting, etc.

Why intervene here?



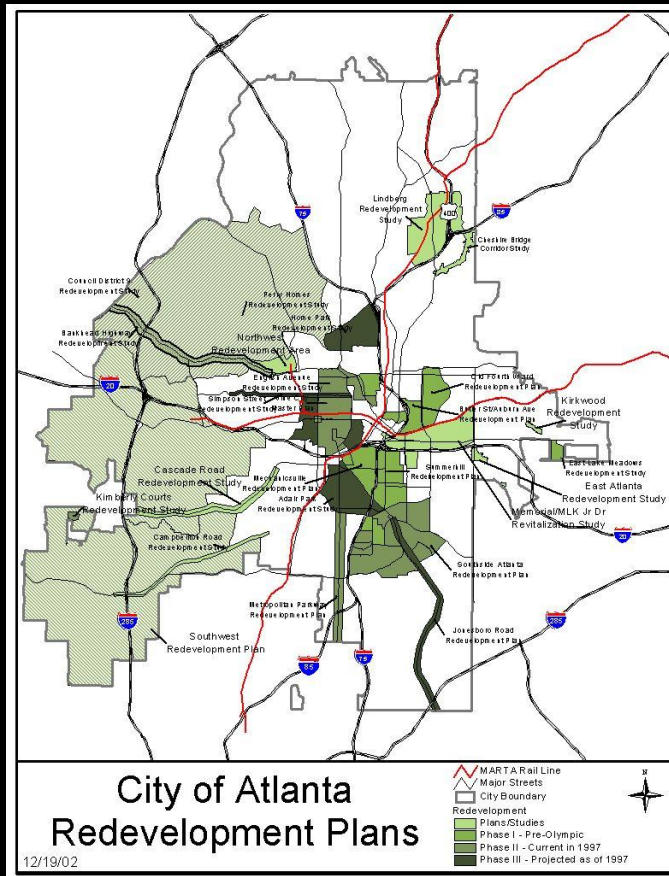
- Many are up to 40 yrs old; very auto-oriented
- Engineers usually won't venture outside their guidelines
- An upstream barrier to improving pedestrian safety & access

What can Public Health do?

- Call for revision of existing standards
 - Good opportunity is when the General Plan is updated
- Advocate for pedestrian-oriented design (e.g., “skinny streets”, fewer lanes, 5 ft minimum width sidewalks including parkways, mid-block crossings, new crosswalk designs).

Strategic Intervention #7

Area Specific and Redevelopment Plans



- Area Specific Plans
 - Smaller areas within a city or county (e.g., urban core; master planned community)
 - “Mini-General Plan”
 - Includes design standards (building & street design)
- Redevelopment Plans
 - Plan for a blighted area that has been designated as a redevelopment zone
 - Also dictates very specific design standards

Why intervene here?

- Smaller scale & shorter timeframe than a GPU
- Chance to demonstrate how Smart Growth/ walkability works
- A more tangible and concrete issue
- Easier to engage the community; build on your existing networks

What can Public Health do?



- Promote pedestrian-oriented and Smart Growth design guidelines (limit drive-thru's)
- Call for form-based codes
- Engage marginalized communities in the process

Southwest Chula Vista, CA



Building resident capacity to participate in planning process



- Now: neighborhood walkability project
- Bi-lingual walkability workshops & walk audits
- Next: Kaiser Permanente grant to train & assist residents in Southwest Chula Vista Area Specific Plan
- Advocate for culturally competent outreach methods by city

Strategic Intervention #8

Development Projects



How the process works:

- Developers propose preliminary plans to local jurisdiction
- Planning staff conduct a preliminary review of proposal
- Formal plan then goes through formal review and approval process
- May require public input
- May require approval by elected body

Why intervene here?

- Public Health already has a legal role in development project review
- Most concrete point to participate in process
- Usually engages the most attention and direct involvement of neighborhood

What can Public Health do?



- Help residents form a design review committee (Walk Sacramento)
- Expand health department's role in project review

Integrating health & walkability into the development project review process



- Tri-County Health Department, Colorado (EH)
- Expanded agency's authorized role
- Sit in on planning department's preliminary reviews
- Now - comment on environmental health issues AND walkability & Smart Growth
- Developed checklist – available at NACCHO.org

Strategic Intervention #9

Retrofit Existing Streets: *Fix Yesterday's Mistakes*



Piloting a curb extension

- Identify and get local jurisdiction to address pedestrian hotspots & walkability barriers
- Apply traffic calming and other environmental changes
- Model program: Safe Routes to School

Why intervene here?

- Good entry point for public health
- Beyond the actual improvements:
 - Can serve as a demonstration project
 - Points to upstream policy barriers (e.g., street standards)



Walkability Workshops and Community Mobilizing Work!



Walk audits identify issues & illustrate good & bad design

- ✓ University Heights
- ✓ Bird Rock
- ✓ Chula Vista
- ✓ Uptown, Hillcrest
- ✓ Downtown San Diego
- ✓ North Park
- ✓ Oceanside



WalkSanDiego's workshops & recommendations have led to street improvements in many local neighborhoods

What can Public Health do?



- Bring in the walkability experts
- Facilitate a community process for improving walkability
 - Workshops, forums
 - Walk audits
 - Traffic calming recommendations
- Bring policy issues to light

Top Nine Strategic Points for Public Health Intervention

1. General Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Promote Smart Growth vision and strategies• Integrate “public health” as a goal and as a rationale for key policies• Engage marginalized communities
2. Zoning	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Advocate and encourage cities/counties to adopt “form-based codes” (Smart Codes)
3. Regional Transportation Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Call for revision of existing standards• Advocate for pedestrian-oriented design
4. Regional Comprehensive Plan	

Top Nine Strategic Points for Public Health Intervention

5. MPO/RTPA	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use grant programs to encourage adoption of new policies, practices by cities/county
6. Street Design Standards & Policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Call for revision of existing standards• Advocate for pedestrian-oriented design
7. Area Specific & Redevelopment Plans	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Promote pedestrian-oriented and Smart Growth design guidelines (limit drive-thru's)• Call for form-based codes• Engage marginalized communities in the process
8. Development Projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Help residents form a design review committee• Expand health department's role in project review
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How We Make It Happen: The Role of Public Health

- ✓ Bring the data, be the health impacts expert
- ✓ Educate the other professional groups
- ✓ Be a facilitator & convener
- ✓ Engage in advocacy
- ✓ Take a seat at “the table”
- ✓ Mobilize the community



Defining the role of Public Health Agencies
NACCHO Focus Groups

Public Health Agency Examples

Riverside County, CA: The Pioneer

- 2003, Smart Growth conference and SHCC training
- “Livable Communities” goal in 3-year strategic plan
- General fund dollars & a livable communities position
- Spread the word and built political support
- Helping re-design existing communities (Ryan Snyder Associates)
- Overcoming barriers put up by public safety
- Doctor, heal thyself

Public Health Agency Examples

Contra Costa County, CA: Local and Regional Policy Focus

- Board Order calling for multi-agency collaboration on built environment/Smart Growth
- Health/Built Environment briefing paper and forum
- Introducing new approaches to a local city
- Member of regional agency's Pedestrian Advisory Committee

Public Health Agency Examples

Washington State DOH

- Nutrition & Physical Activity Plan – strong built environment recommendations
 - “Incorporate transportation policy and infrastructure changes to promote non-motorized transit”
- Active Community Environments Grass-Roots projects, joint with state DOT
- Safe Routes to Schools
- Nutrition Physical Activity Policy Leadership Group
 - Private/public partnership
 - Develop and promote policies that make healthy choices easy

Public Health Agency Examples

California State Health Department

CA Center for Physical Activity & EPIC Branch

- Nurtured grassroots advocacy
- Spread the word, linked with the Smart Growth & planning community
- Collaborations with state DOT
 - Healthy Transportation Network
- Trained Walk Experts, offer Walkability Workshops
- Home Zones

Public Health Agency Examples

California State Health Department

Local Public Health and Built Environment (LPHBE) Network

Building local capacity:

- 101 and 201 level trainings across state
- Technical assistance
- Mini-grants to 17 counties
- Grand Rounds
Teleconferences



A Safe & Healthy Communities Consulting Partnership

Organizing to do this Work

- Build broad-based support within your agency
- Work cross-programmatically
- Adopt a built environment goal into your Agency's strategic plan
- Build your knowledge and skill base

Organizing to do this Work

- As with most of what we do, it's all about relationships
- Develop your built environment strategy
 - Identify agency's existing links into the process
 - Map out key LUTP issues & gaps
 - Map out the opportunities (people & projects)
 - Select your strategic targets
 - The overlap between relationships, existing links, priority policies/issues and opportunities

Organizing to do this Work

- Develop funding strategy (general fund, grants)
 - Integrate into existing DPH programs
 - Help from regional transportation agency
 - Growing interest among funders

Believe in what public health can bring to the table and that we should be at the table!

Thank you!



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www.safehealthycommunities.com