

Models for Change: Lessons for Creating Active Living Communities

By Robert Cervero

Physical inactivity is a major contributor to the rising incidence of obesity, diabetes, and other chronic ailments in the U.S. Some 60% of adult Americans fail to meet the U.S. Surgeon General's recommendation of at least 30 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity most days a week. Yet idle living is avoidable. Designing cities with attractive sidewalk networks; creating schoolyards, playgrounds, and trails that are safe and accessible; and converting brownfields into mixed-use, bike-friendly communities are among the tools available to planners, public officials and advocates to promote active living.

The Active Living Research (ALR) program was established by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) to stimulate and support research that identifies factors and policies that influence physical activity. The program focuses on the effects of natural and built environments as well as public policies on active living.

Past research in this nascent but fast-growing field has been mostly quantitative, using statistical methods to associate New Urbanist designs, traffic

Many communities have adopted policies to create more trails.



www.pedbikeimages.org / Dan Burden



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Active living related policies encourage an environment that makes it safe for children to walk to school.

calming, trail construction, and the like on such outcome measures as walking and body mass index. In late 2004, ALR invited researchers to carry out case studies on active living policies. Case studies are useful for communicating information on “how” and “why” policy changes occur. They shed light on the “process” of policy change, something rarely revealed in regression model outputs. Good, compelling stories of newly emerging fields, like active living, can help communicate key lessons to decision-makers, as well as generate new research questions.

The 11 case studies that follow were prepared under the ALR program. Some examine the policy-change process, such as how to go about building a united front in developing a countywide network of bikeways or multi-use trails. Others focus on policy innovations, like agreements between municipalities and school boards in the planning and siting of school facilities and initiatives to transform greenfields into active-living new towns.

The summaries that follow are best viewed as vignettes. Authors were challenged to strip their rich stories down to the bare basics, summarize key lessons learned, and suggest opportunities for replicating these lessons elsewhere. The fact that researchers and scholars from fields as diverse as urban planning, medicine, public health, exercise science, and parks and recreation worked together, shared insights, and reached agreement on complex policy issues is itself a triumph.

Several common themes important to city planners of all persuasions are evident from these case studies. One is that planning matters. Without vision, leadership, and the tools of the trade (be they zoning codes or inspiring drawings), places and policies that promote physical activity are less likely to take shape. Collaborative planning is essential. All actors need to be at the table in forging some degree of consensus, particularly when, as these cases show, rewards and

risks are unevenly distributed. The “active living” seed also needs to be planted early. Bicycle, pedestrian, and public-health advocates need to be part of the planning process from day one—be it in the design of a neighborhood-scale traffic-calming program or a comprehensive new-town plan.

Many of the cases underscore the value of a champion—someone willing to invest considerable time networking among stakeholders with a laser-like focus. Several of the studies conclude that planners must seize windows of opportunity. Planners and politicians, we are told, must also be patient. Active living communities and policy reforms take form more through small steps than giant leaps.

We learn of inertia in policy change. Local governments and school boards, for example, have little history of working together, making collaboration in the siting and design of new schools difficult. And while capital funding for trail improvements or schoolyard renovations might be forthcoming, figuring out who will cover the ongoing costs for upkeep can be problematic. Giving stakeholders a voice in the planning process is particularly important in sidestepping roadblocks like funding constraints and NIMBY opposition.

Collaboration is important for at least one other reason. Partnerships draw new knowledge and insights into the active-living arena. By connecting active-living policies, whether streetscape improvements or brownfield conversions, to multiple issues, other interest groups become advocates of active living.

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The Philadelphia Story—Updated:

Public Policies to Encourage Downtown Living

By Eugenie Birch

The Story

Across the U.S., people are moving to—and staying in—downtown urban areas. With downtown living often meaning active living, how can public policies encourage more people to live in cities?

In the 1990s, downtown Philadelphia was in trouble—economically, socially, and aesthetically. Overall, Philadelphia had lost 700,000 residents in the past five decades; downtown businesses and nearby residential districts were feeling the losses. It had double-digit office vacancy rates and abysmal municipal services due to the city's near-bankruptcy.

But those who cared about Philly wouldn't give up without a fight. Community advocates like Paul Levy, head of the Center City District, and political leaders, like Mayor Ed Rendell, were determined to revive downtown Philadelphia. They pursued a multi-faceted strategy to bring people back downtown—as residents, workers or visitors—to the area's many cultural and culinary attractions.

The residential strategy served two purposes—it absorbed excess office space and brought newcomers into the area. Since parts of the city date from the colonial period, it is very walkable, so attracting people to the downtown area helped increase active living among the city's population. The revival of Philadelphia is still underway, but much progress is evident.

Lessons Learned

In transforming downtown Philadelphia, leaders have relied on four types of public policies:

- 1. Fiscal strategies**, such as tax abatements for office or factory conversion or new construction and tax increment financing for new construction;
- 2. Regulatory or administrative devices**, including zoning amendments and new school district boundaries;
- 3. Capital improvement expenditures**, such as public, private and foundation spending on cultural, tourist, and public space improvements; and

4. Creating and strengthening organizations, including private consortia to support amenities and open space conservancies.

How have these policies translated into action?

First, the city authorization of tax abatements for conversions of buildings from other uses to residential in 1997, and for new construction in 2000, has had dramatic results. By 2005, 110 office and factory buildings had been converted to residential use—with almost 7,000 units. As the building conversions absorbed office space, demand for new construction emerged. Philadelphia's market—with no starts in 1998—rose to more than 600 in 2005.

These conversions had positive visual and physical impacts on Philadelphia's downtown, and they are located near places of employment. Surveys of their tenants indicate that a high percentage walk to work. In addition, many of the converted buildings have refurbished ground-floor retail, making the shopping more convenient to residents and the pedestrian experience more attractive.

Another critical issue is retaining the younger,

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highly educated segment of the downtown population as they age, marry and become parents. Two years ago, Central City District's Paul Levy negotiated the creation of a "Center City Academic Region," or school district. Headed by its own superintendent and encompassing an area slightly larger than the downtown, it comprises 13 elementary schools open to downtown children regardless of their home addresses. The improved schools are attracting more families to move downtown, which has been difficult to achieve in other cities.

Central City District also secured pro bono contributions from downtown architectural firms to upgrade the schools' physical appearance, enhancing lighting, playgrounds and landscaping.

Replicating Change

Philadelphia's story yields many useful, replicable lessons regarding public policy, downtown living and the re-definition of the entire central business district.

A paper jointly published by the Penn Institute for Urban Research and Princeton's Policy Research Institute on the Region provides the background for the following conclusions:

- **The content and sequence of the four types of pro-downtown policies are emerging in an uncoordinated, quasi-independent form.** When replicated, however, these policies can frame a comprehensive strategy to introduce and seamlessly link new downtown functions in central business districts.
- **Developing a new downtown requires vision, patience, and endurance.** The idea of a 24/7 downtown is more than four decades old and has materialized slowly. In Philadelphia, it gained momentum in the face of dire circumstances—a disastrous office vacancy rate, the loss of four major banks and a premier hotel—in conjunction with changed socio-economic conditions.
- **Dedicated leadership is essential to success.** In recent years, Philadelphia Business Improvement Districts working with elected officials, civic groups, and other interested parties, have offered the entrepreneurial spirit, strategic economic stimulus, and political power necessary to spur development of the new downtown.
- **The new downtown is a dynamic, ever-evolving place.** An ongoing theme in its metamorphosis is the necessity of taking action to reinforce the area's distinct urban character. Attention to emerging issues is critical to its well-being. These issues include dealing with competing user needs, amplifying complementary economic functions and infrastructure support, rectifying destructive planning and design errors, and paying attention to affordability concerns.
- **Philadelphia's success shows that change is possible—but creating a redeveloped downtown can be a costly and time-consuming affair.** Although many people focus on the economic and social benefits of revived central business districts, the active living and health benefits of more people living in walkable neighborhoods should not be underestimated.

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Wisconsin's 1999 Comprehensive Planning Law:

Creating a State-Wide Plan that Encourages Active Living

By Joseph Schilling

The Story

With guidance from Brian Ohm, a university professor and trusted facilitator, Wisconsin's historically competing interest groups came to an agreement on a remarkable system of enforceable land use plans that will encourage active living in most of the state's cities, counties, towns and villages by 2010.

How did they do it?

Ten years ago, everyone agreed there was a problem, but no one could agree on the solution. Mounting discontent over Wisconsin's inconsistent and outdated land use policies came to a head. Citizens were alarmed by rapid conversion of farmland on the suburban and rural fringe, while builders and realtors were frustrated by the lack of certainty created by inconsistent rules and procedures administered by a maze of local governments. Communities throughout the state were experiencing population growth or economic disinvestment, sparking local government concerns about obsolete state policies.

At an impasse, leaders from the state Realtors association as well as 1000 Friends of Wisconsin, a civic organization, agreed to support a land use working group to repair the state's planning laws. Building on the University of Wisconsin's strong tradition of community service, Planning Professor Brian Ohm agreed to facilitate this consensus-based process given his extensive knowledge of the state's planning laws and contemporary smart growth practices. After six months of intense negotiations, the group designed a pioneering draft bill that was acceptable to all participants, including organizations representing Wisconsin's builders, planners and all levels of government—towns, villages, cities, counties and the state.

After months of partisan wrangling, the Wisconsin legislature adopted the working group's planning reforms as part of the governor's budget. These Comprehensive Planning Amendments of 1999 ensure that a comprehensive plan will guide just about every city and county and most towns and villages by 2010. They require that communities engage their citizens in formulating these plans, and that land use decisions stay

consistent with the locally-adopted comprehensive plan. The law further stipulates that all cities with a population greater than 12,500 must adopt a traditional neighborhood development (TND) ordinance that encourages more pedestrian friendly, mixed use projects—the ideal environment for supporting active living.

Lessons Learned

These TND ordinances give developers a more direct path to the compact, walkable neighborhoods that would otherwise require a drawn-out land use permitting process. Wisconsin's innovation involved embedding the requirement in a statewide planning framework, which reduces the barriers to walkable neighborhoods.

Here are three key lessons:

1. Good plans don't just happen. The consensus-based law that was so carefully formulated by a broad cross-section of interest groups was a significant achievement, but it was only the beginning. Even with a state framework, these processes take political will, financial and human resources and sustained support for reform.

2. Waiting for the market. While the mixed use development market remains confined to Wisconsin's urbanizing areas, communities that adopted TND ordinances will be ready when the market for compact development strengthens. Current practice favors following planned district development procedures because of the perception that no market exists for TND development.

3. Smart growth, self-determination and property rights. The amendments set out a framework to guide planning efforts—without telling communities what to choose. With requirements for public participation and grants to defray the planning costs, the amendments support each community in determining its own vision for the future. (It should be noted, however, that far from embracing this freedom, opponents insist that any land use planning infringes on individual private property rights.)

In Stevens Point, WI, the public library is integrated with a traditional neighborhood downtown to encourage pedestrian and bicyclist visitors.



Cannery Square in Sun Prairie, WI: The result of a traditional neighborhood development ordinance that supports active living for residents.

Replicating Change

Wisconsin's success—the passage of the 1999 Amendments and subsequent adoption of over 400 comprehensive plans—resulted from a combination of good timing, effective leadership, a well-balanced law and the skills of local planners and engaged citizens. While the political climate may not support consideration of statewide planning reforms in all states, the following insights from Wisconsin are broadly applicable:

- **Work with everyone.** Consensus may take longer to achieve this way, but the resulting alliance can offset political challenges during adoption and continue to support implementation of the reforms in coming years.
- **Give communities a choice—but hold the line.** The Wisconsin model does not require communities to develop a comprehensive plan, but after 2010 they must ensure that future land use decisions, such as zoning or subdivision approvals, are consistent with comprehensive plans—a powerful incentive to adopt a plan now.
- **Support the local work.** The state has provided over \$15 million to more than 800 local governments to help them draft their plans and engage the public in the process. Perhaps more important, technical assistance is available in the form of guidebooks and a library of plans and model ordinances created by University of Wisconsin Extension programs. Non-profit groups, such as 1000 Friends of Wisconsin, have also been instrumental in providing technical assistance and political support.

From introduction to adoption and then down the long road toward implementation, the planning reform process requires constant infusions of political advocacy, expertise and encouragement from a wide variety of constituencies. Wisconsin planners and leaders are relying on a tradition of perseverance and ingenuity to ensure that comprehensive plans will reflect the unique visions of the state's diverse communities.

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Sustaining Smart Growth and Active Living:

A Greenbelt Town and its Village Center, 70 Years Later

By Sherry Ahrentzen

The Story

They call themselves “Pioneers”—nearly a dozen people who moved to Greendale, Wisconsin when it was founded in 1938. And they continue to live there today.

As the new residents of one of the three federally-sponsored greenbelt towns, they were embarking on a new frontier. Greendale’s development, which was part of FDR’s New Deal Greenbelt Towns Program, reflected remarkable physical, economic, and social innovations in community building. The program created affordable towns that fostered engagement with green space and recreational facilities. While the contemporary term “active living” was not in the vocabulary of Greendale’s planners, the quality of life they encouraged was very much the same.

Today, the town, near metropolitan Milwaukee, is one in which one out of three households has a resident over 62 years of age; some live alone, some live with others. While Greendale’s demographics have changed, it remains a community responsive to active health needs, with walkable neighborhoods, foot trails, woods, parks, and a vital village center with civic, retail and service establishments frequented regularly by residents.

And residents do, indeed, walk: more than 80% of the 700 seniors surveyed said they walk in Greendale for exercise or health reasons, often in the parks, along the high school grounds, or on the foot trails. One of their favorite destinations, they said, is the village center.

The story of Greendale is a story of how a planning policy instituted nearly 70 years ago has been sustained and adapted so that Greendale’s physical qualities continue to enhance active living among residents even today.

Lessons Learned

A recent threat to Greendale’s garden city viability was the slow demise of the village center, which is the heart of the community—historically, civically, physically, and emotionally. Weather permitting, many residents walked there on sidewalks and ubiquitous foot trails.

In the 1970s, retail market changes brought the state’s largest shopping mall—and the subsequent proliferation of big box stores—to the edge of Greendale. This economic development aided the city’s tax base, but it left the village center in disarray. The grocery store, hardware store, and others pulled out; by the early 1990s, only 7 of the center’s 29 business spaces were occupied. A particular confluence of conditions and events aligned, however, to regenerate the village center in a manner in keeping with the original planning principles and scale.

Roy Reiman, a resident millionaire businessman, saved the village center by establishing a foundation for its redevelopment—and accommodating his own business expansion needs. Some of Reiman’s efforts included refurbishing all of the storefronts, interiors, and public walkways; instituting an aggressive marketing campaign to attract non-chain retailers and services; creating direct access to walking trails; and establishing a visitor’s center sponsored by his business, Reiman Publishing, to anchor the village center.

The Pioneers, local business owners, public officials, and Reiman worked together to ensure the village center’s survival. They demonstrated that entrenched community attachment and a sense of uniqueness—cultivated originally among the Pioneers but passed along by subsequent community generations—play a vital role in establishing the grounds for regeneration.

Replicating Change

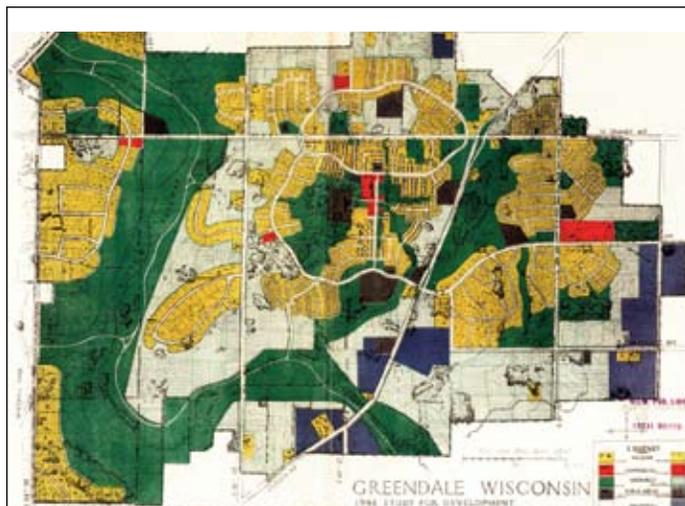
Over the decades, Greendale faced a number of challenges that threatened the viability of the greenbelt principles and their implications for active living.

Consider walkability—a defining characteristic of the original town with its myriad off-road walking trails, sidewalks, and site design situated so that residents of any home could reach the village center without having to cross more than one street. This layout was distinctive for its time; it continues to be distinctive today. As development surrounding the original settlement grew, easy and safe walking from the newer outlying neighborhoods to the village center came under threat. But while today one has to cross several streets to reach the village center from the outskirts of the town, each neighborhood—new and old—instituted their own network of walking trails through wooded areas, along the river, and other natural settings.

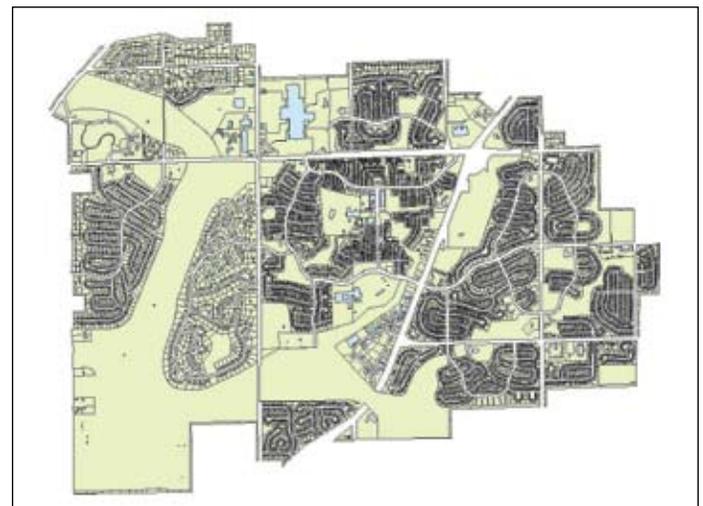
These efforts largely came about because residents and politicians identify strongly with the walkable history of their town and have endeavored to keep that distinction visible and current. The community identity resulting from Greendale’s historical uniqueness has informed and inspired efforts to sustain that distinctive quality.

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A proposed land use plan for Greendale, WI, developed in 1948 by Elbert Peets, when Greendale was being divested from the federal government.



As shown by this current GIS map of parcels and building footprints in Greendale, WI, open space is still a priority in the community.



Advocating for Active Living on the Rural-Urban Fringe

By Noelle Dobson, Sy Adler, Karen Perl Fox and Lynn Weigand

The Story

The town of Damascus, outside Portland, Oregon, is a rural community on the verge of major growth and dynamic change. For the last few years, advocates from around the region have worked to ensure that future growth in Damascus provides compact mixed-use centers and neighborhoods, creates viable transportation options for bicycles and pedestrians, and respects the area's rich natural resources—all contributing to the community's capacity to support active, healthy lifestyles among its residents.

How have leaders in Damascus balanced the coming development with active living principles?

Dee Wescott, a resident of the Damascus area, chaired an advisory committee appointed to create a conceptual plan to manage the process of urbanization. Mr. Wescott, along with Barb Ledbury, a neighbor who served with him on the advisory committee, supported efforts to plan a built environment that would encourage active living.

Wescott is now mayor of the recently incorporated City of Damascus, and Ledbury is a member of the city council. They are working on a local comprehensive plan and ordinances to implement the ideas they supported during the conceptual planning process.

Lessons Learned

The motivation for managing Damascus's growth came from a variety of sources: city councilors who didn't want it to become a freeway town with congested traffic and strip malls; community residents determined to walk their children to school safely; non-profit advocates focused on smart growth land use and transportation plans; and health advocates who wanted to help residents integrate physical activity into their daily lives.

Projections suggest that Damascus, a 12,200 acre rural area, will become one of the most dense communities in the Portland metropolitan region. The process to develop a concept plan for the area took nearly two years and involved the efforts of more than



Members of the community participated in forums and offered valuable input during the planning process for the new town of Damascus.

1,000 technical and advisory participants at numerous community forums. The concept planning process offered active living advocates the opportunity to influence the design of a large new community that would be conducive to active living and to "get it right from the start."

One important decision involved the size and location of schools and parks in a future Damascus. Advocates used several successful strategies to highlight the need for neighborhood schools and parks, such as bringing in national experts on school siting and gathering information on community preferences to share with concept plan decision makers.

In response to district concerns that siting facilities on the concept map could confuse property owners and raise land costs, advocates created a non-site specific diagram to further discussion on how school and park sites should relate to other elements of a complete community. Because school and park agencies are even more autonomous than private developers, active living advocates must coordinate with school and park districts directly and early in the process to make sure future schools and parks are integrated into activity-friendly designs.

Also central to active living advocacy was the question of whether or not to allow large-format retail in the town center and neighborhood centers. Because many residents, planners, and decision makers wanted to avoid traditional "big box" stores, parking lots, and traffic congestion, the concept of urban style large-format retail took hold early on in the planning process. Active living advocates suggested that urban style large-format would better integrate with the overall community design and be more supportive of walking and biking. However, some wondered whether an alternative to traditional large-format retail could be financially feasible. Advocates hope that strong urban-style design standards included in the concept plan will mitigate large-format's potential negative impacts on walking and biking.

Replicating Change

Active living advocates need to be involved early and often in planning processes, and advocates must work collaboratively across multiple stakeholder groups to pursue their objectives. Engaging public health advocates specifically can greatly contribute to planners' and decision makers' knowledge and understanding of how choices made during this stage can impact opportunities for active lifestyles for generations to come.

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A view of the current state of Damascus, OR.



Active Living Through Converting Brownfields to Greenspaces

By Kris Wernstedt and Juha Siikamäki

The Story

Not long ago, an abandoned railway shipping yard was creating a blight on prime Mississippi River-front land in St. Paul, Minnesota. Now this area has been transformed into the Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary—and what was once an unusable eyesore has become a popular place for recreational activity.

“Brownfields”—properties that were once used but now lay underused—are an unfortunate reality in many communities. But brownfields can be replaced with greenspaces, offering a way to transform distressed neighborhoods—and provide healthy environments that are central to active living.

In Wisconsin, the state’s Brownfields Green Space and Public Facilities Grants program has awarded a total of \$1 million to 10 communities to support these kinds of transformations. This money has supported community ballfields in Milwaukee, a farmer’s market in Eau Claire, the extension of a river walk in Oshkosh, and a town park—the first one—in Geneva.

Elsewhere, broad coalitions have worked more informally to promote greenspace conversions. For example, the restoration of the 27-acre Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary in St. Paul has benefited from supporters as diverse as bike advocates, the local watershed district, development corporations, neighborhood associations, national environmental organizations such as the Trust for Public Land, and an array of federal, state, county, and city agencies.

What factors appear to influence the conversion of brownfields into greenspace?

Lessons Learned

Since brownfields contain abandoned or underused facilities where redevelopment is complicated by real or perceived environmental contamination, such conversions often face resistance in strapped jurisdictions where redevelopments are expected to yield immediate gains in jobs, tax revenues, or housing.

We recently surveyed people who were deeply involved in conversion projects and asked them to explore the relative importance of different conditions to the likeli-



The sprawling 18th and 19th century railyard on the east side of Saint Paul has given way to the Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary.

hood that local jurisdictions would undertake alternative hypothetical greenspace development projects.

The 486 respondents come from 49 states, with most working for local governments, principally as elected officials, planners, economic and community development specialists, or as staff in parks, recreation, or natural resource agencies. More than three-quarters of the respondents indicated their communities have achieved conversions of brownfields into greenspace.

The results offer several lessons to those interested in transforming brownfields to promote active living objectives:

- Respondents indicated that a mix of public and private funding—as opposed to public funding alone—is likely to increase community support for a greenspace development project.
- Community support is about twice as likely for conversion projects taking place in residential as opposed to commercial neighborhoods, which in turn are preferred over projects in industrial neighborhoods.
- Jurisdictions appear more likely to develop a vacant property into a recreational park with developed ball fields than into a nature park that lacks major facilities. However, there is some question whether ball fields provide physical activity opportunities to a broad cross-section of community residents.
- Not surprisingly, lower capital costs increase the likelihood of redevelopment into a greenspace. Operation and maintenance costs are a far bigger concern—on average, a one dollar increase in annual operation and maintenance costs is perceived to be as prohibitive as a 30 dollar increase in capital costs. Money undoubtedly helps brownfield to greenspace conversions, but financial support for longer-term operation and maintenance costs appears to offer more bang for the buck than support for capital costs.
- Public acquisition of a site through purchase is more likely to facilitate brownfield to greenspace conversions than securing the site through tax foreclosure.



The 27-acre Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary now provides ready access to outdoor opportunities for residents and workers in downtown Saint Paul, Minnesota.

- Environmental insurance and other mechanisms to reduce financial risks at brownfield properties are important options to consider in greenspace conversions, since the mere presence of contamination decreases the likelihood that the site will be developed as a greenspace, even when cleanup costs are already accounted for.
- Brownfield to greenspace conversion projects offering natural open space face a tougher road than those offering developed recreational facilities, putting the onus on advocates for open space to show evidence of its benefits.

Replicating Change

Conversion of brownfields to greenspace does not guarantee that active living will follow. However, most respondents indicated that active living is an important or emerging policy issue in their communities, and overwhelming majorities suggested their communities have developed trails and supported recreational programs that encourage physical activity. The challenge is to find ways to marry this enthusiasm for active living environments with the need to convert hundreds of thousands of contaminated properties nationwide into community assets that can provide economic, social, and active living benefits.

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Traffic Calming Initiatives—Approaching The Tipping Point

By Reid Ewing, Amy Hofstra and Robert Lane

The Story

In a little over a decade, traffic calming has expanded from a few scattered programs with limited scopes and toolboxes, to a mainstream transportation planning activity. Ten years ago, we studied 20 early adopters of traffic calming. We recently examined how far these cities and counties have come.

None of the U.S. programs have fully transitioned to the European model of traffic calming, which emphasizes the needs of pedestrians and bicyclists, thereby contributing more directly to the goal of active living. However, Austin, Texas; Bellevue, Washington; Charlotte, North Carolina; Eugene, Oregon; and Sacramento, California, have made progress in this direction. Innovation is most often a product of big-picture thinking on the part of city staff—notably Norm Steinman and Tracy Newsome of Charlotte, Karen Gonzalez of Bellevue, and Steve Brown, formerly with Sacramento and now a consultant.

In Charlotte, NC, arterials are put on “road diets” to help calm traffic—as demonstrated by these before and after views.



Lessons Learned

1. Broaden goals. The official goals of traffic calming programs remain to reduce speeding and cut-through traffic. Unofficially, though, walkability is now on par with slowing traffic in Sacramento, which wants to become the world’s “walking capital.” Walkability may become an explicit goal as Charlotte folds traffic calming into its new street standards and transportation action plan.

2. Broaden representation in plan development. We found two places in which bike-pedestrian interests have a voice in traffic calming decisions. In Austin, the bike-ped coordinator is consulted on traffic calming plans when bike lanes are part of projects. More important, in Eugene, with its strong bike-ped culture, advocates are routinely invited to open houses and charrettes—and they show up.

3. Calm higher order streets. Traffic calming is still applied mostly to minor collectors and local streets in residential areas. One notable exception is Charlotte, which is putting arterials on “road diets” (with fewer and/or narrower lanes). With only one travel lane in each direction, prudent drivers set the pace on diet roads, whereas aggressive drivers dominate on multi-lane streets.

4. Use pedestrian and bicycle-friendly devices. Bellevue is outfitting routes to school with raised crosswalks and curb extensions, traffic calming devices that give priority to pedestrians. Austin and Sacramento have begun to use speed cushions instead of speed humps in certain areas, in part because the wheel cut-outs provide gaps for bicyclists. Eugene now has three raised intersections. Several communities have provided bypass lanes for bicyclists at chokers or half closures.

5. Count pedestrians and bicyclists. None of the programs conducts before-after counts of pedestrians or bicyclists in connection with traffic calming projects. One admitted that it “didn’t want to get into” pedestrian counts, believing that low pedestrian counts might hurt the program. Another cited the difficulty of manual counts of pedestrians and bicyclists, while motor vehicles can be counted automatically. In this respect, European practice has yet to cross the Atlantic.

6. Make connections to active living. The mayor’s initiative in Charlotte—Fit City Charlotte—involves the city’s pedestrian coordinator and the county health department. Both have endorsed proposed urban street design guidelines that call for traffic calming of new and reconstructed streets. Bellevue has a Walk-to-School initiative. Because the program coordinator is housed within the same agency as the traffic calming program, there is coordination between the two programs (exemplified by the raised crosswalks at school crossings).



A raised crosswalk and curb extensions at a school crossing in Bellevue, WA.

Replicating Change

Malcolm Gladwell’s best-selling book, *The Tipping Point*, offers three rules for epidemics of social change—rules which can help planners and policy makers apply the preceding lessons:

1. Rule of the few. A few key people are involved in the development of traffic calming programs. Transportation staff must develop expertise in traffic calming from travels, prior work in other communities, coursework in school, or professional associations. Individual councilmen, neighborhood activists, and bike-ped advocates can play the role of connectors, and can also acquire maven-like expertise that makes them effective sales people.

2. Stickiness factor. The most “sticky” idea appears to be that traffic calming works (based on before-and-after studies). Several programs began with successful pilot tests that convinced policy makers of the effectiveness of traffic calming measures. Other sticky ideas are that traffic calming can help preserve neighborhoods in the face of increasing cut-through traffic and can improve pedestrian safety at high accident locations.

3. Power of context. Progressive political cultures and/or Sunbelt problems and opportunities are common to case study communities. Specific triggers for traffic calming innovation vary from case to case. To our surprise, the threat of cut-through traffic seems to be a much bigger motivator than speeding traffic.

Before-after studies of traffic calming in Europe suggest that significant increases in walking and bicycling are achievable. The route to such increases seems clear—run, don’t walk, toward a more European version of traffic calming.

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Street Violence or Physical Activity? A Community Decides

By Mindy Fullilove
and Lesley Green



Local youth participated in the 2006 Highbridge Classic, an inter-neighborhood competition.

The Story

Some people assume Manhattan residents get all the walking they need. But this is not always the case.

In the 1990s, terrible violence controlled the streets of Washington Heights and Inwood. Residents there reported that family members would call each other to check on safe routes before venturing home. Mothers kept their children inside and away from the parks. Some parents even went so far as to put filing cabinets between their windows and their children to protect them from flying bullets. The violence also discouraged active living. It took intensive anti-drug campaigns, police action, and the natural slowing of the drug epidemic to control the danger.

By 2004 it seemed perfectly safe to stroll home from Little League practice on a spring afternoon. But for two middle school children, walking with their mother, Maria Perez*, it was not. They were attacked by a gang of youths who beat them with their fists and sticks. The mother's screams attracted the attention of passers-by who came to their rescue, but not before the children were bruised and terrified. The next day, Ms. Perez went to Miguel Martinez, the local councilman, to demand his help in restoring safety to the

streets. Martinez immediately convened community leaders in an effort to search out solutions.

Lessons Learned

As it happened, two organizations—UNIDOS Coalition as well as the Center for Youth Violence Prevention at Columbia University—were planning a fair to address youth violence in the area. Councilman Martinez adopted the fair as a venue for a town hall meeting on youth violence. Approximately 30 neighborhood youth joined 40 residents and community leaders to formulate a plan that called for the creation of youth activities, educational and vocational opportunities directed at high school drop outs, and the development of opportunities for inter-neighborhood interaction. Participants formed a coalition called CODES: Community Outreach and Development Efforts Save.

Though community groups had few new resources to carry out these projects, they were willing to share what they had to carry out the community-generated plan. CODES urged the schools to take action. The schools agreed to police their grounds for hidden sticks and other weapons. They also introduced

staggered dismissal times. This immediately calmed violence around the schools. To reduce inter-neighborhood violence, CODES promoted friendly competition on the basketball courts and football fields.

Once the initial crisis was addressed, the coalition began to dissipate, with participating groups reorganizing according to interests and missions. At the end of the research period, some groups were working together to create a hiking trail through parks that had been abandoned during the years of the crack cocaine epidemic. Others are working to support youth returning to the neighborhood from jail or prison. Still others continue to work on the CODES agenda, promoting youth-centered events.

Replicating Change

Neighborhood violence can galvanize communities and stimulate action that produces many benefits. The elements of CODES' success appeared to be local political leadership, strong community participation in planning and implementing strategies, and effective collaboration by diverse local organizations. The activities CODES started will likely outlast the coalition's own existence—providing an important lesson for other communities with limited resources and a need for safe streets. CODES demonstrated that a neighborhood coalition could restore public safety: a prerequisite of active living in the urban setting. In addition, CODES promoted active recreation that offered nonviolent competition for neighborhood youth.

Families with young children line up for a stroller hike during the 2005 outdoor festival, Hike the Heights I. The day was designed to re-introduce people to parks once abandoned to violence.



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*Note: Maria Perez is a pseudonym.

Can Mega-Schools Be Tamed?

Collaborative Planning in Lee County, Florida

By David Salvesen, Emily Lees and Elizabeth Shay

The Story

Over the last 20 years, school enrollment in Florida has increased by an average of about 50,000 students per year. To keep pace with demand, the state embarked on a school-construction binge, building hundreds of new schools—56 in 2000 alone. Most of the new facilities are huge. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics, the average high school enrollment in Florida is 1,565 students—compared to 1,177 in Georgia, and 1,004 in New York (not to mention 210 in North Dakota).

Larger schools usually require bigger sites, which are typically found on the urban fringe, far from the neighborhoods they serve. Not surprisingly, in these cases, relatively few school children walk or bike to school. A recent survey of middle-school students in Florida confirmed that only 17.5% walked or rode their bikes to school. Thus, siting and size of schools can clearly affect active living.

"Yeah, we're going from neighborhood schools to mega-schools," said a planner in Lee County, Florida. And because large schools generate so much automobile traffic, they are being built near major roads, which further discourages students from walking.

The lack of coordination between local governments, which approve new subdivisions, and local school districts, which are responsible for building new schools to meet the demand for additional capacity, is a critical part of the problem. In 2002, Florida enacted legislation—SB 1906—that requires local governments to coordinate planning with school boards. SB 1906 mandates the adoption of inter-local agreements (ILAs) that address factors such as school siting, enrollment forecasting, school capacity, infrastructure, co-location, joint use of civic and school facilities, and dispute resolution.

How has this worked in fast-growing Lee County, the nation's 60th largest school district, where some 35 schools are scheduled to be built in the next 10 years?

Interviews with state policymakers, facilities officials, local planning directors, school superintendents, city/county managers, representatives from the local school board, city council/county commissions,

and the Lee County Health Department offer some revealing insights.

Lessons Learned

Crucially, intergovernmental coordination depends not so much on a government mandate, but on whether someone is willing to take the initiative to promote greater collaboration. In addition, cooperation seems most likely to occur when the parties involved have known each other for a substantial amount of time and have developed a close working relationship.

A few years ago, for example, the Lee County Parks and Recreation Department gave the school board 20 acres in the middle of Veterans Park in a part of the county called Lehigh Acres (a huge subdivision that once grew slowly but is now growing rapidly). A school was built on the site and the parks department constructed a recreation center attached to the school gymnasium. During the day, the recreation center and gym are kept separate—the community uses the recreation center and the school uses its gymnasium. In the evenings, the community can use both facilities. The project came about primarily because the two people who pushed for it—one from the parks and recreation department and the other from public works—have been with the county for 30 years and have a good working relationship.

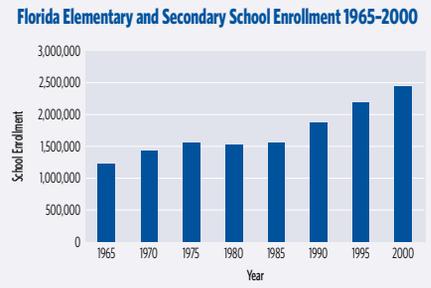
One of the limitations of the inter-local agreements is that there has been little, if any, monitoring and enforcement. Many interviewees stated that the inter-local agreements "lack teeth" and that signing the agreements was largely a paper exercise, since there is no penalty for failure to implement or act on the ILAs. As one interviewee said, "We met once to sign the agreement and that was it."

Based on our observations, the ILAs have not had much impact on Lee County, but there may be better results in other counties. To make ILAs work, it appears you need strong leadership, good relations across government agencies, and incentives from the state. Local governments have seemed reluctant to invest political capital in ILAs ahead of new school concurrency rules that will go into effect in 2007. These new regulations will require that sufficient capacity exists in local schools before additional development will be approved.

Replicating Change

Florida has a history of state-mandated planning initiatives that dates back at least 20 years. Because of this, some of the institutional infrastructure for coordinated planning—such as concurrency for roads, water, and sewer—already exists. Coordinated planning across local, regional and state levels has become part of the culture in Florida. Other states may respond better to a program based on incentives, rather than mandates—carrots rather than sticks.

One of the challenges of improving coordination across institutions is that school boards and local



Source: Florida Division of Community Affairs

governments often have no history of working together, despite compelling reasons to do so. School boards and county commissions are elected separately and have their own missions and budgets. Absent strong incentives, the two institutions will continue to operate in isolation. Stakeholders have to be convinced that they have more to gain by collaborating than by working alone.

Greater cooperation must be promoted by policymakers and by agency heads. School superintendents and the county manager and planning director must make collaboration a priority. Without directives—and rewards—from above, coordination will be given a low priority. Planners, with their training in dispute resolution, can play pivotal roles.

It may be overly ambitious and optimistic for the state to expect the inter-local agreements to have much impact, particularly in counties where there has been no tradition of collaboration between school districts and county or local governments and where there is no monitoring and enforcement of agreements. Building the trust and relationships necessary for collaboration takes time.

In fast-growing regions, however—particularly where land prices have risen dramatically and where schools are scrambling to add new capacity—schools and local governments may be drawn together to coordinate their planning. Joint use of facilities such as ball fields or libraries is one instance in which collaboration benefits both parties. Education regarding the benefits and pitfalls of collaboration may spur interest, as will technical assistance and model agreements. Because of the importance of creating new schools that support active living, political leaders need to evaluate additional innovations that could lead to stronger intergovernmental cooperation.

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Saving Boston's Public Schoolyards

By Russell Lopez

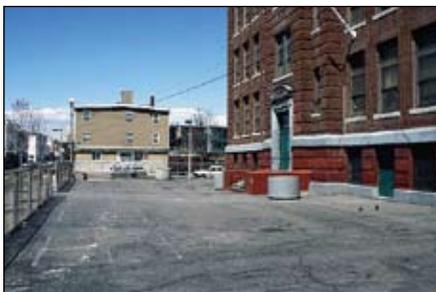
The Story

In the early 1990s, Boston's public outdoor schoolyards stood neglected—and many of them were downright dangerous. Some were used as parking lots for cars and busses; worse, some were littered with broken glass, used needles, and other drug paraphernalia. Far from being used for recreational purposes, many Boston schoolyards were disconnected from their immediate communities and were left shamefully abandoned.

In 1995, the people behind the Boston Schoolyard Initiative decided to do something about it. The initial meetings that led to the BSI were initiated by the Boston Greenspace Alliance and the Urban Land Use task force, two organizations with extensive experience in working on environmental issues in Boston. Boston Mayor Thomas Menino endorsed the meetings and directed city and school personnel to participate.

The BSI came to life as a public-private partnership dedicated to redeveloping schoolyards and transforming them into active play spaces and outdoor learning environments. An independent non-profit

The Boston Schoolyard Initiative helped transform the Otis Elementary School in East Boston.



organization, the BSI was made up of working groups of parents, school-based personnel, city hall staff, and other interested parties. Kirk Meyer has served as executive director of the BSI since its beginning and along with his staff, he has helped to keep the stakeholders involved in the process as well as provided critical oversight to individual projects.

The results have been impressive: Approximately half of Boston's schools, including facilities in every neighborhood, have been renovated at an average cost of about \$200,000. Visually, the changes are remarkable. Today's schoolyards boast colorful, safe play equipment, teaching gardens, outdoor amphitheatres, and classroom space.

THE BOSTON SCHOOLYARD INITIATIVE CAME TO LIFE AS A PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP DEDICATED TO REDEVELOPING SCHOOLYARDS AND TRANSFORMING THEM INTO ACTIVE PLAY SPACES AND OUTDOOR LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS.

Lessons Learned

A patient planning process

The BSI needed to convince outside parties that they had the capacity to improve schoolyards, and they needed school personnel to understand that external institutions could be partners in enhancing their institutions. The BSI met these dual challenges by fostering a patient planning process that lasted a year or more at each school and involved the hiring of outside organizers, design consultants, and other experts. These parties assisted each working group in developing a shared vision and a realistic plan for improvements.

Developing community support

Developing community support for local schools takes time—but it's absolutely critical. A bottom-up initiative must be allowed to develop as part of the planning process. And, importantly, local efforts require realistic levels of dedicated funding. Redevelopment cannot be sustained on the basis of volunteerism alone. While individual project funding need not be huge, the process should be flexible, and each partnership participant must have an active role in planning improvements. Ideally, this kind of funding should be foundation-based and administered by an independent non-profit organization.

Schoolyards can unite communities and schools

Schoolyards can bring communities and schools together. Redeveloped schoolyards have become venues where community residents, parents, staff, and teachers focus on the well-being of children. Initiatives between communities and schools help build trust and networking.

Replicating Change

The BSI demonstrates that older schools in inner city neighborhoods can be turned into community assets. Schools can be revitalized and diverse individuals and institutions can learn to work together. The first and most important step in this revitalization process is to

begin developing the partnerships that will underpin it. These partnerships must begin prior to the start of the project. Second, but just as important, the staff selected to lead the improvements must be experienced in community based coalition building. Finally, there is a need for leadership including politicians such as the Mayor (or whoever has responsibility for the schools), the funding community and neighborhood leaders. They must commit to making these projects work.

There continue to be concerns about the long-term stability of BSI projects. The physical maintenance of schoolyards in the context of limited budgets is an ongoing worry, and schools are also constrained from making full use of outdoor spaces as they come under pressure to focus their attention on classroom time and test results. In the end, however, the BSI is an example of the positive change that can come about when neighborhoods and schools work together—for the good of both students and communities at large.

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Promoting Bicycling in Three Metropolitan Washington Counties

By Garry Young
and Royce Hanson

The Story

Residents in Arlington County, Virginia, enjoy what is perhaps the best biking system on the east coast. How did it get that way?

In the early 1970s, bicycling in Arlington County, Virginia, largely resembled the rest of the Washington, D.C., area—in short, it was in a sorry state. Few adults rode bikes, fewer commuted on bicycles and fewer still were local advocates for bicycling. Yet within a decade a thriving biking system took shape. Why? Nearby Fairfax, Virginia, and Montgomery County, Maryland, resemble Arlington along numerous dimensions—but lack Arlington's quality biking assets. How does one account for the differences?

Arlington's transformation began in 1972 with county transportation director Hank Hulme and county manager Bert Johnson. Rapid rail transit was coming, and soon a locally controversial interstate highway would bisect Arlington. Johnson saw a window of

opportunity to lessen Arlington's automobile-centric traffic patterns and create a bike-inclusive system. With his mandate from Johnson, Hulme put a program into action; this ultimately led to the Arlington biking system.

Lessons Learned

1. Leadership CAN come from the top. Arlington's successful biking system did not come primarily from grassroots pressure. It developed because county leaders saw biking as a partial solution to a general transportation problem. This led to resource allocation with transportation engineers assigned to multi-modal transportation, the appointment of a bike coordinator and a Master Bikeway Plan.

2. Grassroots support, however, is still crucial.

While grassroots pressure did not produce the biking system, support at the local level helped sustain it. Hulme recruited local bikers to lend advice and support. Soon Arlington created the Bicycle Advisory Committee to provide a formal voice for citizen input. This input proved critical to the system's development. (Montgomery also cultivated biker support, though less consistently, while the county-biker relationship in Fairfax has been sporadic and often adversarial.)

3. Planning and incremental development

are key. Generally speaking, Arlington planned and built, Montgomery planned and partially built, and Fairfax never planned and idiosyncratically built. Arlington's 1974 Master Bikeway Plan provided the blueprint for the system; it demonstrates the importance of planning. Various bikeways in the plan were regularly included in capital budgets, and county leaders pursued incremental development, adding

mileage as funding allowed, and initially building trails below ultimate standards. Upgrades followed as resources allowed.

4. Take advantage of windows of opportunity. As part of the "price" for building I-66, the controversial new interstate highway that bisected Arlington, the federal government built a parallel trail heading to Washington. The county then integrated this trail with adjoining neighborhoods—thus creating an efficient biking commuter route. Likewise, bikeways were integrated with numerous transit stations, making it possible to commute by bike and Metrorail.

ARLINGTON'S 1974 MASTER
BIKEWAY PLAN PROVIDED THE
BLUEPRINT FOR THE SYSTEM;
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5. The role of development. In the early 1970s, Arlington was fully urban and bikeways had to be shoehorned into the already densely-developed county. However, developers had different interests in Arlington than in the less urban counties. In Montgomery and Fairfax, developers usually resisted requirements for bikeway creation in new subdivisions. In Arlington, however, developers focused on intensive redevelopment around transit stations and were generally amenable to integrating bikeways.

The lighted Custis trail, which connects Arlington's western boundary with the District of Columbia and links to an extensive network of trail spurs, offers commuters easy access to adjoining neighborhoods.



Replicating Change

Arlington's success in building its biking system can be replicated elsewhere. Again, grassroots pressure can help create interest among officials and keep them focused on supporting biking. But grassroots pressure alone is insufficient. It takes a champion inside government to keep biking central to transportation and development policy. An effective political strategy, then, is to pressure elected officials to select managers who see bikeways as crucial to transportation, and then actively support the programs those managers initiate. Master planning and a commitment to building incrementally are also crucial.

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Developing Community Trails:

Brainstorms and the Power of Policy

By Amy A. Eyler, Ross C. Brownson,
Kelly R. Evenson, David Levinger,
Jay Maddock, Delores Pluto and Philip Troped

The Story

Flying into Seattle International Airport one day in 1988, John Amberton* looked out of his window and fixed his gaze on a utility corridor far below. It would make a perfect trail, he thought, with its wide swatch of clear land. His mind began to process the possibility; 15 years later, his vision would become a reality.

Planning community trails often begins with such moments of revelation. In another community, Galen Watson's* brainstorm ensured that land devastated by a flood would eventually help fill the need for a trail and recreational area. With help from flood buy out programs, he would go on to develop a trail that enhanced the community. Elsewhere, members of another citizen group, Friends for Fitness in West

Hawaii, dreamt that an abandoned airport could become a place to walk for exercise.

These revelations, however, were simply first steps in a long line of events that led to the actual development of trails. What started as simple ideas evolved into complex webs of funding, land acquisition, and other policies. But the ultimate results, in all cases, were community assets that allow residents to be physically active—the creation of places for recreation and social interaction, and in some areas, places for active transportation to and from work or shopping.

This is a study of successful policies that created six multi-use trails across the United States: a one mile trail in a rural Missouri town; a five-and-a-half mile rail trail in suburban Massachusetts; a six mile river trail in South Carolina; a three mile trail in southeastern Seattle; a one mile trail on old airport grounds in West Hawaii, and a three mile trail in Durham, North Carolina.

Lessons Learned

Though the specifics of each trail varied, the challenges faced by planners and invested parties were often similar. First, trail planning and policy change or development involved many individuals and organizations—such as private funders, city, state and federal organizations, advocacy organizations, community residents, engineers, planners, local businesses, and utility companies. The diversity of the partners added complexity to the necessary tasks of reaching compromises, keeping timelines, and even speaking the same professional language.



Workers build the McKenzie Creek Trail in Piedmont, MO.

A common stumbling block was provisions for trail maintenance. Because such work requires yearly funding, partners must work together to decide who will fund and implement maintenance. Positive partnerships among groups and individuals were a common theme in successful policy change.

Another challenge across several of the trail sites was the time it took for the policy process to run its course. Many trail plans were presented at least a decade before they were actually built. Perseverance is often the key to success.

A third challenge in developing community trails was the difficulty in getting people and organizations to view the trail as an important and positive feature in the community. Whether their lack of support was due to safety concerns or funding priorities, addressing the opposition was essential in policy initiation or change.

Replicating Results

Policy development for trail development requires a team of players that includes governmental and private agencies as well as community groups. The trick, it seems, is in balancing these groups' different motives to accomplish a shared goal. Trail development for a transportation planner may mean reducing traffic congestion. For a public health practitioner, it may mean more people becoming physically active.

Communities of all types can benefit from the development of multi-use trails. Doing so requires seizing windows of opportunity, finding positive partnerships, and being committed to the cause. Even though there may be policy barriers to trail development, many policies change over time or new ones are created to accommodate shifting community needs. As active living becomes more integrated into our culture, community trails can increasingly provide access to venues for physical activity, recreation, and active transportation.

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**Note: John Amberton and Galen Watson are pseudonyms.*

A cyclist rides the Chief Sealth Trail in Southeastern Seattle, WA.

