

REALTORS® & Smart Growth

# on common ground

WINTER 2016

Bicycle Friendly Places  
The Healthy Food Movement  
Reconnecting with Nature

## HEALTHY COMMUNITIES



NATIONAL  
ASSOCIATION of  
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# Designing Healthy Communities

At the turn of the 20th century, public health was a major impetus to the creation of the urban planning movement in the United States. Housing regulation and land use and parks planning focused on ameliorating the negative impacts of crowded, polluted cities on the public, especially the poor.

As planning and zoning evolved throughout the 20th century, more focus was given to separating different land uses, spreading things out, and designing the metropolis to facilitate the driving and parking of motor vehicles. Walking as a form of daily transportation became rare.

Now, well into the 21st century, we are seeing a renewed focus on how community planning and civic activism can affect and improve the public's health. With obesity and chronic diseases such as diabetes afflicting so many Americans, many elements of smart growth, such as facilitating more walking and biking, are recognized as having important links to health. Of course, diet plays a huge role in health too, and providing better access to healthy food, such as fresh produce, is playing an increasing role in public health initiatives and city planning.

Many schools are developing new approaches to encourage students to eat better food and be more physically active. Urban gardening programs have been found to improve the gardeners' diets as well as improving social ties and civic engagement. Cities are helping small grocery stores provide



Courtesy of USDA; photo by Lance Cheung

healthier food options for customers. Making biking safer (with protected bike lanes) and easier (with bike share programs) can increase the use of bicycles for transportation purposes, making exercise a regular part of a person's day. As research increasingly shows that contact with the natural world is essential for our well-being, providing better access to nature and parks is now seen as a health issue rather than just an aesthetic one. How we build and grow our communities can have a large impact on our health and quality of life.

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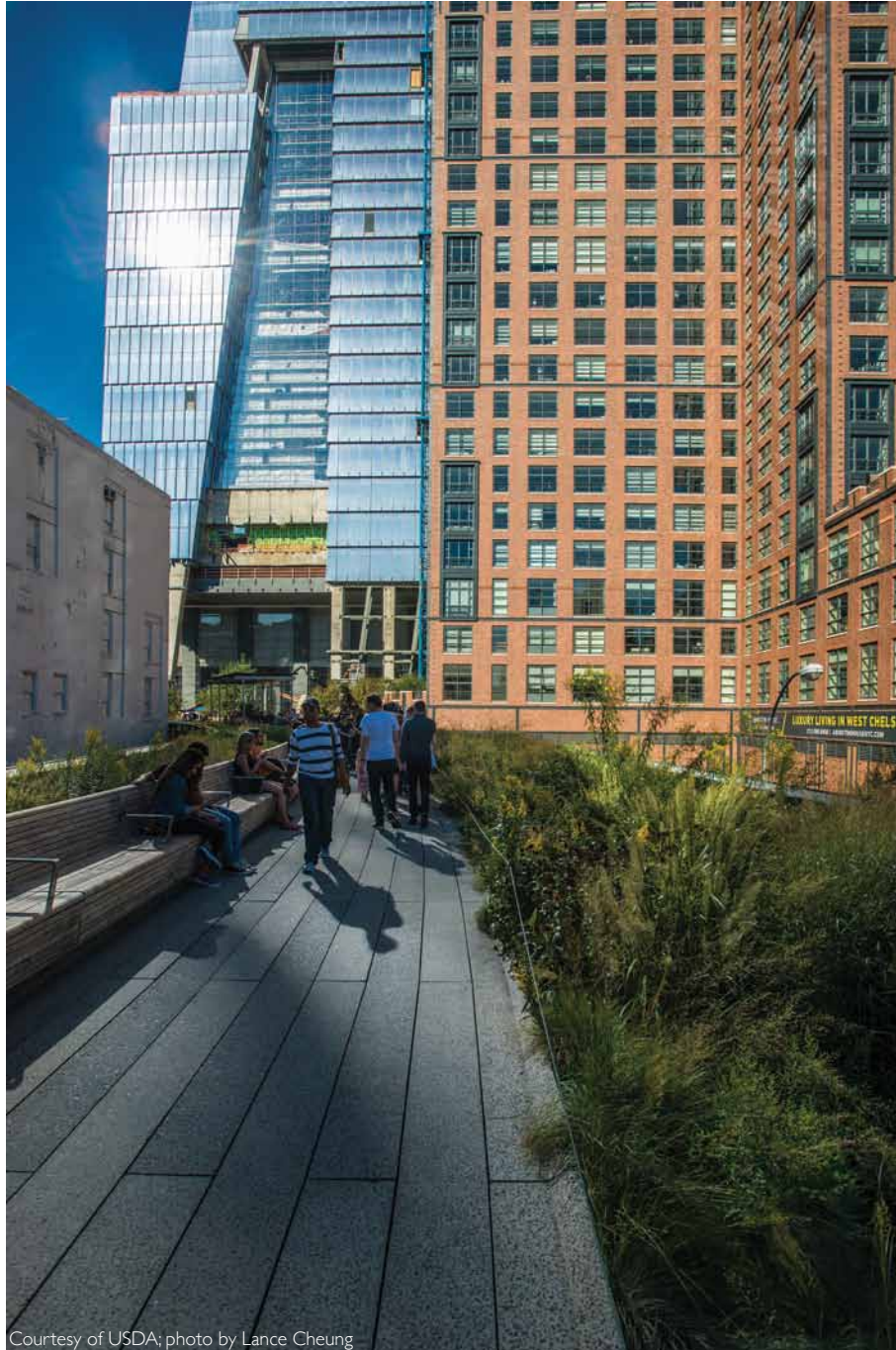
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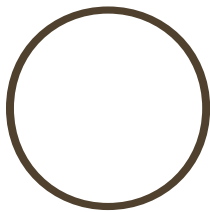
Photo courtesy of Tennessee Department of Tourist Development



# WALKABLE COMMUNITIES

The prescription for better health

By Brad Broberg



One out of every two adults in the United States lives with a chronic disease.

Physical activity can help prevent chronic disease, but half of all adults get too little of it.

Treating chronic disease accounts for 75 percent of all health care spending, which is projected to reach \$5.4 trillion a year by 2024.

Ouch. Ouch. Ouch.

Too bad there isn't a simple way to increase physical activity, improve public health and help reduce rising healthcare costs.

Ahhh, but there is.

Hippocrates connected the dots more than 2,400 years ago. "Walking," said the creator of the Hippocratic oath, "is man's best medicine."

Millenniums later, that prescription is more valid than ever. With obesity, diabetes and other chronic diseases taking a heavy toll in lives and dollars, the link between walking and health raises the stakes for creating safe and convenient places to walk.

Earlier this year U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy sounded a call to action challenging all Americans to increase their physical activity through walking and challenging all communities to become more walkable.

It's a worthy goal, but a heavy lift.

Much of the built environment in America is designed with driving, not walking, in mind. While walking remains a popular form of recreation, it stopped being a routine part of everyday living decades ago, erasing an inherent source of physical activity that contributed greatly to public health.

"One of the biggest challenges is 50 years of automobile-dominated development," says Scott Bricker, executive director of America Walks, a nonprofit organization based in Portland, Ore. "A lot of development has basically engineered walkability out of the daily lifestyle of people."



Photo courtesy of NY DOT

The evidence is all around. Streets designed solely to move as much traffic as possible as fast as possible. Sidewalks and crosswalks missing in action. Families marooned in sprawling subdivisions miles from most destinations. Everybody totally dependent on their car to get around.

Times are changing, though. More and more people want to live where they can walk to stores, cafes, schools and work — or at least to a transit stop. They want to reduce their reliance on cars, live more sustainably and enjoy the perks of a vibrant and connected neighborhood.

Bottom line: They want to use their feet for transportation.

While market forces alone are enough to give walkability greater weight in transportation planning decisions, walkability has become more than a consumer preference. With the surgeon general's call to action, it's now a formal public health strategy for reducing healthcare costs and helping people live longer and healthier lives.

The beauty of walking as transportation is it requires no special skill, equipment or license, costs nothing and almost everyone can do it.

What matters most, though, is the health benefits it delivers. A brisk daily walk can provide the 150 minutes of moderate aerobic exercise per week recommended by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to protect against everything from heart disease to depression to some cancers.

“Walking has proven to be the best form of exercise there is for long-term health benefits (because) it's something you can do throughout your life,” says Shawn McIntosh, program manager with the American Public

Health Association. “Studies have shown that walking even 20 or 30 minutes a day can make a big difference.”

Nashville, Tenn., provides a blueprint for folding health and walkability into transportation planning.

Tennessee has one of the highest obesity rates in the country, according to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), and its residents are among the least physically active of any state. In 2009, the agency that allocates federal dollars for roads, bridges and other transportation projects to cities and counties in the Nashville region revised its scoring system to favor projects that support active transportation — walking, biking, transit — and produce other positive health outcomes.

“We stopped thinking first about how to move cars up and down the corridor as fast as possible and started thinking about how to connect people to places in ways that would improve health,” says Leslie Meehan, former director of healthy communities for the Nashville Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (NAMPO). “That shift ... really moved the needle.”

Under the old scoring system, only 2 percent of the projects in Nashville's regional transportation plan included active transportation components such as sidewalks or bike lanes. After the new scoring system was introduced, nearly 70 percent supported active transportation in one way or another.

The NAMPO has since placed even greater weight on improving health — 80 points out of 100 versus 60 out of 100 — and is factoring in results from a landmark health and transportation survey the agency co-sponsored in 2012.



Photo by Gary Howe



Photo by Gary Howe

The Middle Tennessee Transportation and Health Study looked at the relationship between transportation, health and overall physical activity based on a survey of 6,000 households in the region — including a subset of 600 households who wore GPS devices and activity monitors.

Data from the study has become a north star for transportation planning in the region, steering support for active transportation to neighborhoods with high levels of health problems and low levels of physical activity. “It makes sure funding goes where it’s needed most,” Meehan says.

Improved health outcomes won’t come overnight because the epidemic of chronic diseases didn’t develop overnight, but the potential payback for even modest gains in physical activity is a game changer.

The Middle Tennessee Transportation and Health Study found the average person in the region walks or bikes just three minutes a day for transportation purposes — excluding any walking or biking they might do for recreation or exercise. Using a model developed in the United Kingdom, the NAMPO estimated the monetary impact if everyone in the region walked or biked 10 minutes a day for transportation.

“The results are preliminary ... but the savings are about \$200 million a year in health care costs that wouldn’t be expended because of diseases that wouldn’t be incurred because people would be healthier,” Meehan says.

As more data rolls in showing the return on investment of active transportation, more thought leaders and policy makers around the country are looking at the built environment in general — and transportation in particular — from a public health perspective.

“Everybody from all of these different fields — health, transportation, planning, housing — wants to play in the same sandbox and start figuring out how to work together on this issue,” says Meehan, who is now assistant director for primary prevention at the Tennessee Department of Health. “This is still very much burgeoning, but we’re headed down the right path.”

The American Planning Association (APA) and the American Public Health Association (APHA) launched Plan4Health to combat chronic disease by changing the built environment — a natural mission for the two professions to share because planning originated with a public health focus.

“The long-term goal is to integrate public health with planning so that both fields are thinking about how to support one another’s goals and really think about the health of

the people they’re serving,” says Anna Ricklin, manager of the planning association’s Planning and Community Health Center.

Plan 4Health is supported by the CDC and focuses on two major risk factors for chronic disease — lack of physical activity and lack of access to nutritious food. Plan4Health awarded \$2.5 million in grants from the CDC to 18 local coalitions — anchored by APA and APHA members — to help them attack those problems.

In Columbus, Ind., for example, a coalition consisting of a dozen groups is working to increase physical activity by creating safer pedestrian and bicycle crossings at three intersections along a trail system and at three state highway intersections.

“If people don’t feel safe, they don’t enjoy walking. We need to make the healthy choice the easy choice for people,” Ricklin says.

Complete streets policies are one way to weave walkability into a community. By adopting complete streets policies, communities direct transportation planners and engineers to routinely design and operate roadways with pedestrians, cyclists and transit riders — not just cars — in mind.

More than 700 local, regional and state agencies across the country have introduced complete streets policies, according to the National Complete Streets Coalition. (The NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF REALTORS® is a member of the steering committee of the Coalition.)



Photo courtesy of the City of Boulder

The components of a complete street — sidewalks, crosswalks, curb extensions, median islands, narrower lanes, wider shoulders, lower speed limits and other measures — can vary from location to location, but the goal is always the same: to make all travel choices safer and easier.

A complete street policy is most effective when it applies to all projects whether new construction or ongoing maintenance. Even the smallest projects offer opportunities for incremental improvement such as adding time to the walk signal during routine work on traffic lights or completing a gap in a sidewalk when resurfacing a street.

“It really does come down to the details if you’re looking at improving the pedestrian system so people walk as part of their day-to-day life,” Ricklin says. “One of the best ways to think about all this is to think about the most vulnerable among us — children, older adults, disabled folks. If we’ve made it safe and accessible for them, we’ve made it safe and accessible for everybody.”

Giving people reasons to walk in their day-to-day life is important, too. Strong transit systems play a critical role in the public health/active transportation dynamic by converting commutes into workouts. People can build 20 minutes of physical activity into their day just by walking to and from the bus or train, Bricker says.

“We’re not talking about cut abs and beach bodies, but we are talking about incredible health outcomes,” he says.

The opportunity to realize those outcomes is lost in many cases, though, because there are too few transit stops, no sidewalks leading to stops, no crossings near stops and other infrastructure shortcomings.

The problem is that many of those elements fall between cracks in jurisdiction that confine transit to one planning silo and pedestrian improvements to another, Bricker says.

“An important area of improvement for us (is to create) tighter connections between transit and departments of transportation in ensuring safe and accessible transit stops so you don’t have to take your life in your own hands every time you get on and off a bus,” he says. ●

Brad Broberg is a Seattle-based freelance writer specializing in business and development issues. His work appears regularly in the Puget Sound Business Journal and the Seattle Daily Journal of Commerce.



Photo by Pam Broviak



Photo by Gary Howe

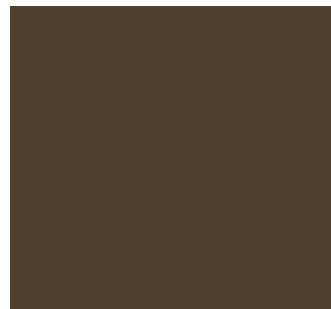


Photo by Eric Fredericks

# Calling All Resources for Healthy Communities

## How can a community improve its walkability?

When the nation faces a major health threat, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) leads the response. With chronic disease on the rise, the CDC's Dr. Tegan K. Boehmer, acting lead for the Healthy Community Design Initiative, answers questions about the agency's focus on walkability — which can help prevent chronic disease — and transportation planning.

## Why does the CDC care about transportation planning?

Preventing disease and injury is a core function of the CDC. By making it safer and more convenient to use active transportation such as walking and biking, transportation systems and policies can have a positive influence on health and healthcare costs through increased physical activity, reduced air pollution exposure and reduced motor vehicle crashes, among other things.

The Healthy Community Design Initiative within CDC's National Center for Environmental Health focuses on understanding the link between the built environment and public health. The program partners with

public health, transportation and land-use professionals to create built environments that provide people with convenient and safe opportunities to walk, bicycle and use public transit.

Promoting active transportation, such as walking and bicycling, is one way CDC hopes to make people more physically active. See our Recommendations for Improving Health Through Transportation Policy (<http://www.cdc.gov/transportation/>) for details.



## Surgeon General's CALL TO ACTION Goals

- ✓ Make walking a national priority.
- ✓ Design communities that make it safe and easy to walk for people of all ages and abilities.
- ✓ Promote programs and policies to support walking where people live, learn, work and play.
- ✓ Provide information to encourage walking and improve walkability.
- ✓ Fill surveillance, research and evaluation gaps related to walking and walkability.



## Is the link between public health and active transportation — especially walkability — driving much action nationwide?

Interest is definitely growing and that includes within the federal government. The CDC collaborates with the U.S. Department of Transportation and the Transportation Research Board at the National Academies of Science. According to the CDC-funded 2014 Bicycling and Walking Benchmarking Report (<https://www.bike-walkalliance.org/resources/benchmarking>), an increasing number of states and large cities have set goals to increase walking and bicycling and have adopted pedestrian and bicyclist master plans.

## What evidence is there that improving walkability can improve public health?

There is quite a bit of evidence that people are more physically active in communities and neighborhoods that have infrastructure and policies that support walking and bicycling. However, it's much harder to measure whether changes to the transportation environment actually lead to improved health or health behaviors such as increased physical activity. Change, both to the environment and in people's behavior, occurs slowly and the health benefits of increased physical activity take time to accrue.

Transportation and health impact models can help quantify future health benefits and risks of various transportation scenarios. Some health impact modeling studies have projected a net health benefit of shifting transportation share from driving to other modes like

walking and biking. In addition, there is some evidence from Europe and China that people who walk or bicycle for transportation have better health outcomes compared to those who don't.

## What are the biggest challenges in getting people to walk more in their daily lives and what are the biggest opportunities?

One important challenge is distance. People are unlikely to walk or ride a bicycle to a destination that is considered too far away to reach in a reasonable amount of time or with a reasonable amount of effort. Situating residential areas closer to employment or shopping centers is important for encouraging biking and walking to everyday activities. Another challenge is the lack of infrastructure (sidewalks, bike lanes, trails) to make active transportation a safe and convenient option.

One area of opportunity is travel to work. Our recent research (Active Transportation Surveillance – United States, 1999-2012) shows that 20 to 30 percent of Americans report recent walking or biking for transportation, but only 2 to 3 percent of adult workers report using one of those modes as their primary means of transportation to or from work in the past week.

As public health and planning professionals work to redesign cities and communities to better support walking and biking, active commuting could be an increasingly important source of physical activity in the United States. ●



Photo by Gary Howe



Photo by Gary Howe

# POUNDING THE PAVEMENT FOR BETTER HEALTH

## ULI Reinventing Roads to Improve Health

Van Nuys Boulevard is like a lot of arterials in Los Angeles and across the country — a main drag that puts a heavy drag on public health.

That’s especially true where Van Nuys Boulevard passes through the Pacoima neighborhood.

“This is one of the city’s most challenged neighborhoods in terms of health outcomes,” says Jonathan Nettle, director of the Urban Land Institute Los Angeles. “It has among the city’s highest concentrations of childhood obesity, diabetes and strokes.”

Physical activity such as walking and biking can help prevent chronic disease, but Van Nuys Boulevard does more harm than good in that regard. With few crosswalks, scant shade and no buffer between the sidewalk and five lanes of traffic, the corridor gives people in Pacoima little reason to get out of their cars and on their feet.

But that may change. The Pacoima leg of Van Nuys Boulevard is one of four places where local chapters of the Urban Land Institute (ULI) are leading demonstration projects aimed at helping corridors invite greater physical activity and provide other health benefits. The others are Vista Avenue in Boise, Charlotte Avenue in Nashville and Federal Boulevard in Denver.

Funded by a \$250,000 grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the projects will identify and apply specific remedies to each corridor and help ULI create a nationwide model for developing healthy corridors based on lessons learned.

One of the strategies being considered in Pacoima is to put Van Nuys Boulevard on a “road diet,” Nettle said. “That’s where you narrow or eliminate vehicle travel lanes to increase the space for pedestrians and bicyclists.”

Once stakeholders finalize Pacoima’s strategy, temporary “pop-up” changes will be made sometime in 2016, Nettle said. What happens after that depends on how the city and the community respond, but the hope is that permanent changes follow.



Vista Avenue in Boise allows for very little physical activity along the street.

Photos by Jimmy Emerson DVM

(Below) ULI/Pacoima Walking Tour of Van Nuys Boulevard



Courtesy of LA DOT

“The science is clear that a sedentary lifestyle built around auto-based mobility is often associated with poor health outcomes,” Nettler said. “There is an opportunity here to do some things that we know can get people moving.”

### Get Out and Walk to School!

One of the saddest parallels between the decline of walking in daily life and the prevalence of chronic disease in the United States is the rise in childhood obesity.

Between 1980 and 2012, the number of children ages 6-11 who were obese grew to 18 percent from 7 percent and the number of children ages 12-19 who were obese grew to 21 percent from 5 percent, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

A likely contributing factor: fewer kids walk to school these days. In 1969, nearly half of children ages 5-14 typically walked or biked to school, according to the National Center for Safe Routes to Schools (NCSRS). Over the next 40 years, the number declined to just 13 percent.

The same safety and convenience concerns that discourage adults from walking — missing sidewalks and crosswalks, high traffic speeds and volume, crime and personal security — are doubly troubling for children, so it’s understandable why many parents feel more comfortable driving their child to school.

Yet children need at least an hour of physical activity a day to grow up healthy and help prevent chronic disease, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Social Services. Driving kids to school who could walk or bike is “a missed opportunity to build physical activity into their day,” says Dr. Jason Mendoza of Seattle Children’s Research Institute.



The federal Safe Routes to School Program provides funding to help communities make walking and biking to school safer and easier. The NCSRS shares information about the program, supplies technical support and offers tips on successful strategies such as walking school buses.

A walking school bus is a group of children walking to school accompanied by one or more adults to alleviate safety concerns. Mendoza is leading a study to learn whether the exercise gained from joining a walking school bus can lead children to be more physically active throughout the entire day and help prevent obesity.

Mendoza is measuring the body mass index of each child in the study — grades three through five — at the start and the end of the school year and tracking their physical activity by giving them wearable activity monitors. The study will compare data from a group of schools where Mendoza’s team is leading walking school buses to a group of schools without walking school buses.

“People are realizing we are spending way too much time sitting,” Mendoza said. “We need to be moving to be healthy.” ●





Photo by Juan Alberto Puentes

# BICYCLE FRIENDLY COMMUNITIES:

## *A Chosen Route for Health*

By Martin Zimmerman

It was not that long ago that a driver's license was a coveted status symbol and a sacred right-of-passage to adulthood. Meanwhile, the car's two-wheeled predecessor, whose popularity had ebbed and flowed since well before the car was invented, was being disparagingly marketed as a surrogate car to children. Bicycles were even designed to look like cars, with wide tires, streamlined front headlights and faux gas tanks. That was an era of manicured front lawns, black and white television sets, Leave it to Beaver and Father Knows Best. Today's mobility environment bears little relationship to the 1950s, as users of all stripes take advantage of pedaling's inherent benefits.

Bicycling is comfortably affordable. Simply by choosing one less car, a family can accumulate over \$130,000 in savings by the time their child enters college. And bicycling makes a good fit for one-third of the population who lack access or choose to forego auto ownership. For many users, the motive is sustainability: bicycle riding eliminates carbon emissions, favors compact neighborhoods over sprawl, and fosters a balanced transportation system with parity among different travel modes. Last year, 35 million Americans saddled a bike at least

six times, according to the National Sporting Goods Association; other data indicates that over 100 million Americans cycled at least once.

### And what about the health benefits?

Cycling makes for great brain food. Every morning neuroscientist Brian Christie hops on his bike, goes to the gym, and then rides the rest of the way to work. Says Christie, "When I get to my desk, my brain is at peak activity ... I can double or triple the production of neurons — literally building my brain capacity." Despite a sprawling landscape, half of our nation's labor force still lives within five miles of employment according to the most recent National Household Transportation Survey. That's a totally doable 25-minute ride. By pedaling this distance four times per week, one can burn up to 6,000 calories — or two pounds of fat — each month.

Five miles of pedaling four times per week can burn up to 6,000 calories.

### Cycling for health is a natural fit:

- Cycling helps muscles and joints. Cycling improves muscle function with little risk or strain. It strengthens leg muscles and is great for the mobility of hip and knee joints.
- Cycling improves cardiovascular fitness. Cycling makes the heart pound in a steady manner. Cycling uses the largest muscle groups, the legs, raising heart rate to benefit stamina and fitness.
- Cycling makes for healthy hearts. According to the British Medical Association, cycling for only a couple of hours per week can reduce the risk of coronary heart disease by 50 percent.
- Cycling helps coordination. Cycling is an activity that involves the whole body. It improves arm-to-leg, feet-to-hands and body-to-eye coordination.
- Cycling cures the blues. One need not be a long distance rider to know that cycling can reduce stress and help relieve symptoms of depression. Cycling clears the mind of stimulus overload. It rejuvenates the soul.

A national leadership network has blossomed in recent years to advance the bicycling for health agenda. It includes AARP, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the American Heart Association, and Safe Routes to Schools, a federal program funded since 2005 at about \$100 million annually. Last January, U.S. Department of Transportation Secretary Anthony Foxx issued his “Mayors’ Challenge”, a checklist of pro-active bicycle friendly goals, many with health ramifications. Foxx is well known in bike circles, having been a staunch advocate as a city councilperson and later as mayor of Charlotte, N.C.

What this all means is that success for bicycle riding in the 21st century must be redefined in more diverse and inclusive terms than ever. The goal now is healthy, safe, fun and convenient mobility for all Americans regardless of age, income level or socio-economic background.

The League of American Bicyclists (LAB), via a competitive Bicycle Friendly Communities (BFC) program, ranks cities and towns in five broad categories: Education, Encouragement, Engineering, Evaluation and Enforcement. LAB’s award levels — Bronze, Silver, Gold, Platinum, and a new level, Diamond — provide a clear incentive for communities to continuously improve. Sixty-nine million people now live in a bicycle friendly community ranging in size from Crested Butte, Colo.,(pop. 1,497 / Gold) to New York City (pop. 8,337,000 / Silver).

The LAB makes awards every year to new applicants and every four years for renewals. Last June it announced 42 new and renewing awardees. They join 350 other communities in all

Photo by Gabriel Amadeus



Boulder, Colo.

Photo by Seattle DOT



Sixty-nine million people now live in a bicycle friendly community.

50 states that have demonstrated significant gains. Since the program's rebranding in 2003, more than 800 communities have applied. A community can reapply on each cycle to retain its status, or better yet, move higher in the rankings.

Davis, Calif., (pop. 63,722), considered the mother lode of community bicycling since the mid-1960s has implemented bike-only roundabouts, bike signal heads to improve traffic flow, and technology that automatically detects cyclists and stops traffic for them to increase efficiency and safety, and is now gearing for the Diamond award. Its competitors will no doubt include the three other Platinum level communities — Boulder and Fort Collins in Colorado and Portland, Ore. Daily bike trips in Davis, currently at roughly 20 to 25 percent of all local travel, are among the highest in the nation. But that is not good enough. As Davis' 2014 Bicycle Action Plan notes, this figure must increase for the town to become world-class on the European model and also meet its own climate action objectives. That means targeting to a 30-percent bicycle mode share by 2020.

Cleveland Heights, Ohio, (pop. 46,121) is part of an inner ring of Garden-City-era suburbs largely developed before

World War II. It received a Bronze award in 2013 with the help of Mary Dunbar, a retired financial communications executive. Dunbar holds dual roles as president of the nonprofit Heights Bicycle Coalition and member of the city council. Ongoing local initiatives include pending passage of a "Complete Streets" resolution, investing in better crosswalks, crossing guards and safety patrol gear for the Safe Routes to Schools program, and more innovative street markings on par with the 2013 "buffered" bike lane, the first in Northeast Ohio. The lane carries hundreds of commuters daily uphill from the University Circle district, home of the Cleveland Museum of Art, Case Western Reserve University, and a wide array of other world-renowned cultural and medical facilities. Dunbar hopes that by increasing the number of street savvy cyclists, "We can get the Silver."

Buffered lanes — or lanes that are separated by space from motor vehicle traffic — belong to a toolkit of protected infrastructure solutions meant to overcome the safety shortcomings of the standard one-size-fits-all bike lane. Buffers mark an increasingly popular street design approach intended to attract a large segment of bicyclists who have never felt safe on conventional lanes.



Buffered lanes attract a large segment of bicyclists who have never felt safe on conventional lanes.

Photo by NY DOT



Safety City is a traffic safety program for school children that uses a simulated New York City street to teach children about traffic safety through hands-on experience.



Biking skills class for boomers in New Orleans.

Photo by Bike Easy

## People want to live in bicycle friendly communities.

Pilot projects from coast to coast are popping up to test this premise.

It takes skill to ride a bike even when the infrastructure is supportive, and many local bicycle advocacy groups are expanding their education venues. “Bike Easy”, a New Orleans advocacy nonprofit whose mission is to make cycling fun, easy and safe, now offers classes for children, women, and commuters, that educate on bicycling safety and the rules of the road. Instructors have also taught a special seniors class in conjunction with AARP called ‘Bicycling for Boomers.’

Private enterprise also plays an important role. The Meredith Corporation, a media and marketing services company headquartered in Des Moines, Iowa, began a comprehensive wellness program in 2006 with the support of Chairman and CEO Steve Lacy. Lacy believes that wellness should be a priority for all employees. The bicycle component includes a \$240-annual-cash reimbursement for commuters. According to Tim O’Neil, Director of Employee Benefits and Wellness, “We were one of the first companies to qualify for this Federal tax reimbursement program.” Meredith also offers bike racks, showers,

locker rooms and free towel service. Bike skills classes are available during Bike Month in May along with bike buddies mentoring assistance. O’Neill estimates that 5 percent of the workforce participates.

Steve Clark has traveled to hundreds of large and small communities as the technical liaison for the Bicycle Friendly Communities program. Clark admits that “in most cities it is still faster and more convenient to use a car than to choose a vehicle that does not pollute, conserves energy, promotes health and is low on the injury and fatality scale. But the people I’m meeting — the elected leaders who care, the tireless advocates who keep pushing and pushing, and the city/county staff who are given the task of trying to improve the bicycling environment are all incredible people who are doing marvelous things.”

Clark has learned that, “More than ever, the momentum is in our direction. People want choices. People want to live in bicycle friendly communities. They want to be able to safely ride bicycles to work, for fun and for good health”. ●

Martin Zimmerman is a transportation planning consultant and former executive director of the Charlotte (NC) Area Bicycle Alliance. He does not own a car.



Courtesy of Seattle Housing Authority

# PLANNING FOR HEALTH

To ward off chronic disease, health pros take on everything from regional plans to housing design



Courtesy of Seattle Housing Authority

Many units in Yesler Terrace will be Breathe Easy Homes.

Photo by SDOT



By David Goldberg

A century after leading the charge to create the system of land use planning and regulation we know today, public health champions are once again deeply engaged in shaping our built environment — often to undo some of the unintended consequences of practices their predecessors put in motion.

The year 2016 will mark 100 years since New York City officials invoked public health and safety in adopting the first zoning laws to separate noxious industrial uses from residential areas. Around the same time the automobile burst on the scene, and by the end of World War II, the now-universal zoning laws were being used to create separated urban districts connected only by car. By the early 2000s, experts at the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and elsewhere were beginning to point out the impact on health of this new form of human habitat.

“For decades, we have designed our neighborhoods, towns and cities around the automobile as our primary source of mobility,” said Lauren Benet, a spokesman for the CDC National Center for Environmental Health. The dominance of vehicles degraded air



quality, created safety problems for people on foot and all but engineered exercise out of existence for daily life. “The reason for this renewed planning/public health partnership is the growing evidence of how community design affects our health in areas such as obesity and physical activity, access to fresh fruits and vegetables, and access to health care and employment opportunities.”

To elevate these issues and provide health-conscious policy guidance to planners, designers and local policy-makers, the CDC created the Healthy Community Design initiative. At the time, few in the nation’s planning, development or transportation departments were talking much about health, noted Andrew Dannenberg, who led the initiative team while at CDC. That has changed today, he noted, when we see health considerations becoming key drivers in everything from regional transportation plans to discussion of housing design and indoor air quality.

“For example, incorporating walkability features, designing communities so that you can walk to transit, walk or bike to destinations is really popular,” Dannenberg said. “I have seen real estate signs that promote trails, sidewalks, walkability and bikeways as an amenity. They may not say ‘health’, but that’s what it’s about.”

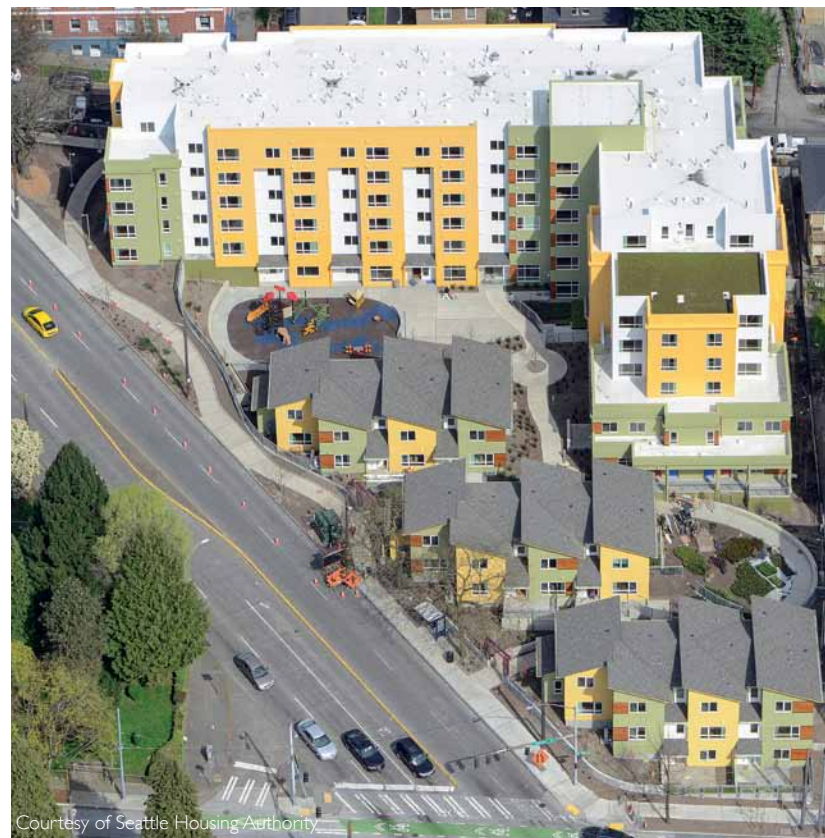
The CDC and others helped bring the issues to light by conducting a series of “health impact assessments” (HIA) on a range of proposed transportation and development projects. One noteworthy early success was in San Francisco, where the city’s health department conducted an HIA on a proposal to demolish 360 low-income apartments and replace them with 1,400 market-rate condominiums. The HIA found that displacing the residents without creating new affordable units would threaten their access to food, increase stress and mental health problems, and raise the risk of homelessness and myriad associated health problems. The HIA led to a revised plan that allowed current residents to remain in 360 rent-controlled units contained in the project.

### A health screen for a city’s transportation and development plans

In 2007, the city of Decatur, Ga., — a community of 19,000 in the core of metro Atlanta — became the first jurisdiction to perform a health impact assessment on its transportation plan. The result was a plan that addressed the needs of all residents in all parts of the city,



(Below) Yesler Terrace redevelopment in Seattle.





## Focusing on health during transportation planning was a way to structure an inclusive conversation.

as opposed to past plans that mostly focused on the convenience of motorists — many of whom were only passing through, said Amanda Thompson, who led the effort as Decatur’s planning director.

“Health was a way to structure an inclusive conversation, because arguments over modes can be really divisive,” she said. “People often come to those conversations as, ‘I’m a biker, or ‘I’m a motorist’, or ‘I’m a pedestrian’. When you’re trying to balance those interests, health is a common denominator. It also helps people wrap their minds around a future that is years off. They can imagine what you might do to make health better — gaining or losing weight over time, what might happen when your parents are older and losing personal mobility, or people needing to get to healthcare. Having that conversation in that frame puts people in same place — so you’re not arguing over bike lanes for ‘those people.’”

After that discussion, health — and reducing associated disparities among income groups — became part of city government culture, she said. “The biggest change I saw was with our elected officials and city manager, because it

began to trickle down to everything we did. The city manager, who does not bicycle and avoids vegetables, became an avid supporter of providing opportunities for physical activity and access to healthy food.” Decatur’s example also helped inspire others. Metropolitan Nashville, for example, now uses a health screen in allocating dollars



Downtown Decatur, Ga.

for projects in its metropolitan transportation plan, and regions as diverse as Seattle, San Diego and Detroit are working on similar efforts.

Larry Frank is a researcher whose firm, Urban Design 4 Health, has helped many jurisdictions quantify the impact of planning and development decisions on health. While he has seen communities make enormous strides in many respects, he noted a disturbing trend. “I’m concerned we are not helping the people who need it the most — the poor. We bring good transit service to a neighborhood and make it more walkable, then the values go up and people get pushed out to areas where there’s poor transit and it’s unsafe to walk. We are making places nicer and safer, but they really aren’t helping the people who have the chronic health problems.”

### Bringing it all together: Seattle’s Yesler Terrace

Officials at the Seattle Housing Authority (SHA) are seeking to counter just those concerns with the ambitious redevelopment of Yesler Terrace, a 1940s-era public housing project near downtown that was Seattle’s first. In a prime location within striking distance of half the jobs in surrounding King County and a commanding view of Mt. Ranier, Yesler’s 561 subsidized units could easily have given way to pricey condos. The SHA instead is working to create a model, mixed-income community on the 30-acre site, where 1,800 of the planned 5,000

## Seattle Housing Authority set about incorporating a wide range of measures to improve health.

housing units will be subsidized for low- and moderate-income residents and health is embedded throughout the planning and design.

As SHA began planning the complex redevelopment, officials noted a 2011 survey of residents in which fewer than half described their health as “good” or “excellent”, noted Tom Eanes, senior development program manager for Yesler Terrace. They set about incorporating a wide range of measures to improve health, from features promoting physical activity and healthy eating to using asthma-reducing construction and adding community health workers and programs.



Photos courtesy of Seattle Housing Authority  
Renderings and development plans for Yesler Terrace in Seattle.





Courtesy of Seattle Housing Authority

Community healthcare workers embedded at the development are organizing a community walking group to promote healthy social interaction and exercise.

**Physical activity and active transportation.** The former Yesler Terrace sat isolated on a forbidding hill, with no walking connections to the adjacent First Hill neighborhood and its hospitals, or to the International District and its green grocers. The new design creates connections with “hill climbs” featuring wheelchair-accessible switchbacks and other walkways. The connections also will allow residents to reach a new streetcar line that itself connects to light rail. The housing authority also will provide subsidized access to point-to-point bicycle rentals under the city’s Pronto bike-share system.

“We designed a half-mile ‘Green Street’ loop through the neighborhood,” Eanes said. “That connects to a 1.8-acre, central neighborhood park in the middle, and then three pocket parks — about an acre total — distributed throughout the neighborhood. The street has wide sidewalks, landscaping on both sides of the sidewalk, with places to pause and rest. There are eight exercise stations along the loop. You can run around the Green Street loop, pausing at the exercise stations. Elderly people can easily go out for a pleasant walk, which is extremely

good for physical and mental health.” Community healthcare workers embedded at the development are organizing a community walking group to promote healthy social interaction and exercise.

**Breathe Easy construction.** Many units in Yesler Terrace will be “Breathe Easy Homes,” using construction and ventilation approaches that SHA developed with the King County Health Department and tested in a previous development called High Point. That experiment found that for asthma sufferers living in these homes, the share making an urgent asthma-related clinical visit within a three-month period declined by a whopping two-thirds.

Breathe Easy homes are built with moisture-reduction features, enhanced ventilation systems, and materials that minimize dust and off-gassing (from carpet and paint, for example) and result in reduced exposure to mold and rodents. Improved indoor air quality will be a major health benefit to residents with allergies and respiratory conditions, Eanes said.

From the outset in planning, health has been a key consideration.

**Access to health care.** Planning for health has to go beyond the location, arrangement, design and construction of buildings — all part of the Yesler Terrace plan — and into programming of on-site services, said John Forsyth, SHA’s community services administrator. SHA has linked up with a local healthcare provider, Neighborcare, to provide several community health workers to assist residents with “navigating the health care system, getting connected with primary care, actively engaging in their care plans, and ensuring insurance coverage,” as a program brochure explains. They also provide regular health screenings for chronic illnesses, checking blood sugar levels, blood pressure, etc. In addition, a neighborhood clinic has been established in the adjacent elementary school. “We also are doing an annual survey every year for five years, asking people about their health and care needs. At end of the survey they can ask for a visit from a community health care worker.”

**Healthy eating.** Yesler Terrace also will provide about an acre of community gardening space, Forsyth said. Raising your own food and working with others in the process is good for physical and mental health as well as social engagement, he added. Not only will the healthful produce be available for residents’ consumption, but they also will have access to cooking classes to learn more about maintaining a healthy diet that is also tasty.

“From the outset in planning Yesler, health has been a key consideration, in all components of it, from planning and design to construction,” said Kerry Coughlin, SHA’s communications director. “To do that effectively, you have to look at both the built environment — indoor and outdoor — and the programmatic environment. It was hard at first, but it becomes a way of thinking after awhile.” ●

David A. Goldberg is the vice president of communications for Action for Healthy Food, a national non-profit working to reduce the quantity of sugar and other unhealthy substances in our food supply, and formerly was the founding communications director for Smart Growth America. In 2002, Mr. Goldberg was awarded a Loeb Fellowship at Harvard University, where he studied urban policy.



Courtesy of Seattle Housing Authority



Photos by Alan Light



Photo by SDOT



Courtesy of Bread for the City



Courtesy of Denver Urban Gardens

## Gardening supports the health of communities

By Christine Jordan Sexton

Community gardens aren't just for the Birkenstock-wearing crowd anymore. These days they are sprouting up nearly everywhere.

Data collected by the National Garden Association shows that the number of households participating in a community garden increased by 200 percent, from 1 million households in 2008 to 3 million in 2013; while overall, 35 percent of all households in America, or 42 million, grow food at home or in a community garden.

The data, contained in the report "Garden to Table: A 5-Year Look at Food Gardening in America" also shows that the interest in urban gardens has increased from 7 million in 2008 to 9 million in 2013.

Bruce Butterfield, market research director for the National Garden Association, attributed the increase in community farming to a souring economy as well as interest among millennials, the term used to describe people between the ages of 18 and 34.

### Millennials nearly doubled their spending on food gardening.

In 2008 there were 8 million millennial food gardeners. That figure rose to 13 million in 2013, an increase of 63 percent.

Millennials also nearly doubled their spending on food gardening, from \$632 million in 2008 to \$1.2 billion in 2013.

With statistics like that, it's perhaps not surprising that the environmental nonprofit kick-starter organization IOBY.org, has gone national. The acronym stands for "In Our Back Yard" and pokes fun at the NIMBY — or not in my backyard — movement that was prevalent in the 1980s and 1990s.

IOBY.org funded nearly 2,000 community-led parks, biking, hiking, composting and chicken projects across New York City before it went national. Community gardens are one of the initiatives the kick-starter helps fund.

The National Recreation and Parks Association also has published a document to help those interested in developing community gardens. It lays out the do's and don'ts and provides a suggested timeline that is required to help secure community buy-in to the initiative to ensure its success.

But some towns and cities already have entities that help people interested in community and urban gardens.

At 35 years old, Denver Urban Gardens (DUG) is slightly older than a millennial. The not-for-profit organization has more than 150 community gardens under its umbrella, most of which are open to the public. And demand for more gardens continues to increase, said DUG Director of Development and Communications, Rebecca Andruska. She said there has been a real push among the public schools to include gardens on school grounds.

DUG gardens are located at schools, municipal buildings, churches, workforce housing, parks and in neighborhoods. Denver Urban Gardens generally owns the land the gardens are located on and with the exception of a handful of privately held plots, the majority of its gardens are open to all comers.

Residents interested in joining a garden can call or email DUG with their contact information as well as the name of the garden they want to grow in. Garden leaders annually review their plots in the offseason and contact people when there are availabilities. Costs for the community garden range between \$25 and \$75 each season.

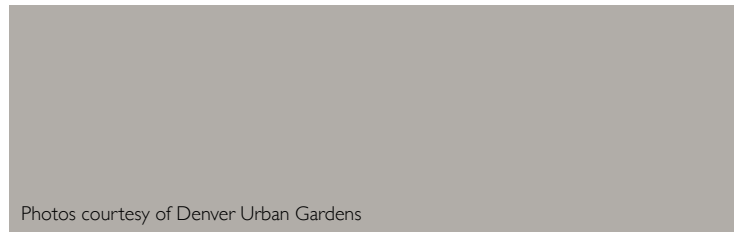
Most of the rules for each community garden are set by the local garden leader. The association did, though, have to pass a no marijuana policy in the wake of Colorado Amendment 64 — which makes it legal for those aged 21 and older to grow up to six marijuana plants and legally possess the cannabis from the plants they grow.

“We are about producing food, not the munchies,” said Andruska.

Since 2004, Denver Urban Gardens and the Colorado School of Public Health have worked together, through the “Gardens for Growing Healthy Communities” community-based research initiative, to explore how gardens, as neighborhood places, support healthy living.

#### The research shows that:

- More than 50 percent of community gardeners meet national guidelines for fruit and vegetable intake, compared to 25 percent of non-gardeners;
- Ninety-five percent of gardeners give away some of the produce they grow to friends and family; and
- Sixty percent of farmers donate what they grow to food assistance programs.



Photos courtesy of Denver Urban Gardens



Courtesy of Bread for the City

Data also showed that gardeners are more involved in social activities and have stronger ties to their neighborhoods. Perhaps more telling is that 88 percent of people who do not garden still want to see gardens in their neighborhood.

DUG also has a “community supported agriculture” farm, at the 158-acre property in metro Denver called Delaney Community Farm. DUG cultivates about 3 acres of vegetables, herbs and flowers at the site. The farm also has beehives in two areas that aim to improve pollination for the flowering vegetables and fruits grown there.

DUG helps community and urban gardeners regardless of income level. Other community garden programs focus on helping to provide fresh fruits and vegetables to area residents who are low-wage earners and may not have access to fresh fruits and vegetables.

Mike Metallo, president of the National Garden Association, said the rise in popularity in community and urban gardens is part of a “food revolution taking place in America.”

A stronghold for the revolution is Washington, D.C., where there are 27 community garden plots for every 10,000 residents according to the website, [nerdwallet.com](http://nerdwallet.com), which ranked Washington, D.C., as the No. 1 city for urban gardening. George Washington University has a number of initiatives focused on food sustainability, helping the city earn its top ranking.

Bread for the City was created in 1974 to provide vulnerable residents in the Washington, D.C. area access to comprehensive services, including food, clothing, medical care, and legal and social services, in an atmosphere of dignity and respect.

The organization has two community gardens on rooftops, one in the southeast section of town, which is client driven, the other on the rooftop of the organization’s new building in northwest center of town. The southeast rooftop garden is a 1,000-square-foot container garden and most of the organization’s programming is offered at the southeast rooftop garden.

Additionally, the organization also has City Orchard, a larger plot of land in Beltsville, Md., where fruits are grown as well as some other vegetables. The land was donated by the University of the District of Columbia.

Gardeners are more involved in social activities and have stronger ties to their neighborhoods.



Helping people grow their own food provides access to fresh, healthy affordable food; improves public health; and strengthens communities.



Similar to Bread for the City, a community gardening and urban garden program in Providence, R.I., also has focused its efforts on helping low-wage earners eat healthier. The Southside Community Land Trust (SCLT) focuses its efforts on helping lower-income families. In October 2015, SCLT helped 750 families (mostly poor), who grew their own food, said Jenny Boone, grants and outreach manger for SCLT.

By helping people grow their own food, the organization believes it helps create economic opportunities for families; provides access to fresh, healthy affordable food; improves public health; and strengthens communities.

All its community gardens and farms were “fully subscribed” and there is a waiting list of interested people that keeps growing. Boone said she doesn’t know how long the wait list is, but that she takes names every spring. “Things do open up, but often the gardens are passed from one generation to the next,” she said.

In addition to the family farming opportunity, SCLT also has a 50-acre urban edge garden where farmers are currently growing lettuces, beans and other fruits and vegetables that are sold at the local farmers’ markets and used in area restaurants.

With an increasing number of farmers’ markets being equipped to handle supplemental nutritional assistance program (formerly food stamps), people can use their benefits to buy locally grown fresh fruits and vegetables that are sold at the markets.

“Our mission is to make healthy food accessible to all,” said Boone.

SCLT has a three-quarter-acre piece of property where it operates its City Farm. It serves as the trust’s demonstration center and also is the area where the trust grows lettuces and beans and peppers and other fruits and vegetables that produce often and grow well in small spaces. City Farm also has an apprentice program. According to a 2013 annual report, 80 percent of those who went through the apprentice program were farming for a living.

As it does with the produce from the urban edge garden, SCLT also sells the food grown at City Farm at local farmers’ markets and even to local restaurant owners who are eager to offer their customers locally grown fresh vegetables. The trust holds what Boone calls a “huge plant sale” every spring at the City Farm.

The program has been able to grow every year and attaining new space for gardens has not been an issue. They have been able to buy lots directly from the landowners



Photo by \*aja



Courtesy of Bread for the City, photo by Zoelca Images

and they also have been able to plant on city-owned lots, she said. Known as Lots of Hope, the city of Providence leases land to SCLT for \$1.

Boone says that the gardens not only offer people an opportunity to grow food, they improve communities by helping to cultivate relationships.

“Neighborhoods are safer because more people are out working in the garden and people get to know each other,” she said. “They take pride in the gardens and they don’t want to see them vandalized. So they are a force for good.” ●

Christine Jordan Sexton is a Tallahassee-based freelance reporter who has done correspondent work for the Associated Press, the New York Times, Florida Medical Business and a variety of trade magazines, including Florida Lawyer and National Underwriter.



Stockbox Grocers in Seattle, Wash.



Photos courtesy of Philabundance

# A Healthy Food Store Movement

Ensuring low-income and rural neighborhoods have access to healthy food options

By John Van Gieson

Where liquor bottles and advertisements once occupied prime space by the front door of the Daldas Grocery in San Francisco's Tenderloin district, customers now shop for lettuce and carrots.

The Tenderloin is one of many inner city and rural areas lacking healthy food options. There are no supermarkets or grocery stores in those areas. The closest ones are a long walk or several bus rides away.

The closest supermarket to the Tenderloin is a mile away. But there are more than 70 corner stores serving an area of less than half a square mile.

Healthy Retail SF promotes healthy food options in corner stores.

Corner stores typically make their money selling alcohol, tobacco, lottery tickets and junk food. They may offer customers a handful of bananas or apples, but not much else in the way of healthy foods.

The Daldas Grocery, owned by Indian immigrant Satwinder "Bill" Multani, was one of them until public health specialists from the city of San Francisco introduced Multani to a program promoting healthy food



Courtesy of Tenderloin Neighborhood Development Corporation  
Satwinder "Bill" Multani, owner of Daldas Grocery, in San Francisco

## Hundreds of thousands of corner and rural stores lack healthy food options.

options in corner stores. If owners agree to display fresh fruits and vegetables prominently in their stores, San Francisco's Healthy Retail SF program provides display cases, shelving and refrigerators at no cost and teaches customers how to prepare healthy meals.

"It is a very good idea," Multani said. "I know it's actually a positive response because I see more families now and they started shopping for produce."

"It used to be we were just like the image of a liquor store, now we're like the image of a grocery store," he said.

From San Francisco's immigrant-packed Tenderloin to the streets of Baltimore to the rocky coast of eastern Maine, programs encouraging healthy food conversions in corner and rural stores are spreading all over the country.

The task is daunting. Karen Shore, director of consulting for The Food Trust, said millions of low-income Americans buy a lot of the food they and their families eat at "hundreds of thousands" of corner and rural stores lacking healthy food options. In large part, those stores serve African-Americans, Hispanics, immigrant groups and the rural poor.

Based in Philadelphia, The Food Trust is a nonprofit dedicated to providing healthy food to all Americans. It consults with healthy corner store and inner city supermarket initiatives in 34 states, including Healthy Retail SF.

Joel Gittelson, a medical anthropologist at Johns Hopkins University, has studied healthy corner store and

bodega initiatives and concluded some have been quite successful, but there is a long way to go.

"We're five percent of the way," he said.

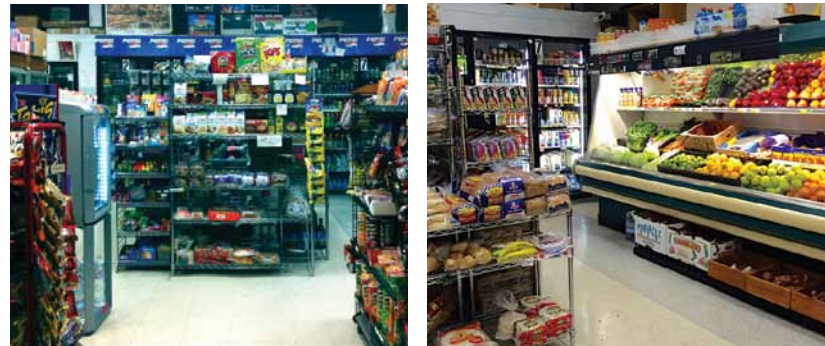
In a report published by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Gittelson studied 16 corner store initiatives in locations ranging from Apache reservations in Arizona to inner city Philadelphia and Baltimore.

"Our findings indicate consistent improvement across most of the trials in availability and sale of healthy foods, the purchase and consumption of those foods and consumer knowledge," he said.

Underlying the healthy corner store movement are concerns about the impact of unhealthy diets on the health of poor Americans. Advocates say both the urban and rural poor, many of whom live below the federal poverty line, suffer high rates of obesity, diabetes and heart disease attributed in large part to unhealthy diets.

*Before and after the Daldas Grocery Grand Re-Opening event in May 2015.*

*Courtesy of Tenderloin Neighborhood Development Corporation*



*The Food Trust assists with healthy conversions of general stores in low-income areas, such as Washington and Hancock Counties, in rural Maine.*

## Promoting development of supermarkets in many urban neighborhoods that lack them is a primary goal of the healthy food movement.

Results from older healthy corner store initiatives are encouraging. The Food Trust reported that the Philadelphia Healthy Corner Store Initiative, the first of its kind in the nation, resulted in a 6.3 percent decline in the obesity rate among inner city children.

Successful healthy corner store initiatives are built on three pillars: persuading store owners to participate in the program; providing them with the equipment they need to handle fresh produce; and teaching residents of targeted neighborhoods how to prepare healthy meals. Healthy Retail SF also works with store owners to improve their ability to run a successful business.

Healthy Retail SF has set a goal of reducing the amount of space occupied by alcohol products to not more than 20 percent. Multani said alcohol takes up about 40 percent of the space in his store, but he will reduce that to 20 percent over time.

“We’re not telling the owners ‘Hey you need to stop selling tobacco, you need to stop selling alcohol,’” said Jorge Rivas, program manager for Healthy Retail SF.

Added Ryan Thayer, who works with the diverse residents of the Tenderloin for Healthy Retail SF, “Our theory is that over time by increasing the healthy products, there’s going to be less demand for alcohol and tobacco.”

Thayer and Jessica Estrada work with a group of neighborhood residents they call “food justice leaders.” Those residents promote healthy food to their neighbors, encourage them to attend nutrition classes and demonstrations and provide community feedback to program leaders.

“When we do outreach, we have to do it in seven different languages usually,” Thayer said.

The Tenderloin is a tasty stew of ethnicities, including Chinese, Filipinos, Mexicans, Hondurans, Vietnamese, Yemenis, Russians, African Americans and others. Diversity means corner stores must respond to the tastes of their customers. Bok choy goes over big in one store; collard greens in another.



*(Left) Store owner Satwinder “Bill” Multani with his wife and staff during the Daldas Grocery Grand Re-Opening event in May 2015 in San Francisco’s Tenderloin district.*

Photos courtesy of Tenderloin Neighborhood Development Corporation





Promoting development of supermarkets in the many urban neighborhoods that lack them is a primary goal of the healthy food movement, but for a number of reasons it's slow going.

Small healthy food stores opened in inner city neighborhoods in Philadelphia and Baltimore in recent years but quickly went out of business. Advocates say the owners meant well but failed to connect with members of the community.

“Putting a new store in isn't enough,” said Anne Palmer, a food policy advocate at Johns Hopkins University. “It's much more complicated. It's very hard to get all these things working in concert.”

The nonprofit Fare & Square market in Chester, Pa., is a new urban supermarket that has succeeded since it opened two years ago. Chester is a struggling city of about 34,000 south of Philadelphia.

Fare & Square is located in an old supermarket that closed 11 year ago. The 14,500-square-foot store, the first nonprofit of its kind, was built by Philabundance, a large hunger relief organization in Philadelphia.

As a nonprofit, Fare & Square is not supposed to make money and it's not. Mike Basher, vice president of retail operations, said revenue increased by 25 percent from year one to year two, but the store is generating only 75 percent of the revenue it needs to break even.

“The board's comfortable with us losing money,” Basher said.



Healthy corner store advocates say they do everything they can to hold prices down.



*An inside look at the Fare & Square grocery store. Fare & Square always has fresh produce and a large selection of meat and seafood available to its customers.*

Photos courtesy of Philabundance



Manager and Chester native, Markiesha Evans, standing in the front of Fare & Square.

## There's a growing trend of aspiring food entrepreneurs opening new inner city groceries.

One of the raps on corner stores is that they charge higher prices than the big, fancy supermarkets in the suburbs. Healthy corner store advocates said they do everything they can to hold prices down.

"We try and be real aggressive on our pricing," Basher said. "We're always looking for better deals on produce, meats, some of your proteins."

Many corner store customers participate in the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), which pays for the food they eat.

Basher said SNAP benefits arrive early in the month and tend to run out in the third and fourth weeks. To help its customers deal with that dilemma, Fare & Square created the Carrot Club, which offers customers who say they meet federal poverty guidelines a 7 percent discount on their purchases and an additional 3 percent on fresh fruit and vegetables.

Customers store those savings and draw on them to pay for food at the end of the month, Basher said.

"Last year we gave back in Carrot Cash over \$140,000," he said. "This year I think we're budgeted for about \$165,000."

Inner city corner stores are usually mom and pops owned by immigrants from places like Mexico, Asia or the Middle East. Relations between immigrant owners and residents from different backgrounds can be strained.

Hundreds of stores were looted in Baltimore, including a number of corner stores owned by Korean Americans, when rioting erupted in poor African American neighborhoods following the April death of Freddie Gray while in police custody. A number of those stores participated in the Baltimore Healthy Stores program.

"It was a blow because many of them thought they had a good relationship with the community," Gittelsohn said. "They felt betrayed."

There may be a growing trend of aspiring food entrepreneurs opening new inner city groceries that fit into the corner store model.

In Seattle, Carrie Ferrence and Jacqueline Gjurjevich opened Stockbox four years ago in a modified shipping container but quickly outgrew it. Stockbox is now located in a 2,000-square-foot building in Seattle's First Hill neighborhood, known locally as Pill Hill because it's been home to several health care facilities.

**Our focus is improving access to healthy food inside urban neighborhoods.**

“Our focus is really about improving access to healthy food inside urban neighborhoods, dairy, meat, milk, veggies and prepared food,” Ferrence said. “We put a premium on fresh.”

She said Stockbox also stocks items such as chips and soda that are considered junk food.

“One of our commitments is to accept that people like a range of food, and we’re not going to put a judgment on it,” Ferrence said.

“Our goal is to build a network of smaller grocery stores across the Seattle area, and we’re looking at opening two new stores next year,” she said.

In eastern Maine, Healthy Acadia, a rural healthy food program touted by The Food Trust, is working on healthy conversions of general stores in two low-income counties, Washington and Hancock. Washington is the eastern-most county in the United States; the place where the sun rises first.

Healthy Acadia is focusing on converting rural general stores located more than 20 miles from larger food stores.

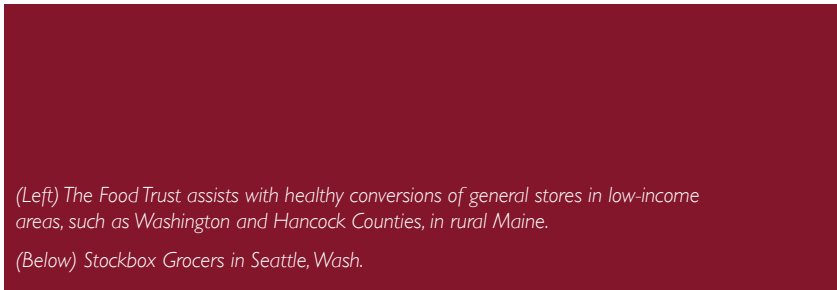
## The store owners have been happy with the sales of fresh produce.

Access to fresh produce is limited, said Katie Freedman, Healthy Acadia’s food programs director, so the program set up a farmer’s market in a general store’s parking lot over the summer.

Healthy Acadia also received grants from the late actor Paul Newman’s Newman’s Own Foundation and another foundation to pay for the equipment installed in general stores to display and store produce.

“We’re seeing incremental changes,” Freedman said. “We haven’t seen a major overhaul of these stores. They’re not going to become health food stores, but we’re seeing a substantial increase in healthy foods. The store owners have been happy with the sales of fresh produce, fruit cups and things like that.” ●

John Van Gieson is a freelance writer based in Tallahassee, Fla. He owns and runs Van Gieson Media Relations, Inc.



(Left) The Food Trust assists with healthy conversions of general stores in low-income areas, such as Washington and Hancock Counties, in rural Maine.

(Below) Stockbox Grocers in Seattle, Wash.



Photos courtesy of National Farm to School Network

## Schools Savoring the Effects of Healthier Food

Schools are cooking up healthier students and better communities by beefing up their food options.



By G.M. Filisko

It was the underappreciated radish's turn to be vegetable of the month at the Broward County public schools, and Darlene Moppert proudly tells the story of a teacher calling her to pass on a delicious nugget of information.

“One of the activities was for students to describe their feelings when they ate the radish,” recalls the program manager of nutrition education and training at the approximately 230 Broward County, Fla., schools (in the Ft. Lauderdale area). “One first-grader said it was like ants dancing on her tongue. We try to do things to make fruits and vegetables seem fun.”

Moppert is among a growing crowd mixing up school food choices to get students to eat healthier. It's happening not just through school menus and education but also by creating farm-to-school food programs through which local schools purchase the harvests of local farmers.

“Farm-to-school means three things,” explains Anupama Joshi, executive director and co-founder of the National Farm to School Network in Cary, N.C. “It means local and regional food procurement in food cafeterias. It also

means gardening activities in school, and third, it's food and farming education in the classroom. The trifecta of these elements is important in changing the health of children and providing benefits to farmers.”

Farm-to-school food programs are important in changing the health of children and providing benefits to farmers.



Photo courtesy of Washington Sustainable Food & Farming Network

Farmer Andy Ross picking beans near Mt. Vernon, Wash.



Each dollar invested in farm-to-school programs creates an additional \$2.16 of local economic activity.

Efforts have begun to bear fruit. “Overall in the nation, figures show that childhood obesity, which has continued to climb over a 20-year period, is now leveling off,” notes Moppert; she’s referring to studies, including one from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, showing that obesity has stabilized at about 17 percent for 2- to 19-year-olds. “We still have a way to go to get it to be declining. But that’s a more positive trend.”

It’s not just kids who reap the rewards. The effects are rippling throughout communities, especially from farm-to-school programs. “Schools are the hubs, and kids take information from school into the community,” contends Joshi. “Farmers are benefiting from these initiatives as well. And communities benefit because there’s a multiplier effect. Each dollar invested in farm-to-school programs creates an additional \$2.16 of local economic activity. For every job created by school districts purchasing local foods, an additional 1.67 jobs are created.”

The best news? These programs are just getting cooking. Proponents expect an even bigger bounty when more schools get a taste of the benefits.

### Lunch program grows up

Today’s healthier school menus have been brewing for a long time. The story begins with a federal mandate way back in 1946. “The federal government signed into law the National School Lunch Act in part as a national defense program because when the Americans went into World War II, a lot of young men were rejected for service because of nutritional deficiencies,” explains Moppert. “Then when we won, we began producing more food than we needed as a nation. The national school lunch program made lunch available to students based on need.”

The program has been updated in the decades since, including in 2004, when it required each school district to have a wellness policy and committee to address issues resulting from childhood obesity. “It was due to a recognition that children might not have the same life expectancy as their parents,” says Moppert.

Feed My School for a Week event in Augusta, Ga., area public schools.  
Photos courtesy of Burke County Public Schools



Broward schools — where last year, 64 percent of students were eligible for free or reduced-price meals — have jumped in. “We’ve been in the forefront of developing healthy lunches,” says Moppert. “In the 1990s, the school system eliminated fryers and started with salad bars to get kids to eat more salads. But salad bars have some challenges, especially in the lower grades. We realized kids did better with grab-and-go salads. In 2006 and 2007, we began offering more of those. One might be a chef’s salad with the meat of the day. Another might be a vegan salad with legumes like kidney or navy beans and seed kernels. Our salad numbers went up tremendously.”

### Grant grows community

Another community transforming school food is Burke County, about 30 miles south of Augusta, Ga., largely through the “fruit and vegetable grant.”

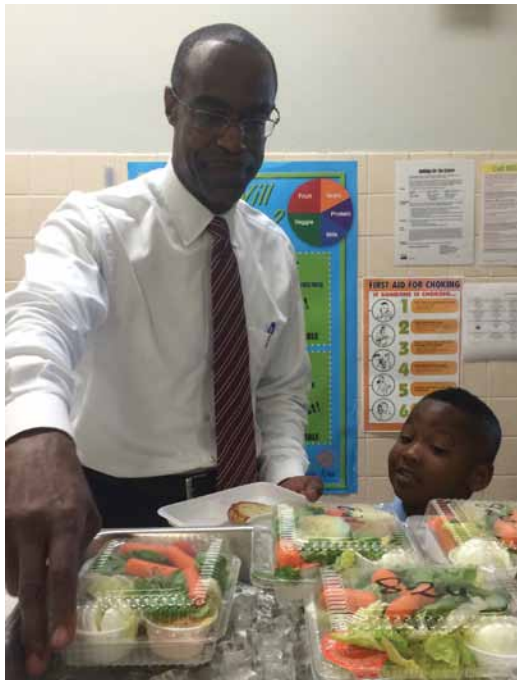
That’s the shorthand name used by Donna S. Martin, director of the schools’ nutrition program, for the federal program launched in 2002 as a pilot program in four states and the Zuni, N.M., tribal organization. Its goal: To determine best practices for increasing fresh fruit and vegetable consumption in schools. In 2008, the program became permanent nationwide.

Martin says the program is one of the best she has. For five years, she’s used it to improve her schools’ food and to shape lives in her community. “We’re trying to teach children how to eat healthy in the hopes they’ll go home and teach their family how to eat healthy,” she says. “We have a high predominance of low socioeconomic statuses. Our students don’t have the same opportunities other children have. So we expose them to new foods they won’t get at home.”

The grant provides about 50 cents per day per child for fruits and vegetables. Every afternoon, schools offer all children a fresh fruit or vegetable snack. Martin has served everything from pomegranate and jicama to sugar snap peas, star fruit and mangoes.

“Our children get so excited,” she says. “When they walk in the school, one of the first things they do is look at the table to see what the fresh fruit or vegetable will be that afternoon. We put it there in the morning, and then during the day, we tell them where it comes from — whether it’s grown underground, on a plant, in a bush, or on a tree — and the nutritional value. We’re trying to get them the basics and show we need farmers because food doesn’t come from Walmart. We also want them to go home and say to their parents, ‘Today, I ate a mango,

The school nutrition program is being used to shape lives in the community.



(Left) Broward County Schools Superintendent Robert Runcie shows the healthy food options to a student on the first day of school.

Photo courtesy of Broward County Public Schools



Photo courtesy of National Farm to School Network

When our children walk in the school, one of the first things they do is look at the table to see what the fresh fruit or vegetable will be that afternoon.



and I liked it. Will you buy me one?’ We think we’re having a huge impact on future generations in trying to develop healthy eaters.”

Martin says very few kids refuse to sample the day’s snack. “Each student gets a baggie with it,” she says. “If the teachers will model the good behavior, the children will try it. Recently, we had figs. About a third of the students liked them, and two-thirds didn’t. But at least that third will grow up liking figs.”

In 2014, Martin began sourcing her food from local farmers, which she says has been the most “eye-opening” experience of her job. She started by connecting with a co-operative agricultural extension group and inviting its members to a lunch to discuss the possibility of working together. Twenty showed up to hear Martin explain that her schools serve breakfast, lunch, an afternoon snack and supper. Then she asked if they could source any of the food. The answer was an enthusiastic yes.

“They grew a lot of corn, soybeans and peanuts, but they also had land they weren’t doing anything with,” recalls Martin. “They said, ‘If we knew somebody would buy the product, we’d grow it.’”

Last year, Martin bought locally grown collard greens, broccoli, honeydew, cantaloupe, strawberries, blueberries — you name it. One farmer provided 2,500 peaches each week for eight weeks. “He’s now our best friend in the whole world,” says Martin. “He was able to do more



*Farmer Tim Terpstra in a Washington state kale field*

volume at his farm and get his peaches in grocery stores, too. That was huge for him.” Another farmer recently told her he couldn’t provide any more food because he’d become too busy with other clients. Martin was happy for him — and for herself, since his products were among her most expensive.

Why aren’t more schools doing this? It’s a complex system to manage, says Martin. “It takes a lot of time to get it started,” she explains. “I had lots of issues learning how to order from farmers. You’re used to ordering one way. But with the farmers, how will you figure out the pack size? When are you ordering things? Also, we can’t take food in certain forms. We can’t clean and wash collard greens. We can’t take corn that hasn’t been shucked. It’s very time-consuming building relationships, checking out

## School lunch programs help kids get access to healthier food, which we hope will decrease the burden on our health care system.

the farms to make sure they're safe, and setting farmers up for billing. But the goodwill with teachers and the community is so huge. The teachers finally want to eat with us because of all the local food."

### Growing pains

Clear across the country in Washington, Ellen Gray has also encountered challenges as she's worked to expand servings of local products in local schools. The executive director of the Washington Sustainable Food & Farming Network in Mount Vernon recounts how in 2008, local schools got \$1.5 million to purchase Washington-grown fruits and vegetables to nourish kids and support the state's farmers. Imagine her surprise when she found her fourth-grade daughter's healthy snack — bulletized carrots — labeled "processed and distributed in Sacramento, Calif."

Gray learned the carrots were actually grown in her state but trucked out of state for processing and packaging before being trucked back to land in kids' backpacks. From that realization came a new project called Fresh Food in Schools, intended to build relationships between farmers and school food service directors.

As with Martin's program, there's been a learning curve. "A lot of schools didn't know how to cook — it had been just opening bags, warming food up, and serving it," she says. "There's a huge need to do staff training. We've also had horror stories of stoves so old it takes five hours to boil a huge pot of water. And when we first started, nobody had salad bars. We recognized there were infrastructure limitations."

However, the result is that working with 20 school districts and three part-time food coordinators, the program has increased schools' purchasing of Washington-grown fruits and vegetables by more than \$1 million.

What does Gray say to those who complain about do-gooders taking over school lunch programs? "Healthy food is a nonpartisan issue, and food-to-school programs are a very good economic business," she argues. "They help local farmers stay economically viable and help kids get access to healthier food, which we hope will decrease the burden on our health care system. It's a win for farmers, schools and communities."

Photos courtesy of  
National Farm to School Network



## How does your garden grow?

Healthier lunches are important, but Gray's pride and joy is school gardens. "So many wonderful things come out of school gardens," she says. "Our local Lincoln Elementary didn't have one, so a bunch of us got together. We got a Home Depot grant and built the garden. Then we started having cooking classes with the stuff we harvested, and we'd all sit together and eat. A student in welding class created our metal sign. A math teacher used the garden as a project to measure and build compost bins. We also collaborated with a community group to take care of the garden during the summer, with the food going to the local food bank."

The Kitchen Community, a nonprofit organization in Boulder, Colo., also believes in the cornucopia of riches that come from school gardens. Its mission is to build community through food with its learning gardens. They're above-ground gardens built by the organization and supported by its full-time education staff. Currently, there are 240 of the 1,200-1,500-square-foot gardens

Healthy food is a nonpartisan issue, and food-to-school programs are a very good economic business.



Photo courtesy of Burke County Public Schools (Augusta, Ga.)



Photo courtesy of the Kitchen Community

The Kitchen Community's learning gardens in Boulder, Colo.

in Chicago, Los Angeles, and Memphis schools and in schools throughout Colorado.

Students learn all about what they're helping plant, cultivate and harvest. They eat the fruits of their labor on the spot, in their school lunch or during classroom events — or they take it home for their family to enjoy, says Courtney Walsh, director of community engagement.

The organization is currently funding research into the effects of its gardens. Anecdotal results show that aggression is down at schools that have learning gardens, reports Walsh. "Studies also show that if kids plant vegetables, they're 60 times more likely to eat them, and that's definitely taking place," she adds. "There's a lot more community happening around food and the idea of harvesting it and the understanding where it comes from."

Advocates expect nothing but continued growth in the push to improve school food and, in turn, communities. "This movement is integrally linked with the overall public desire for fresher foods and for local, organic foods," says Joshi. "I see that future being really bright. Schools can serve as change agents in their communities." ●

G.M. Filisko is an attorney and freelance writer who writes frequently on real estate, business and legal issues. Ms. Filisko served as an editor at NAR's REALTOR® Magazine for 10 years.



Photos by Phil Roeder



# FOOD HUBS:

*Connecting Farmers with Consumers*

Regional food hubs aim to make locally sourced, healthy food available to everyone.

By Tracey C. Velt

When most people think of locally sourced, healthy, organic food, they think of young, urban professionals and trendy restaurants or expensive grocery stores. Think again.

Regional food hubs are making this type of food — organic and non-organic — available to everyone by connecting local farmers to eaters through farmers’ markets, grocery stores and more. Defined by the USDA, a food hub is as an organization that actively manages the aggregation, distribution and marketing of source-identified food products primarily from local and regional producers to strengthen their ability to satisfy wholesale,

retail and institutional demand. There are about 350 food hubs in the United States, and that number is rising.

“Food hubs solve the problem that a lot of businesses, retailers and institutions have,” says Jeff Farbman, senior program associate of Wallace Center at Winrock International and the National Good Food Network ([www.ngfn.org](http://www.ngfn.org)). “There is increasing demand for healthy, local food, but many of the small to mid-sized farmers don’t have the capacity to organize deliveries to a bunch of different companies. Food hubs are the third part that levels out the process for the buyer and seller.”

The National Good Food Network (NGFN) started work “helping to get the Farmers Market Coalition up and running. That part is booming now,” says Farbman.

Regional food hubs are making food, organic and non-organic, available to everyone by connecting local farmers to eaters.

“But, that’s not where most people get their food. They get it from restaurants, supermarkets, schools, hospitals, colleges and other institutions, so that’s the focus of the NGFN, aggregating, distributing and marketing the local, value-based food.”

According to Nick Mabe, food hub coordinator for the Iowa Food Hub in West Union, Iowa, “It’s easy to sell grain, corn, soybeans and hogs on the commodities market. But, it’s more difficult to have a mid-sized operation in dairy, produce or custom meats. The Iowa Food Hub helps to increase food access and help smaller beginning and established farmers run a sustainable business,” he says.

### Economic Impact

More than just serving as a connection between farms and eaters, food hubs “provide opportunities for more local food procurement at a larger scale, which can create jobs, generate business taxes, and increase earnings throughout the region as production increases locally,” according to the USDA’s Regional Food Hub Resource Guide (<http://www.ngfn.org/resources/ngfn-database/knowledge/FoodHubResourceGuide.pdf>).

Food hubs can create jobs,  
generate business taxes,  
and increase earnings.



Various studies have examined the local economic impacts of shifting food purchases to local food. A study conducted in Northeast Ohio found that if the 16-county Northeast Ohio Region were to meet 25 percent of its need for food with local production, it would result in 27,664 new jobs, providing jobs for 1 in 8 unemployed residents, as well as increase annual regional output by \$4.2 billion and increase state and local tax collections by \$126 million.

And, according to the USDA guide, “food hubs demonstrate innovative business models that can be financially viable and also make a difference in their respective communities. Economically, they are showing impressive sales performance and helping to retain and create new jobs in the food and agricultural sectors. Socially, food hubs are providing significant production-related, marketing, and enterprise development support to new and existing producers in an effort to build the next generation of farmers and ranchers. In addition, many food hubs make a concerted effort to expand their market reach into underserved areas where there is lack of healthy, fresh food.”



Photos courtesy of USDA

No one knows that better than Jesse Rye, co-executive director of Farm Fresh Rhode Island in Pawtucket, R.I. “Farm Fresh started 10 years ago, born from a student project at Brown University,” he says. Now, Farm Fresh’s Market Mobile Program handles aggregation and distribution for over 60 farms and producers and connects them with more than 200 consumers every week. “Last year, we moved about \$2.1 million worth of food on behalf of farmers.”

The group also raises funds and secured a grant that incentivizes Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) users so they can buy fruit and vegetables at the local market. “SNAP users get an additional \$2 on top of every \$5 they spend. That means lower income consumers get the benefits of fresh produce, and the community gets more money invested into the local economy and small, local business rather than the national chain stores,” says Rye.

In addition, Farm Fresh has a culinary education apprenticeship program, called Harvest Kitchen, where local, at-risk youth in the criminal justice system can learn culinary and life skills. “They create product lines, including applesauce, pickled products, frozen soups and more,” says Rye. The products are sold at the local farmers’ market and are available wholesale.

For the Iowa Food Hub, farmers are able to increase production because they are accessing new, larger markets without the cost burden of marketing and distribution. “On the consumer side, we’re focused on increasing the consumption of local food in underserved communities. That is done by getting the food to schools in poorer areas,” says Mabe. Unlike many other food hubs, the Iowa Food Hub is located in a rural area of the state. West Union has a population of about 3,000. “We’re bringing jobs and opportunities back into the rural downtowns.”

Mabe finds that much of the local food is exported to large, urban areas; however, one goal of the Iowa Food Hub is to increase the rural sales in Northeast Iowa. “In theory, we can sell everything here, but we need to create the systems and interest to get to that point.”

The Iowa Food Hub focused on increasing the consumption of local food in underserved communities.



(Above) Market Mobile’s Packline, delivering food on behalf of local farmers and growers.

(Below) Harvest Kitchen is Farm Fresh Rhode Island’s culinary education apprenticeship program.

Photos by Liza Yeager



Summer Farmers’ Market at Providence’s Armory Park.





Food hubs are a way to revitalize communities in not just rural, but urban downtowns as well.

Caroline Heine, co-founder and project director of Seed Capital KY in Louisville, Ky., agrees. She's working on getting the West Louisville FoodPort up and running. "We're trying to increase the volume of distribution. Research published in 2012 identified a significant demand in Jefferson County for local food. What the West Louisville FoodPort can do is complement the other efforts already underway, such as farmers' markets and locally-sourced food restaurants. We have significant unmet demand," she says. "We're a public-private partnership. We wouldn't be having this conversation if not for the leadership of Louisville Mayor Greg Fischer."

For Farm Fresh Rhode Island, its winter farmers' market brings in 2,000 to 3,000 people every week between November and May. "It's the biggest in New England and those visitors bring money into our local economy," says Rye.

### Revitalizing Blighted Areas

Heine sees food hubs as a way to revitalize communities in not just rural, but urban downtowns as well. The West Louisville FoodPort is more than just a food hub, it's a combination of distribution, processing, retail, indoor and outdoor farming, restaurants and coffee shops, a food market and community space. "There are companies coming together in our project that already do the things food hubs do. We're bringing those businesses into our project alongside other businesses that represent the entire food chain," she says.

While still in the planning stages, the 24-acre, local food business park expects to break ground in early summer 2016. "We're developing it in an area of West Louisville that has five times the unemployment rate and less than half the per capita income of other areas," she says. "We want to make this an economic driver for the neighborhood. Our hiring strategy is to hire the people who live in this area. But, we're looking at more than just jobs; we want to support and develop wealth-creating opportunities in this neighborhood, allow the residents to start small businesses and own the property itself. Those are the kinds of ideas we're working on," says Heine.

Future development plans for the West Louisville FoodPort.





Food hubs are here to stay based on the good they do for the communities in which they are located or serve.

Farm Fresh Rhode Island is also in an area targeted for revitalization. “We have our farmers’ market in a renovated mill building that is 16,000 square feet. Now, other businesses are springing up in the mill building, including light industrial work spaces, art galleries, fitness studios and small food businesses,” says Rye. The mill space is in a part of Rhode Island that is filled with abandoned mill buildings and residential areas that need attention.

### Helping Farmers Grow the Local Economy

Other than providing farmers a way to distribute and market products, food hubs also serve to help them get desired certifications that make it easier to distribute to institutional and retail buyers. There is a push throughout the United States for safer food. “There is a voluntary agricultural USDA certification that more and more buyers are looking for but many growers can’t afford to apply for,” says Mabe. His area food hub, along with others through a pilot program with the NGFN and the USDA, are able to help mitigate the cost of certification. “The food is already safe, but the paperwork and certifications are expensive. This allows them to get certified and access other markets.”

According to Farbman, another pilot program through the NGFN and ALBA, (Agriculture & Land-Based Training Association, <http://www.albafarmers.org>) offers several

incubator training hubs. “There are many immigrant farm workers who are skillful farmers but forced to take low-wage jobs as farmhands. ALBA trains these farm workers in organic farming,” he says. ALBA runs a food hub where all the food produced by the farming students is sold at different markets.

### Challenges

A challenge for many food hubs is investing in growth while supporting their broader social missions, such as supporting small and mid-sized producers and helping to improve food access to the underserved, according to the USDA guide. While many food hubs are well positioned to be economically viable businesses that can carry out the core functions without external subsidies, says the USDA, they recognize that they need further support/partnerships if they are to offer a variety of complementary producer and community services.

No matter what the challenges, the good outweighs them all. Even if the hip trend of eating organic and locally sourced food withers, food hubs are here to stay based on the good they do for the communities in which they are located or serve. ●

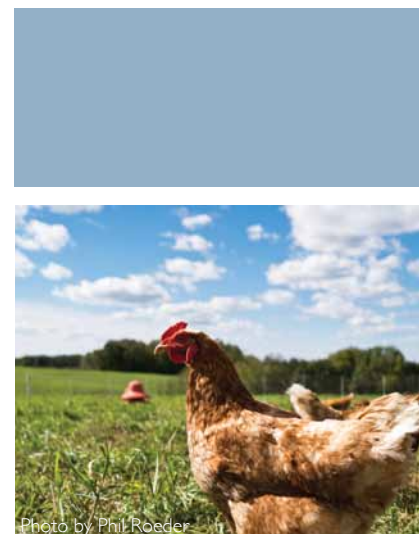
Tracey C. Velt is a real estate writer and editor based in Lake Mary, Fla.

# What Does a *Regional Food Hub* Do?

**R**egional food hubs are defined less by a particular business or legal structure, and more by how their functions and outcomes affect producers and the wider communities they serve. Defining characteristics of a regional food hub include:

- Carries out or coordinates the aggregation, distribution, and marketing of primarily locally/regionally produced foods from multiple producers to multiple markets.
- Considers producers as valued business partners instead of interchangeable suppliers and is committed to buying from small to mid-sized local producers whenever possible.
- Works closely with producers, particularly small-scale operations, to ensure they can meet buyer requirements by either providing technical assistance or finding partners that can provide this technical assistance.
- Uses product differentiation strategies to ensure that producers get a good price for their products. Examples of product differentiation strategies include: identity preservation (knowing who produced it and where it comes from); group branding; specialty product attributes (such as heirloom or unusual varieties); and sustainable production practices (such as certified organic, minimum pesticides, or “naturally” grown or raised).
- Aims to be financially viable while also having positive economic, social, and environmental impacts within their communities, as demonstrated by carrying out certain production, community, or environmental services and activities.

Source: USDA Regional Food Hub Resource Guide; <http://www.ngfn.org/resources/ngfn-database/knowledge/FoodHubResourceGuide.pdf>



Photos courtesy of Visit Savannah

## Millennials' transportation and housing choices *will shape the nation*



By Joan Mooney

**B**usinesses across America are watching the millennial market closely. They should: The 87 million millennials eclipse even the 76 million baby boomers in their numbers. Because they came of age during the Great Recession and many are saddled with enormous college debt, they have not yet made their full market force known.

But millennials have already exerted their influence in many ways. Their transportation preferences could point to a long-term shift in the way Americans commute to work, do errands and socialize. And their mode of travel is already influencing their choice of where to live.

The stereotype is that millennials are living in their parents' basement because they're still paying off college loans and can't get a professional job. They travel by bus and bicycle and on foot because they can't afford a car and don't like to drive anyway.

Of course it's not so simple. A new Community and Transportation Preferences Survey covering the 50 largest metro areas teases out the nuances of travel and

housing preferences of millennials and other groups. The survey, by the NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF REALTORS® (NAR) and Portland State University, sampled 3,000 adults.

### Use transit more than other groups

The study found that millennials (defined here as those born after 1980) use transit much more than older groups. They are "much more likely than other groups to place a high priority on providing convenient alternatives to driving, expanding public transportation and developing communities where more people don't have to drive long distances," the study says.

Millennials are much more likely to have used transit in the past 30 days than any other group. Forty percent did so, compared with just 28 percent for the next highest group, Generation X (born between 1965 and 1980). But it's their least favorite way of getting around, with only 44 percent saying they like transit.

It turns out millennials do like driving — 71 percent said so — but they like it less than any other group.

A whopping 83 percent of the “silent” generation — born before 1946 — said they like driving. Millennials also like bicycling much more than those born after 1946. (Their liking of bicycling is even with that of Generation X.) Millennials are the most likely to bicycle for transportation, not just exercise.

All groups said they like walking, including 83 percent of millennials. But as with bicycling, millennials and Generation X stand out in their preference to walk for transportation. That matches their preference for walkable communities, as noted by many REALTORS® and others who study millennials.

Mackenzie Davis Luke is a REALTOR® in Athens, Ga., a town of 120,000 that is home to the University of Georgia. There’s little public transportation, and it’s not a very bicycle-friendly community, Luke said.

“Walkable areas for us are not near transit,” she said. “They’re walkable to local restaurants and bars. People like having that sense of community.” A millennial herself, Luke has found that her generation likes to live closer to town, even if it’s not a big city.

Luke’s experience matches what Joseph Kane, researcher for the Brookings Institution Metropolitan Policy Program, found in the latest American Community Survey from the U.S. Census Bureau.

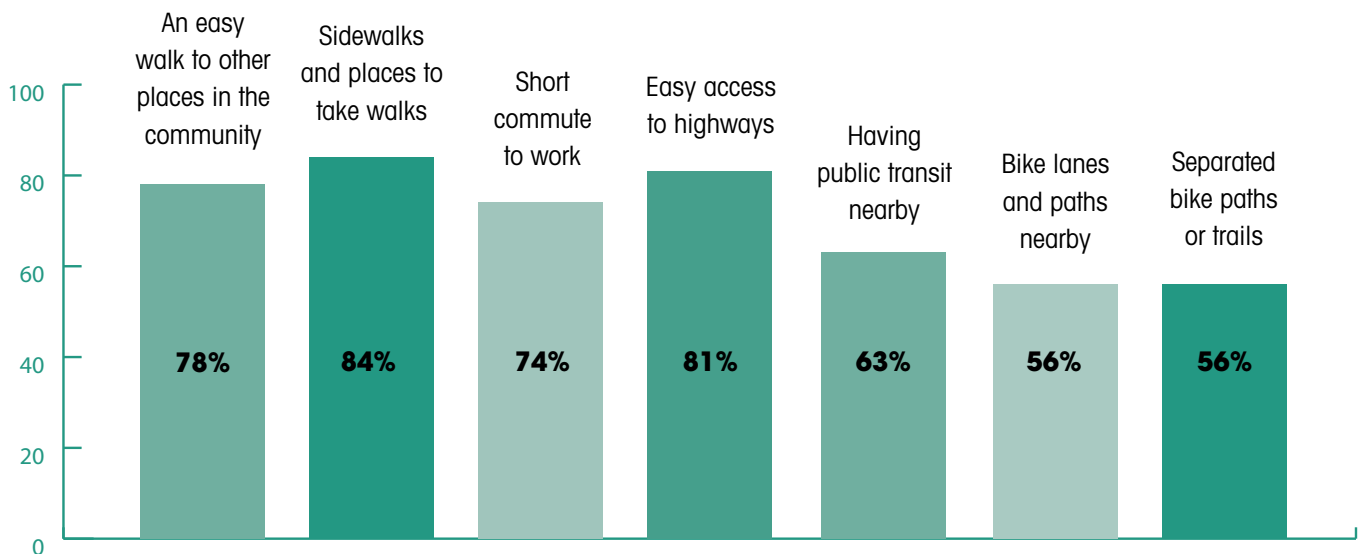
“Some markets have a big emphasis on walking and bicycling,” Kane said. “In Columbia, S.C., almost one-quarter of 16- to 24-year-olds walk or bike to work.” Younger workers are leading that trend. But the NAR study found that 19 percent of millennials walk mainly to save money, so that preference could change as their income rises.

According to the NAR survey, 26 percent of millennials used a bike in the last 30 days — similar to the 25 percent of all survey respondents. However, millennials were more likely to use a bike for transportation purposes rather than just for recreation. The top five reasons why people don’t bike more: they need a vehicle for work, school



## Location Preferences

Respondents were asked how important various factors are when deciding where to live:



or other reasons; the places they need to go are too far to bike; they don't have a bike; they don't feel safe in traffic, and there are too few bike lanes or trails.

### Prefer walkable neighborhoods

The NAR survey also looked at housing preferences and neighborhood design. Millennials are more interested in being within easy walking distance of places and having public transit nearby. In particular, 51 percent of millennials want to live within a short commute to work, and 40 percent want easy access to the highway. And, both millennials and Gen X are more interested in sidewalks and bike lanes and paths.

But millennials have hardly abandoned cars. Even the American Public Transportation Association (APTA) found in its survey of millennials' transportation preferences that "driving a car is their number one preference," said Darnell Grisby, APTA director of policy development and research. APTA also found that a variety of transportation options makes a community particularly attractive to millennials.

The NAR survey found a similar preference — millennials put more importance on living within an easy walk of places and having public transportation nearby. Overall, they prefer an attached home (apartment or townhouse) where they have an easy walk to shops and restaurants and a shorter commute.

Still, most millennials, like other age groups, live in detached, single family homes. Most of those homes have sidewalks available, but fewer have lots of places to walk to, such as shops, cafes and restaurants.

The NAR survey also found that people of all ages with places to walk to are more satisfied with the quality of life in their community.

As Athens, Ga., REALTOR® Luke found, walkability is not found only in cities. That's just as well, because in many cities, millennials just starting their careers are being priced out of city housing.

APTA's Grisby sees promise in some of the older inner ring suburbs that have seen some wear but are near transit and offer yards that millennials may want as they start families. Some of those areas have seen recent investment by developers but are still less expensive than housing in the city or more fashionable suburbs.

"The distinction between urban and suburban is increasingly not very important," as long as the area is walkable to destinations, said Grisby.

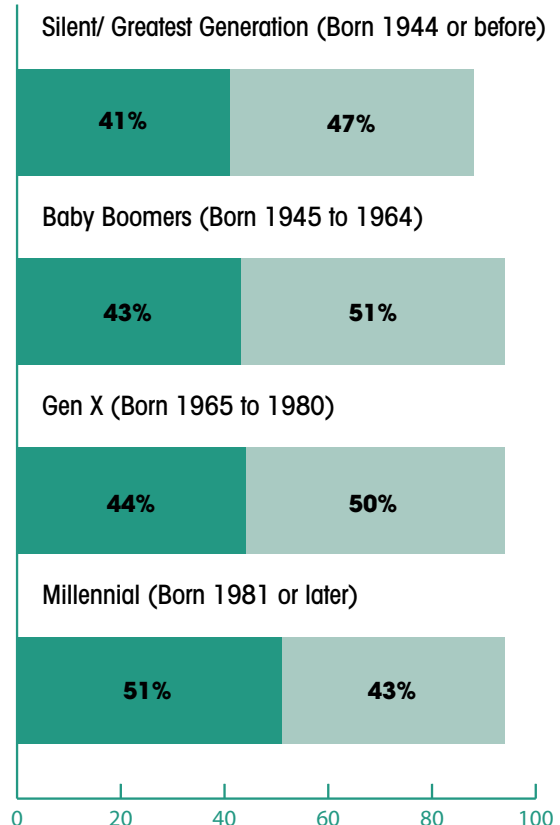


Courtesy of Visit Savannah

## Housing Preferences

Respondents were asked, if you moved, in which type of community would you prefer to live:

- **Home A: (attached, walkable)** Own/rent an apartment/townhouse, and you have an easy walk to shops/restaurants & have a shorter commute
- **Home B: (detached, conventional)** Own/rent detached, single-family house, and you have to drive to shops, restaurants, & have a longer commute



## Will millennials grow out of their transportation preferences?

How are millennials' preferences in transportation and housing likely to change as they get older and more of them have families? Will they want to move to detached houses with big yards in car-dependent suburbs?

Phineas Baxandall, senior analyst for tax and budget policy at the U.S. Public Interest Research Group (USPIRG), doesn't think so. He is coauthor of the group's October 2014 report on millennials' transportation preferences, *Millennials in Motion*. (It should be noted that USPIRG supports more funding of public transit and less for highways.)

The USPIRG report arrived at many of the same conclusions as the NAR survey: Young people want walkable communities and are more open to other modes of transportation than driving. Millennials are shifting away from driving. They are much less likely than previous generations, for instance, to get a driver's license as soon as they are eligible.

"There's no reason to assume that millennials won't increase their driving as they age," said Baxandall. "As they're employed at higher rates and have children they're ferrying around, they will probably, to some degree, live more in the suburbs."

But the question is, as millennials move into the traditionally more driving-intensive stage, "will they drive as much as the previous generation? Even if it's a little bit less, that would have a big impact because there are so many of them," Baxandall said.

Because of millennials' lifestyle and environmental preferences, and the habit they formed in young adulthood of not driving, they realized that it's possible to get around by public transit and bicycling. That habit, said Baxandall, will likely stay with them.

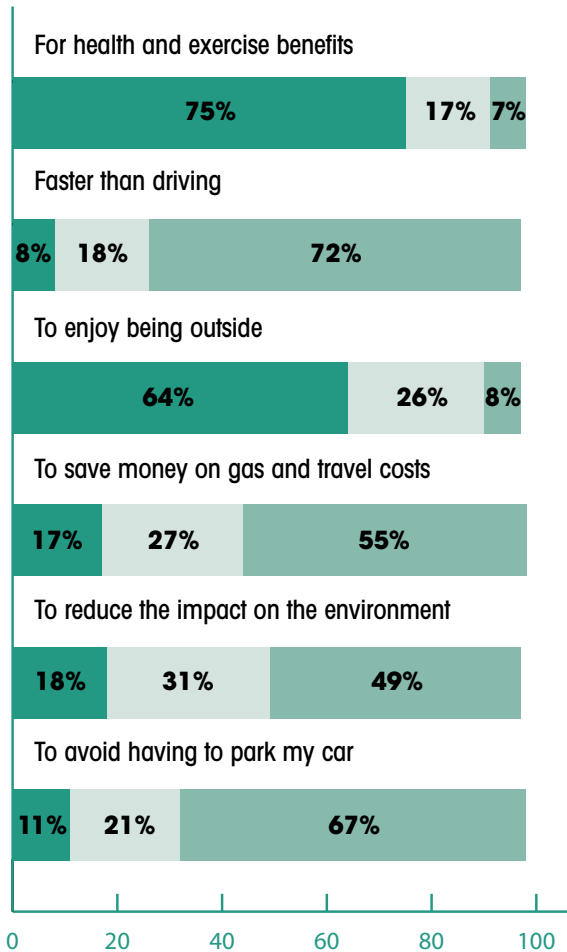
Noreen McDonald, associate professor in the Department of City and Regional Planning at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, has written about the decrease in driving by millennials. The decrease, she said, can be partly explained by millennial-specific factors such as changing attitudes and the use of virtual mobility. Millennials may feel less need to drive to see friends when they can meet them virtually.

"As all generations age," McDonald said, "their need for travel changes. Often they have more need for automobile travel." Although older millennials are driving more than they were when they were younger, they are still driving less than previous generations at the same age. She notes

## Reasons for Biking

Respondents were asked why they choose to bike:

■ Main reason ■ Somewhat a reason ■ Not a reason



a trend that has been documented for several years starting at the beginning of the Great Recession: that all age groups are driving less.

How millennials' transportation and housing choices will change as they age is much on the minds of various sectors of the transportation industry, REALTORS®, developers and planners. The NAR survey adds useful information to the debate. ●

Joan Mooney is a freelance writer who has written extensively about transportation for *Urban Land* magazine and other publications. She also wrote the NAR's water infrastructure toolkit.



# RECONNECT kids and families with nature

By Brian E. Clark

When author Richard Louv was growing up on the outskirts of Kansas City in the 1950s and early 1960s, he spent his free time organizing pick-up games in neighbors' yards and in parks, scrambling around in the woods near his home — collecting snakes, sometimes poisonous ones — and building forts and treehouses. He was also something of a rebel, too, pulling up surveyors' stakes of subdivisions proposed for his beloved woods.

And when he tried to sit down and watch TV, his parents told him, in an oft-repeated phrase that echoes in the brains of most baby boomers, “Go outside and play!”

Fast forward three-plus decades. Louv, then a syndicated columnist with the San Diego Union-Tribune, began to wonder where all the kids had gone. Turns out, he said, that they were inside playing early versions of computer games. And many parents, worried by stories about the relative handful of terrible crimes

that were repeated over and over again on cable TV, were happy to keep them at home and “safe,” Louv said in a recent interview.

“Fear of crime was at the top of the list as a culprit, and traffic,” said Louv, who coined the term “nature deficit.” He is the author of “Last Child in the Woods” and “The Nature Principle.” His much-lauded writings





## American kids now spend a whopping 54 hours a week plugged into some kind of electronic medium.



Photos courtesy of Texas Parks and Wildlife



have spawned efforts in this country and around the globe to reconnect children and families with the outdoors.

“High crime rates are real in some neighborhoods, but not most,” he said. “Though there has been a recent uptick, the actual rate of violent crime has been declining for the past 35 years. But we pulled indoors.”

The results for the health of children raised under what he calls “protective childhood arrest” have not been good. So while there is some risk of falling out of trees when kids play outdoors — which remains part of its attraction, Louv mused — staying inside to watch TV or play often violent computer games has given us a generation of inactive kids. The result has been rising rates of childhood obesity with all the problems of diabetes and heart disease that come even during childhood or later.

So Louv railed against poorly designed neighborhoods with few parks, fear of boogeymen and seductive technology. According to a recent Kaiser Family Foundation study, he said American kids now spend a whopping 54 hours a week plugged into some kind of electronic medium. Their parents are probably as bad or worse, he said, which doesn’t leave a lot of time for other activities.

“Not only are there risks to kids’ health by keeping them inside, but it also hurts their ability to socialize outside the home,” he said. “Ultimately, I believe, there is even a risk to democracy. In order to care about nature, the environment and your neighbors, you need to step outdoors. Too often, people just get in their cars in their garages and drive off down the street, never even getting to know who lives next to them.”

Even team sports have come in for criticism by Louv, who notes that the greatest increase in childhood obesity occurred during the same two decades as the largest increase in organized sports for children in our history. While that doesn’t mean that organized sports are causing obesity, he said exercising for only a few hours isn’t helping to the extent that we think it is.

Many Americans (Europeans, Chinese and Brazilians, too) have gotten the message and created programs to get kids outside again. They have names like “Every

Photos courtesy of Virginia State Parks



Photo by Brett Billing, USFWS

Our goal is to get people together from a wide variety of constituency areas to talk about issues and see what barriers we can remove to get kids into the outdoors.

Child Outdoors” in Tennessee and “Taking Children Outdoors” in Texas. Even developers have gotten on the bandwagon, he said, creating new neighborhoods with open spaces, hiking trails and nature centers that many families — as well as baby boomers — find more attractive than subdivisions built around golf courses. The author said he was shocked, shocked, when he was warmly received at his first builders’ conference.

Nancy Dorman, who runs the Every Child Outdoors coalition in Tennessee, said the Volunteer State’s effort was launched within several years after Louv’s “Last Child in the Woods” was published.

“He came out to Nashville to do a presentation and as a result, we organized a broad coalition of organizations that were interested in this issue,” she said. “I’m an environmental educator and a Tennessee State Parks person, but our goal is to get people together from a wide variety of constituency areas, including health, education and even the built environment,

to talk about issues and see what barriers we can remove to get kids into the outdoors.”

She said they developed the Tennessee Environmental Literacy Plan. For its part, her agency created a state-wide Junior Ranger program that is partially funded by a Project Diabetes grant from the Tennessee Health Department. State parks offer Junior Ranger camps and other programs, including after-school activities at elementary schools, she said.

“We also have a middle school and family running program that is kind of a park-based running club to encourage families and kids to come out to the state parks and run,” she said. “We have cross-country running events several times a year. And we do seasonal summer programs for families because kids don’t function in a vacuum. We want to encourage families and kids to get out and enjoy nature and the outdoors.”

In Texas, Jennifer Bristol said that the state’s Children in Nature program started about five years ago and has

The website has a ton of activities that families can pick and choose from when they have the time to get outside.

grown into a network of about 300 government agencies, nonprofits, businesses and individuals whose goal is to get kids and families outdoors. It was sparked, in part, by surveys that said that typical park users in Texas were in their 40s.

“Our tag line is that kids and families who spend time outdoors are happier, healthier and smarter,” said Bristol, who coordinates the program. “This all grew out of the movement Richard Louv started and took off when the project was endorsed by our state Legislature. They recognized that this is important for our kids.

“About 80 of the legislators said ‘We want to do something about this, so go for it!’ So we work with schools, healthcare providers and others, helping families who want to get out in nature. We also work with educators to help them get their science lessons outdoors.”

She said the “Nature Rocks Texas” website ([naturerock-texas.org](http://naturerock-texas.org)) is the main vehicle for providing information to Texas families. It has information on nearly all the state’s green space and nature centers.

“You name it, it’s there,” she said of the website. “It has a ton of activities that families can pick and choose from when they have the time and inclination to get outside. All of the state parks are listed as well as our national partners, wildlife refuges, etc.

“If people say they don’t know what to do, we send them to this website, which has it all,” she said. “Now we are revamping it, so it’s more mobile friendly because we know through research that 80 percent of families — even underserved ones — are connecting with mobile devices. We want to include everyone.”

Bristol said when she spoke to families recently about the program, which is funded through the Texas Parks and Wildlife Foundation, they were somewhat skeptical about how spending time in nature would benefit their kids.

“I told them that numerous studies show kids who are playing and learning in nature are physically and mentally healthier, do better in school, have higher self-esteem, have



Photos courtesy of Texas Parks and Wildlife



Courtesy of Virginia State Parks

better self-discipline, are more capable and confident, are more cooperative, more creative and better problem solvers than their peers who don't get out as much. They're also tomorrow's conservation leaders."

But what really sparked the attention of the families was when she told them that she talked to friends, who owned businesses or interviewed people for jobs, about that research, and those friends said "send us those problem solvers. We need folks who can think critically and have that on-the-fly ability to come up with solutions because it's not something that is taught or tested for in our current school system that we have."

"We see that time and time again with all of our partners," she said. "They say kids coming out of their programs say they have that capacity and ability, which is pretty cool."

Grace Lee, executive director of the National Park Trust, said her organization began working to reconnect kids with nature six years ago with the launch of its "Buddy Bison" program. Roughly two years later, it started the "Kids to Parks" day, "getting young people — mainly

in poor urban areas — to green spaces right in their backyards and then a little further, perhaps an hour or so, away."

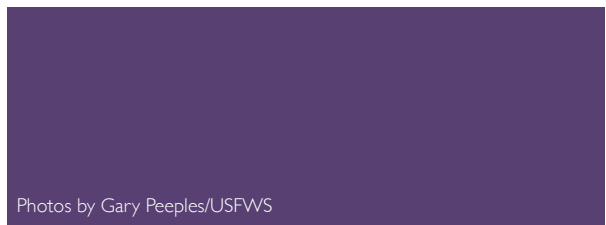
The Buddy Bison program uses parks and public lands as outdoor classrooms, primarily to teach children about science and history, said Lee, who lauded the NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF REALTORS® for supporting the program.

"We talk to school leaders to find out where best a program like this would plug into their classrooms," she said. "It's usually 3rd, 4th and 5th graders, but we can also work with kids everywhere from pre-K through 8th grade. Then we enhance their existing curricula by taking their learning outdoors."

"We also know that parks are great places for kids to play, burn off energy and get their bodies moving. This is important because about two-thirds of our country is overweight and obese, so it is a wonderful twofold opportunity to help underserved communities."

"We fund all the costs, including all of the staff planning, execution of the program and transportation."

The Buddy Bison program uses parks and public lands as outdoor classrooms.



The world is urbanizing, so there is a danger that the nature deficit disorder could grow.

One of the other reasons why we created this school program is because the demographics of the country are not reflected in those who go to parks. And we know that only those who have a connection to nature will know how important it is to not only take advantage of these places, but to preserve them for future generations.”

Though the environmental movement often has a gloom-and-doom element, Louv said he is fairly optimistic about the future and has hopes that a new kind of city can emerge.

“The world is urbanizing, so there is a danger that the nature deficit disorder could grow,” he said. “As of 2008, more people in the world live in cities than in the countryside.

“As that continues, humans will either lose most of whatever connection they have to the natural world, or we will create new kinds of cities, ones that can become centers of biodiversity and human health by having more nature in them. That’s my hope. It won’t be wilderness, but it can be done through biophilic design that incorporates nature into public and private places — and individual actions.”

Moreover, Louv said he has been inspired by his talks with college students — most of whom were raised with images of a bleak dystopic and post-apocalyptic future.

“Martin Luther King said any movement will fail if it cannot paint a picture of a world that people want to go to,” he said. “But I am optimistic that we can turn this around because of positive things that I have seen in the past decade.

“I talk to a lot of college kids. They know that things like sustainability and energy efficiency are important. But it’s kind of hard to get excited about BTUs.

There are tens of thousands of people — mostly volunteers — who are working on getting kids outside again to play.



Photos courtesy of Virginia State Parks



“However, when the conversation changes to discussing what a nature-rich future looks like and whether they’d like to be part of making that, their eyes light up and their whole affect changes. They really want to go to that future. That gives me a lot of hope.

“I’m also pleased with the counter-movement that has emerged around the globe. There are tens of thousands of people — mostly volunteers — who are working on getting kids outside again to play and explore. There are things like family nature clubs sprouting up all over. In San Diego, where I live, 1,500 families belong to one and do things like go out for a hike. And they don’t need a foundation grant or government action. Things like that make me optimistic, too.” ●

Brian E. Clark is a Wisconsin-based journalist and a former staff writer on the business desk of The San Diego Union-Tribune. He is a contributor to the Los Angeles Times, Chicago Sun-Times, Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, Dallas Morning News and other publications.

# Daylighting

## UNCOVERING THE NATURAL BENEFITS OF HIDDEN STREAMS



By Brad Broberg

Streams are a simple but valuable natural gift. They abate flooding and remove pollutants while adding beauty and value to the land around them. No design or construction needed. At least not much. That's just what streams do as they glide and tumble along their natural course.

But thousands of streams no longer follow their natural course. Hijacked to carry wastewater or paved over to make way for development, they travel in underground pipes, contributing little to the quality of life above as they flow through the darkness below.

Most will remain buried forever, trapped and forgotten beneath buildings, streets and parking lots. Yet a select few are being uncovered — at least in part — through the growing practice of daylighting.

Returning streams to the open restores their function as green infrastructure.

“The practice of daylighting is really in its infancy, but the idea that we can in some cases bring streams out of pipes and to the surface is really attractive to people,” says Laura Craig, an associate director at American Rivers, a nonprofit organization based in Washington, D.C. “On the East Coast, many of our cities have 70 percent or more of their streams and rivers underground.”

## Saw Mill River is a catalyst for ongoing downtown revitalization efforts.

Returning streams to the open restores their function as green infrastructure — the concept of using natural processes to cleanse runoff, curb storm surges and perform other environmental services — and recaptures a lost public amenity. By preserving — or in this case restoring — critical natural areas, daylighting streams is a smart growth approach to creating more livable and sustainable communities.

The Saw Mill River flows 23 miles from its headwaters before emptying into the Hudson River in Yonkers, N.Y. For nearly 100 years, the last half-mile passed through an underground flume built to protect downtown Yonkers from flooding and from the mix of human and industrial pollution poisoning the river's waters.

Today, a growing stretch of a cleaned up Saw Mill River flows in the open through the heart of Yonkers — a catalyst for ongoing downtown revitalization efforts in the city of 200,000 just north of New York City.

“It’s doing even more than what the city of Yonkers anticipated in terms of stimulating redevelopment of many old and empty industrial buildings in the historic downtown,”

says Ann-Marie Mitroff, river program director for Groundwork Hudson Valley, an environmental organization that helped lead the Saw Mill River restoration.

The first section of the Saw Mill River to be set free from the flume — which remains in place to serve as an overflow channel during heavy rain — runs for two blocks through a former parking lot that is now a park. Two more sections of the \$48-million daylighting project will add a pedestrian walkway, courtyard and park, bringing the total length of exposed river to about six blocks.

Daylighting the Saw Mill River adds a public amenity while new zoning that was adopted at the same time allows greater density — a one-two economic development punch generating a flurry of residential, retail and office planning and construction in downtown Yonkers.

Daylighting also improves habitat for wildlife because it restores the Saw Mill River’s bed and banks to a more natural state. The Saw Mill River is home to the American eel, a species in serious decline up and down the East Coast, so creating a healthy ecosystem and food chain was an important goal.



Photos by  
Donna Davis  
Saw Mill River  
in Yonkers, N.Y.

Cincinnati is embarked on a \$276-million public works project that revolves around daylighting a long buried creek to help reduce combined sewer overflows.

Lick Run became part of the Cincinnati's wastewater system more than 100 years ago when the creek was funneled into a pipe to carry both sewage and stormwater — a common practice in many cities. The system works well until heavy rains overwhelm the pipe and send overflows of stormwater and raw sewage into the surrounding Mill Creek watershed before the foul flood can reach a sewage treatment plant.

Daylighting a mile of Lick Run and flanking it with wetlands — which store and absorb runoff — will provide a separate channel for stormwater to flow into Mill Creek without mixing with sewage. The project will include walking trails and recreation areas, demolishing aging buildings to create a public amenity that could stimulate new development in the challenged neighborhood.

Seattle is riddled with creeks that disappear into a pipe, pop back up, then disappear into a pipe again. “Typically, it’s where somebody wanted to build something or just to get the stream out of the way,” says Miles Mayhew, strategic advisor with Seattle Public Utilities.

Over the last decade, the city has completed several daylighting projects designed to improve water quality, enhance wildlife habitat — particularly for salmon — and add green space to neighborhoods that in many cases were the biggest advocates for undertaking the work.

“A lot of it has been community driven in a lot of ways,” Mayhew says.

When a developer sought to build a mixed-use project in the parking lot of a shopping mall, citizens successfully fought to require that Thornton Creek, which ran through a pipe beneath the parking lot, be uncovered as part of the project.

“Technically, it’s a water quality channel,” Mayhew says. Instead of rushing through a pipe, stormwater winds slowly through the channel, which is planted with native plants that filter and process sediments, pollutants and nutrients such as nitrates — which can cause toxic algae blooms — before the runoff reaches Lake Washington.

The creek — or water quality channel — doubles as park space for residents of Thornton Place, the much acclaimed transit-oriented development it now flows through. “It’s a big-time amenity,” Mayhew said.



Photo by Chas Redmond



Photo by Chas Redmond

Thornton Creek in Seattle, Wash.

The city has completed several projects designed to improve water quality, enhance wildlife habitat and add green space to neighborhoods.



A new stormwater management system of filtration ponds and wetlands remove sediment, pollution and nutrients from runoff.



(Left) Volunteers planting trees near Trout Brook in St. Paul, Minn.

Unlike many buried streams, Trout Brook in St. Paul wasn't interred below streets and buildings. Much of it was piped beneath a relatively open natural valley that was gradually filled to accommodate railroad tracks and associated uses starting in the 1880s.

Starved for green space, the surrounding neighborhood pushed the city to buy 42 acres of the former railroad property. The primary goal was to create a nature sanctuary and fill a missing link in a regional trail system, but the project also presented an opportunity to bring Trout Brook back to the surface in a new channel.

A new stormwater management system of filtration ponds and wetlands feeds Trout Brook. Together, they remove sediment, pollution and nutrients from runoff before the creek eventually flows back into a pipe and empties into the Mississippi River.

"The nature sanctuary in and of itself didn't need to have a water feature, but Minnesotans are very keen about water quality (because) 50 percent of our surveyed waters are not fishable, swimmable or drinkable," says Deborah Karasov, executive director of Great River Greening, a local environmental organization that

## Uncovering the creek creates educational opportunities.

is helping the community plant grasses and trees in the sanctuary. "The fact that Trout Brook receives so much stormwater from this highly urbanized area and treats it before it goes into the Mississippi is very important."

Uncovering the creek also creates educational opportunities. "When you hide a stream, people are oblivious to their impact on water quality, but now people are more aware of it," Karasov says.

Trout Brook is one of several daylighting projects completed in the Minneapolis-St. Paul area with others likely to follow. "A lot of people are appreciating the possibilities of daylighting," Karasov says. ●

Brad Broberg is a Seattle-based freelance writer specializing in business and development issues. His work appears regularly in the Puget Sound Business Journal and the Seattle Daily Journal of Commerce.



## Cities bringing a **PIECE OF NATURE** into urban neighborhoods

By Brian E. Clark

City dwellers certainly crave the bustle of activities and access to entertainment, but they also dream of quiet, rejuvenating places where they can connect with nature. More and more cities are turning that dream into reality by transforming outdated eyesores into natural spaces filled with shady trees, native plants and grass-lined paths. From Chicago to Dallas obsolete transportation structures are being recreated into natural retreats and urban oases. Chicago graphic designer Kevin Walsh frequently satisfies his craving for nature along the Bloomingdale Trail in Chicago's Wicker Park neighborhood. But generations ago, the Bloomingdale Trail wasn't a link to nature. In fact if Kevin had strolled along the trail 25 years ago, he might have been run over by a train. That's because the nearly three-mile-long Bloomingdale Trail runs on an elevated stretch of Chicago & Pacific Rail Line that bustled with freight for roughly 120 years, but was all but abandoned two decades ago. It left behind blot on the landscape, until it was converted into Chicago's newest park.

"This trail is a great addition to my part of town," said Walsh. "I can commute on it to work downtown, walk my dog, jog or just go for a stroll and enjoy nature and the landscaping while I think about what's going on in the world and my life. It's really cool, too, that they put curves and dips in the path, overlooks and side loops."



*Bloomingdale Trail runs on an elevated stretch of Chicago & Pacific Rail Line in Chicago.*

The Bloomingdale Trail covers 24 acres and is the biggest piece of what locals call “The 606” — a moniker taken from the first three digits of Chicago’s zip code — that includes a pair of existing parks and several new ones, plus a solar observatory at the western end of the path. It opened in June and has two dozen bridges with new trees and landscaping that pass over city streets and 17 wheelchair-accessible ramps to reach the trail. More parks, lush green spaces and public artworks are planned along the route, too, which also runs through the Logan Square, Bucktown and Humboldt Park neighborhoods on the northwest side of the city.

But the 606 is just one of the many new parks that have been built — or are in the works — around the country. According to Beth White of the Trust for Public Land, which coordinated the project with the Chicago Parks Department, urban areas around the country are playing catch-up as downtowns and other neighborhoods grow and residents clamor for nearby places to play, relax and enjoy nature.

The Trust for Public Land partners with communities so people can go out their front door and within a 10-minute walk have access to nature, parks, gardens, playgrounds, trails and other calming places. In Dallas, the city put a deck over a stretch of the Woodall Rodgers Freeway to create a 5.7-acre park called Klyde Warren Park that connects a gentrified neighborhood with the city’s downtown arts district. In Savannah, Ga., a parking garage was buried to recreate one of the city’s historic town squares that was laid out in the 1700s.

New Yorkers boast of the High Line, another stretch of converted elevated railroad. In Florida, the New Tampa Nature Park features access to wetland habitats via an elevated boardwalk. And Madison, Wis., is in the early stages of planning a one-acre park near the University of Wisconsin that will require the demolition of four old student rental houses. The park is needed, city officials say, because more than half a dozen apartment buildings have gone up in the city center in recent years, adding thousands of new residents to the downtown area.

White, the regional Trust for Public Land director, said the 606 will cost \$90 million when completed, with \$50 million coming from federal funding, \$5 million from the city and county, and the rest being raised in a private campaign.



Photo by Steve Vance



Klyde Warren Park  
in Dallas, Texas

Courtesy of Klyde Warren Park



Courtesy of Klyde Warren Park

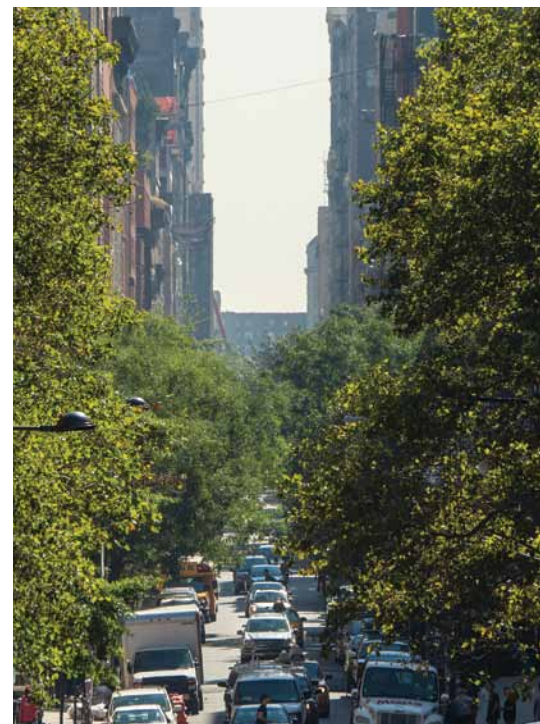
Research shows that parks add to the quality of life of communities.



Photo by Ben Dunham



Courtesy of USDA;  
photos by Lance Cheung



“This is in an area that didn’t have many parks,” she said. “We’ve inherently known that parks add to the quality of life for the last 100 years. But what’s interesting to me is that in the last five to 10 years, research that shows the benefit of parks has really blossomed. So you’re seeing a second wave of great park building. Planners are looking at communities in a much more holistic way.”

She said urban planners include green spaces — in addition to schools, libraries, transportation and jobs — when they talk about healthy communities. In Chicago, she said roughly 80,000 people live within a 10-minute walk of the trail. More than 20,000 children attend dozens of schools close to the 606 and she hopes educators will create lessons that will link students to nature via the Bloomingdale Trail. She said more than 50,000 people attended the opening celebration and thousands now use it on a daily basis.

“Parks are now one of the building blocks for communities because they give people a place to be outside for both physical and psychological benefits, which are enormous,” she said. “There are economic benefits, too, because people like to live near parks. That’s why public spaces are being inserted into communities all over the country. They range from little pocket parks to what

## Parks are one of the building blocks for communities.

we are doing in Seattle, which is a 26-mile-long trail system that goes through three counties.”

In Dallas, the transformation of a former freeway into an innovative green space has been described as creating a “natural landscape that heals the urban fabric of the city.” It’s a conversion that has been years in the making. Planning for the Klyde Warren Park began more than a decade ago, said Peter Bratt, a manager in the Dallas Parks Department.

“Fortunately, when the freeway was built in the 1970s, they put it below grade, so capping seemed like something we could do,” he said. “A group called the Real Estate Council got things going with a grant of \$1 million to see if a deck park was possible and then other folks chipped in, including Texas Capital Bank with another \$1 million”

He said the total budget for the park was \$110 million. The city and the state Department of Transportation both put in \$10 million, another \$16.7 came from the federal Stimulus Program and the remainder came from the private donors. Oil magnate and Dallas resident Kelcy

Warren, a park aficionado, reportedly chipped in another \$10 million in 2012 and got to name the park after his then 9-year-old son.

“All in all, this effort — a great, public-private partnership model — produced a wonderful green space,” said Bratt.

The result is a 5.7-acre park in downtown Dallas with more than 300 trees and dozens of native plant species that seamlessly bridges an urban residential neighborhood that was seriously lacking in open space with an arts district with seven or eight museums and regional attractions. According to a downtown master plan updated in 2013, Dallas lags far behind peer cities such as Phoenix, Seattle and Minneapolis in terms of city center parks.

Being in tune with the natural world  
is essential for our well-being.



Courtesy of Visit Savannah

The park opened in the fall of 2012 and was immediately popular. It has a large lawn and a crescent sort of walkway in the park, he said, and trees and plantings interspersed with playgrounds, a splash park and a jungle gym, as well as seating on the south side where food trucks serve customers. The park features sustainable landscaping and unique design aspects such as trenches that act as planters and allow trees to grow to desired sizes and a combination of Geofoam and specially designed soil that is light weight and encourages growth.

There's also a facility where music acts can perform, and a restaurant, too, he noted. The park itself is run by the Woodall Rogers Foundation, which maintains it, brings in programming and does fundraising.

“I'm not sure of the numbers, but it gets a lot of office workers during the week who come here to have lunch or just take a break,” Bratt said. “And then on weekends, it gets families with kids, people visiting the city and a mish-mash of everyone else. The park has also sparked apartment and residential unit development. In addition, because the area has become more attractive, rental rates have gone up because people want to live near the park.

In Seattle, University of Washington urban forestry professor Kath Wolf said that desire to be near trees and open, green spaces may be part of our genetic makeup — dating back to the thousands of years humans spent their time as hunters and gatherers.

She said the “biophilia hypothesis” — first espoused by former Harvard professor Ed Wilson — argued that our evolutionary background left us with an affinity for nature.

“Being in tune with the natural world was — and still is — essential for our well-being,” she said. “We are hard-wired to be outdoors because that is where we lived for so long before we became urbanized. For millennia, we had a direct reliance on nature in terms of shelter materials, water, food, being safe vs. being at risk. Those are probably part of the mechanisms that we respond to positively in nature — and parks — today.”

Urban planners have for centuries recognized the beauty of trees, and many communities still have quaintly described “beautification committees” that have planting trees and getting people enthused about Arbor Day as part of their duties.

“Aesthetics are certainly important,” Wolf said. “But we now know from extensive research is that trees are also the lungs of our city and do a lot to improve air and water

quality and have other environmental benefits. Though there are some issues with pollen for certain folks, they also capture harmful particulates and pollutants that are swirling around in the air.”

But newer studies have shown the positive effects that trees and green spaces have on our mental health.

“We didn’t know that was going on,” she said. “Research, however, shows that just seeing green and trees lowers our stress response. People are also less depressed when they have consistent access to nature and trees in the city. In summary, what we have learned is that there are health benefits on many levels — some of it we are aware of and a lot we’re not.”

Wolf said her team at the University of Washington has also looked extensively at the economic impact of parks and trees. One study from Portland, Ore., showed that well-maintained trees had a positive impact on property values and that homes with attractive landscaping sold quicker.

“But just looking pretty doesn’t get you terribly far in debates about spending public money on parks,” she said. “When you can show that trees are good for our health, you’ll get a little farther with your argument. Though there are not as many studies about trees and productivity, some of the literature suggests that when workers can see trees, they have less sick days.

“In addition, having trees and quality landscaping in our everyday living environments is what appears to produce these results. This research indicates work productivity is higher, and that students in elementary and high schools and on college campuses have better attention to tasks and assignments on nicely landscaped campuses. So there is a whole range of these positives worth discussing.”

Wolf said she and her colleagues believe there are tree- and greenspace-linked “cradle to grave” benefits emerging from research.

“It started out as a bullet point here and a bullet point there,” she said. “But we now have so much research that we’ve summarized it on a website called Green Cities: Good Health ([greenhealth.washington.edu](http://greenhealth.washington.edu)).



*Klyde Warren Park in Dallas, Texas*



*Photo by Antrell Williams*

Well-maintained trees had a positive impact on property values and homes with attractive landscaping sold quicker.

## Cities are making strides to add trees and become greener.

“It’s much bigger than bullet points. From the moment we are born, it affects us. Studies show that trees and nature are connected to healthier infant birth weight to our last days when elders have better cognitive function if they have nature in their surroundings, including trees.”

Wolf said some cities — such as Portland, Ore.; Austin, Texas; New York; Chicago; Minneapolis; and St. Paul, Minn. — are making strides to add trees and become greener.

“They understand the health and environmental benefits,” she said. “So the first step to improving things is to understand what cities have. They can do this by using a tool called i-Tree for an urban tree canopy assessment. You can also do sampling by having people go out and do direct measurements or even by using aerial photos of satellite imagery or a radar-based sensor. Once you know that, you can begin to make informed management decisions to help plan where you want to go.”

She said the next question city leaders must ask is “how do we get there as a community?” While parks and open spaces are a key part of the puzzle, she said private property owners must be included in the discussions because they control the largest amount of land in cities.

But parks are important, she said, lauding Chicago’s new Bloomingdale Trail. “Other cities are using old railyards, riverfronts or areas cut off by freeways to turn into parks,” she said. “After the Bay Area earthquake knocked down San Francisco’s Embarcadero Freeway, the city chose not to rebuild it and instead turned that wharf area into a great civic space with squares and plazas and a palm-lined boulevard.”

Wolf said she has high hopes that civic leaders will seek to add more trees and parks to their communities.

“In a general sense, I’m positive because most people have a good, even emotional feeling about trees,” she said. “But there are still a lot of cities that don’t see an investment in trees as essential. Nice but not essential.”

“Unfortunately, too many people still think of nature as something outside cities in national parks or big forests. They think you have to get away from it all



Courtesy of USDA; photo by Lance Cheung



Photo by Jeff Krause

to experience these benefits — even though research shows that just a few minutes of just looking out your window or a short walk out the door away from your office in a quality green space is good for your physical and mental health.”

That means there is still work to be done, Wolf said.

“There is a gap, a ‘swamp’ where messages and perceptions don’t connect,” she said. “Some leaders don’t recognize that even ordinary single trees, small parks and trees along the street are worth the investment. So we need to keep the discussion going.” ●

Brian E. Clark is a Wisconsin-based journalist and a former staff writer on the business desk of The San Diego Union-Tribune. He is a contributor to the Los Angeles Times, Chicago Sun-Times, Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, Dallas Morning News and other publications.

# REALTORS® Take Action

Making Smart Growth Happen

## REALTORS® work to improve health and quality of life in communities across the country

“REALTORS® live, work and volunteer in their communities and take immense pride in working to improve them,” Ruth Link the CEO of the Missoula Organization of REALTORS® recently commented about a local playground project. But Ruth’s comments illustrate a core value of REALTORS® everywhere — concerned and active business leaders taking action and doing all they can to make their communities the best possible places to live.

REALTOR® Associations in Greenwood, South Carolina; Missoula, Montana; Cedar Rapids, Iowa; and Wilmington, North Carolina are actively promoting movement in their communities. Organizations in each city have used NAR Placemaking Micro-Grants to encourage healthy living and facilitate physical fitness in a variety

of ways. The results are parks and green spaces that provide a variety of fitness options and healthy living choices for users of all ages and abilities. These efforts are truly improving local communities.

### REALTORS® Trail in Greenwood, South Carolina

The Greenwood Association of REALTORS® has taken the lead in helping convert 54 acres of prime, but underutilized, green space near the city’s heart into the Grace Street Park. When completed, the park — located around an artesian well that was the city’s original water source — will feature walking trails, a dog park, pavilions, playgrounds and even a water feature.

Greenwood REALTORS® donated funds and participated in a work day in creating a walking trail around





a lovely pond that is known as REALTORS® Trail. The trail has become a popular park destination and was recently used in a community wellness event. Their commitment goes well beyond the initial trail development. Greenwood REALTORS® also made a 10-year financial and manpower commitment for the maintenance of REALTORS® Trail. Funds from an NAR Placemaking Grant are assisting with park development of the historically popular, but under-used green space.

Greenwood's Mayor Welborn Adams told the Greenwood Index-Journal that parks are essential to the community and public/private efforts such as the development of the Grace Street Park not only benefit current residents, but will encourage many young people to stay and live in Greenwood. Park planners agree that the fact that Greenwood REALTORS® have been at the forefront of the park's development has prompted greater involvement by other groups and significantly helped the project move forward.

Kim Clark, past president of the Greenwood Association of REALTORS®, explained to a reporter with the online GWDToday why Greenwood REALTORS® are so committed to the creation of the Grace Street Park. "We see this as a once in a lifetime opportunity to share with our community. We are well aware that Greenwood is growing and it's thrilling to welcome our new neighbors and industries with REALTORS® Trail."

### **Missoula, Montana REALTORS® promote activities for all abilities**

In Missoula, REALTORS® have contributed money and muscle to make sure all residents — no matter their physical abilities — feel welcome and have access to parks and recreational facilities. Three years of planning, fundraising and sweat equity have helped create the Silver Summit playground, the city's first all-abilities playground.



*The Silver Summit playground; Missoula, Montana's first all-abilities playground.*



"As the parent of a child with special needs, this playground is very near and dear to me and my family," says Brint Wahlberg, past president of the Missoula Organization of REALTORS®. "REALTORS® want to give back to the community and this is one way we can help make Missoula a better place in which to live and raise our families."

An NAR Placemaking Grant helped make the all-abilities playground one of the most accessible parks in the state. The playground features equipment designed so that children, regardless of their ability level, can play together. The park features a merry-go-round that is wheelchair accessible, swings with additional supports, an overlook, a sensory play area and a climbing feature that lets any child feel like king of the hill. Rubberized surfaces make navigating the play area easier. Plenty of green space allows children to take a break and recharge and then return and play more.

# REALTORS® Take Action

## Making Smart Growth Happen

Children with a variety of ability issues shared suggestions for the park's amenities and visually impaired children helped select the park equipment's color scheme. Community groups pitched in and helped build the park. Missoula REALTORS® helped install equipment, dig holes and pour concrete. Wahlberg said that so many REALTORS® volunteered to help build the park that there was a waiting list of workers.

### Staying fit and healthy in Cedar Rapids, Iowa

Cedar Rapids calls itself a City of Five Seasons, where the fifth season means taking time to enjoy the other four. Folks living in Cedar Rapids pride themselves on staying active and in 2014 were recognized in the Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index as living in the ninth healthiest small city in the country.

The Cedar Rapids Area Association of REALTORS® and the Iowa Association of REALTORS® are ensuring that Cedar Rapids residents stay healthy, active and fit. REALTORS® used local and NAR funds to create a fitness zone at a city park that previously lacked most recreational amenities. The fitness zone at the city's Cherokee Park includes six outdoor exercise stations.

“We know that placing outdoor exercise equipment in parks has a substantial impact on park users. Typically people use the park more and are more active when they are in the park. We are thrilled that the Iowa Association of REALTORS® made this fitness zone possible for the public,” says Sven Leff, Cedar Rapids Parks and Recreation Director.

The REALTOR® Associations, with the help of an NAR Placemaking Grant, not only contributed to the installation of the fitness zone, but when the project's progress was stalled, local REALTORS® conducted additional



The Health Beat outdoor exercise equipment in Cherokee Park in Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

fundraising and lined up a local concrete contractor in order to quickly complete the park.

### **Growing relationships in Wilmington, North Carolina**

REALTORS® in Wilmington are promoting physical fitness in a very down-to-earth fashion and, at the same time, are helping build a sense of community. Some of the city's newest residents are benefitting from the city's new community garden.

Located on a previously unused lot owned by the Devon Park United Methodist Church (UMC), this community garden serves 13 refugee families from Myanmar, — formerly known as Burma — four neighborhood families and a local church. The garden's 18 raised beds not only provide a source of fresh produce for the local gardeners, but are helping plant the seeds of a greater community connection.

Evan McMillan, former community affairs director for the Wilmington Regional Association of REALTORS® (WRAR) wrote in a blog posted in Placemaking in Action that “the garden will be a way for the refugees to feel at home in their new neighborhood and to create community cohesion, bringing people of varying backgrounds together through a shared love of gardening and of place.”

WRAR partnered with the Wilmington Housing Authority, Wilmington Green — a local nonprofit — and the Interfaith Refugee Ministry to help create a sustainable model for community gardens in the Wilmington area. An NAR Placemaking Grant is helping support and create opportunities for community engagement with the development of the Devon Park UMC Community Garden. Funds have been used to purchase wood for raised garden beds, tools, soil, seeds and



starter plants. Nearly 90 local REALTORS® also pitched in and helped build the garden.

Sara Pascal, who coordinates the Wilmington office of Interfaith Refugee Ministries, says the garden is an important food source for the refugees, many of whom don't drive and would have trouble getting access to fresh produce. It also helps bring together the neighborhood through gardening and a shared community 'backyard'.

Across the country, parks and green spaces promote fitness and activity and provide community connections. REALTORS® in Montana, Iowa, the Carolinas and all points in between are working together to help create beautiful and functional public green spaces that benefit everyone living in the community. ●



REALTORS® & Smart Growth

on common ground



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