LAND USE AND PLANNING

Guide to Planning Healthy Neighborhoods

ILG INSTITUTE FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT

LAND USE AND PLANNING

GUIDE TO PLANNING HEALTHY NEIGHBORHOODS

List of Figures

About This Guide

Local officials can provide leadership in many ways to create healthy neighborhoods.

This guide:

- Identifies the reasons to be concerned about the relationship between health and the built environment;

- Offers options for transforming that concern into a vision for a healthier community; and

- Provides strategies and examples of how to translate that vision into action.

Resources to help readers learn more about particular topics are highlighted throughout the guide and gathered into a Resources for Further Information section at the guide's end. In addition, endnotes and legal citations are included for those who wish to explore issues in more detail. The guide also includes an index.

Introduction

Throughout California, city and county officials make planning, policy and land-use decisions on a weekly basis. Typical issues that local officials might confront include the following:

- Can downtown be revitalized by providing a mix of commercial, retail and residential uses?

- Should a new town-home project be approved to replace a group of old industrial warehouses?

- How can streets and sidewalks be designed so that people of varied ages and abilities can safely walk, bike or wheel to school, work and shopping?

- What can be done so that farms and ranches near the community remain productive and economically viable?

- How could buildings be constructed to conserve natural resources, maximize energy efficiency and create healthy indoor environmental quality for their occupants?

Local officials understand that decisions such as these affect their community's development. Many also recognize that land-use decisions can have profound effects on residents' health. A community's physical design and mix of land uses can create barriers to healthy eating and physical activity. Land use and transportation facilities can expose some individuals to indoor and outdoor environmental pollutants. These in turn can contribute to increased rates of obesity, diabetes, heart disease, asthma and other serious health conditions.[1]

Local officials have many reasons to be concerned about the health of their community. Healthy residents are more actively engaged in community life. A healthy work force is attractive to current and potential employers who want to invest in the community. In addition, many local agencies — particularly counties — are responsible for serving the health, welfare and public safety needs of residents. Healthier residents reduce the pressure on tight local budgets to pay for health and social services, public safety, parks and recreation programs, transportation and transit and a number of other local services and facilities.

Chapter 1.
Health and the
Built Environment

Land use can influence health outcomes positively by presenting opportunities for healthy behavior or negatively by restricting access to healthy options. Key land-use characteristics that affect health include:

- Patterns of land use within a community;

- The design and construction of spaces and buildings within a community; and

- The transportation systems that connect people to places.

The leading causes of death in the United States have shifted from infectious and communicable diseases to chronic diseases: medical conditions that are long-lasting, persistent or recurrent. Physical activity and proper nutrition can largely prevent many chronic diseases, such as heart disease and type 2 diabetes. In response to the rising rates of chronic disease, many local agencies are adopting land-use measures that facilitate healthy eating and active living.

Local authority to regulate land use derives from the police power — the prerogative to act to promote the health, safety and welfare of the community. Historically local agencies have pioneered efforts to protect health and safety. For example, beginning in the early 1900s, municipalities established sewer systems and sanitation facilities to control waste and reduce infectious disease. These local efforts eventually led to state and federal sanitation and water-quality policies. More recently, state restrictions on air pollution and smoking grew out of local initiatives to protect public health.

A Short History Of Health And The Built Environment

The industrial era of the 19th and early 20th centuries created cities that provided economic opportunity to millions of foreign immigrants and migrants from rural and small-town America. But with so many people moving into cities, overcrowding, poor sanitation, substandard housing and high poverty rates contributed to widespread outbreaks of infectious diseases, such as cholera and tuberculosis. The new professions of public health and urban planning developed in response to the desire to improve living conditions in growing urban centers.

Sanitation Reform

The discovery of bacteria led to an understanding of the role of microbes in disease transmission. To stem the spread of disease, municipalities worked to create more sanitary conditions. Cities installed sanitary sewers and water-treatment systems. Local agencies cleaned streets and removed trash and contaminated waste. Establishing the most basic public health institutions — state boards of health and associations representing medical professionals — helped spur these sanitation reform efforts.

Land-Use Regulation

The emerging planning and public health professions saw crowded urban communities as unsafe and unhealthy places. Neighborhoods with tall tenements and narrow crowded streets lacked trees and green spaces and didn't allow fresh air and sunlight into homes. Disease was easily transmitted between individuals. Residents were exposed to noxious fumes, noise, chemicals and waste from nearby industries.

Planners sought to change these unpleasant realities. The United States adapted the European practice of zoning to regulate land uses for protecting community health, safety and welfare. Incompatible land uses, such as homes, stables, workshops and factories, were separated. Residents moved from dense urban tenements into single-family, detached homes in the suburbs. Zoning decentralized the city with the goal of improved health and quality of life.[2]

A 1926 U.S. Supreme Court case recognized the constitutional authority of municipalities to use zoning to separate land uses.[3] While

this decision was based on the health and safety benefits for residents, one consequence was the creation of homogeneous neighborhoods where people with similar incomes and backgrounds had the means to settle. Employment centers, shopping facilities and homes grew farther apart. This era of zoning practice, accompanied in many cases by deed restrictions barring some homebuyers based on race, religion or ethnicity, resulted in the economic and racial segregation of neighborhoods that persists in many areas, further exacerbating the health disparities many communities experience today.[4]

Post-War Development

The post-World War II housing boom resulted in the rapid construction of low-density developments built on the periphery of pre-war suburban neighborhoods. Unlike the pre-war "streetcar suburbs" that were connected to urban centers by transit, these new neighborhoods were designed with widespread auto ownership in mind. As neighborhoods become less dense and expanded outward, traveling by car became the norm. Transportation investments favored auto travel over the needs of pedestrians, bicyclists and transit riders.[5]

Where We Are Today

The land-use laws and regulations that created the contemporary landscape were instrumental in preventing factories from locating in residential neighborhoods and protecting residents from infectious diseases. Today, these same laws and regulations provide local agencies with powerful policy tools that can be employed to reverse the unintended consequences of traditional post-war planning and land-use practices. In the process, the fields of planning and public health are once again partners in creating healthier communities.

How Planning and Community Design Affect Health

Physical Activity

Along with a healthy diet, physical activity can help protect individuals against many chronic diseases. People can incorporate daily activity into their lives by walking and bicycling to school, work or public transit. Providing facilities and trails and paths for recreational walking and biking encourages residents to spend time outdoors and be active. Facilities that are well lit, easily accessible to residential centers, and aesthetically appealing typically attract more use. [6]

Food and Nutrition

Coupled with declining rates of physical activity, obstacles to accessing healthy and nutritious food have contributed to rising levels of chronic disease, overweight and obesity. Consumption of foods high in fat and calories has soared while access to quality fresh fruits and vegetables has declined. [7]

Myriad environmental, social, political and economic factors influence food choice. For example, the presence of a full-service grocery store in a neighborhood correlates with higher rates of fruit and vegetable consumption. This in turn helps lower the incidence and severity of disease and hunger. [8]

Urban centers, rural communities and older suburban neighborhoods often lack full-service grocery stores nearby. Their residents must rely on corner markets, convenience stores and fast-food restaurants. These small stores offer limited selections of healthy, fresh foods and cost more than full-service groceries.[9] The Retail Food Environment Index (RFEI) measures the ratio of these small stores to full-service grocery stores and produce markets.[10] The higher the ratio, the more likely it is that residents are obese and diabetic.[11]

TO LEARN MORE

Visit the Institute's website to access these resources.

www.ca-ilg.org/HNGuide#Chapter1

Promoting Physical Activity and Active Living in Urban Environments: The Role of Local Government, The World Health Organization

Community Design: A Toolkit for Building Physical Activity into Daily Life, Metropolitan Design Center, College of Architecture and Landscape Architecture, University of Minnesota

Community Health and Food Access: The Local Government Role, International City/County Management Association

Food Access Solutions to Create Healthy Counties, National Association of Counties

Designed for Disease: The Link Between Local Food Environments and Obesity and Diabetes, California Center for Public Health Advocacy, PolicyLink, and the UCLA Center for Health Policy Research

Counties and Local Food Systems: Ensuring Healthy Foods, Nurturing Healthy Children, National Association of Counties

The Planner's Guide to the Urban Food System, University of Southern California School of Policy, Planning, and Development, Center for Sustainable Cities

Policy Guide on Community and Regional Food System Planning, American Planning Association

Air Quality

Air pollution is especially harmful to the elderly and the very young, as well as those who exercise outdoors, or have respiratory conditions and spend more time breathing polluted air. This includes people living close to freeways and ports, workers exposed to air pollution at their jobs and those living in homes with compromised indoor air quality.

Air pollutants come from three types of sources:

1. Area sources, such as dry cleaners and lawn mowers;

2. Stationary sources, such as factories and power plants; and

3. Mobile sources, such as cars and trucks.

Planning decisions and land-use patterns greatly influence stationary and mobile sources of air pollution. For example, both stationary sources and auto traffic can create local air pollution "hot spots." Locating stationary sources away from vulnerable populations is one way to avoid exposing people to high levels of pollution. Other land-use strategies that can improve air quality include planting and maintaining greenery and urban forests and conserving open space.[12]

Because transportation is a major source of air pollution, planning and land-use strategies that reduce the number and length of automobile trips are key to improving public health. Short automobile trips in urban settings generate more pollution per mile but also have the highest potential to be replaced by walking or biking. However, increasing cycling and walking (sometimes referred to as active transportation) requires safe, appealing and feasible routes to make these choices convenient and pleasant for residents.

TO LEARN MORE

Visit the Institute's website to access these resources.

www.ca-ilg.org/HNGuide#Chapter1

Funding Open Space Acquisition Programs, Institute for Local Government

The Farmland Protection Action Guide: 24 Strategies for California, Institute for Local Government

Understanding the Habitat Conservation Planning Process in California: A Guidebook for Project and Regional Conservation Planning, Institute for Local Government

Trees – The Air Pollution Solution, United States Department of Agriculture, Center for Urban Forest Research

Influencing Air Quality with Comprehensive Planning and Ordinances, Design for Health, University of Minnesota

Traffic Safety

Policies and design guidelines that facilitate bike and foot travel can save lives and reduce injuries. More than 50 percent of all fatal vehicle crashes occur on wide, high-volume, high-speed arterials.[13] Increasing crosswalk visibility, narrowing arterials, adding shade trees and landscaping, slowing traffic and adding other "traffic-calming" features makes walking safer — a key determinant in people's activity levels.[14]

Transportation facilities and networks serve a variety of users, including:

- Auto drivers;
- Transit riders;
- Residents who no longer drive or are too young to drive;
- People with disabilities that prevent them from driving;
- Residents who choose not to drive; and
- Residents who cannot afford to own and operate a vehicle.

More than one-third of U.S. residents are younger than age 16 or older than age 65. Many of these individuals may not be able to legally drive or face increasing challenges in their ability to operate a vehicle.[15] From 1969 to 2001, the percentage of students walking and bicycling to school declined dramatically from 41 percent to 13 percent, while the percentage of children being driven or driving themselves to school nearly tripled, from 20 percent to 55 percent.[16]

By 2020, California is projected to lead the nation in the number of residents age 65 years and older.[17] Providing transportation options to serve all modes of travel supports mobility for people throughout their lifespan, makes transportation less dangerous and contributes to positive health outcomes.
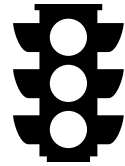
TO LEARN MORE

Visit the Institute's website to access these resources.

www.ca-ilg.org/HNGuide#Chapter1

Aging Well in Communities: A Toolkit for Planning, Engagement, and Action, The Center for Civic Partnerships

CDC Recommendations for Improving Health through Transportation Policy, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

How to Develop a Pedestrian Safety Action Plan, U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration
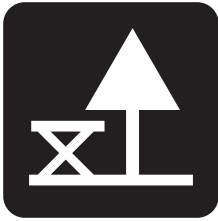
Access to Parks and Open Space

Studies show that providing adequate access to safe parks increases physical activity. Residents living close to parks or with access to more parks are more likely to use them and be physically active.[18]

The decision to use a park is based in part on the individual's perception of safety and aesthetic appeal.[19] Parks that offer paved trails, playground facilities, basketball or tennis courts, sports fields, running tracks, multipurpose rooms or swimming pools are used more often and for longer periods.[20]

Residents of neighborhoods that lack park and recreation facilities are more likely to exhibit health disparities.[21] Increasing park acreage and facilities per capita and improving access to existing parks are important ways to support physical activity. For example, many communities are partnering with school districts on joint-use agreements that make school grounds available outside of school hours to students, their families and other neighborhood residents.[22]

TO LEARN MORE

Visit the Institute's website to access these resources.

www.ca-ilg.org/HNGuide#Chapter1

County Health and County Park and Recreation Department Partnerships to Create Active Healthy Communities, National Association of Counties

Policy Brief: Healthy Parks, Healthy Communities, The Trust for Public Land

Health and Equity

Residents of economically disadvantaged neighborhoods have disproportionate rates of overweight and obesity and the diseases and health conditions associated with these risk factors.[23] These significant differences in the rates of disease from one population to another indicate a health disparity. Health disparities are the gaps experienced by different population groups in measures of health and quality of life.

Acknowledging the challenges and identifying the needs of disadvantaged neighborhoods is an important step when looking at ways to create a healthier community. Neighborhoods with higher proportions of economically disadvantaged residents are typically the same neighborhoods that report higher rates of pedestrian injury, obesity and asthma — and less access to safe parks and healthy, affordable retail food options.[24]

Local officials can work with community leaders on strategies that reduce harm to less affluent populations and increase community resiliency. As needs are identified — such as limited park space, unsafe or inadequate transportation infrastructure and a shortage of safe, affordable housing — residents and local officials alike can identify solutions to improve conditions.

TO LEARN MORE

Visit the Institute's website to access these resources.

www.ca-ilg.org/HNGuide#Chapter1

Healthy Eating & Physical Activity: Addressing Inequities in Urban Environments, Prevention Institute

Leveraging Land Use and Economic Development Practices to Improve Health Disparities, California Health Policy Forum

Active Living and Social Equity: Creating Healthy Communities for All Residents, International City/County Management Association
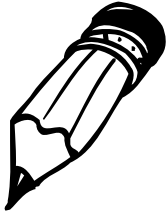
Local Officials as Leaders in Planning Healthy Neighborhoods

As decision-makers, local officials can play a critical leadership role in efforts to improve community health, because there are so many ways that local decisions can affect residents' health and well-being.

A wide array of local officials — those elected to serve on the city council or county board of supervisors, residents serving on advisory boards and commissions as well as local agency administrators and staff — have many opportunities to integrate health considerations into local programs and policy decisions. Some of the most important types of local decisions with health implications are outlined below.

How local officials choose to plan and lay out communities — through the general plan, zoning and other land-use regulations — affects health. For example, if homes, stores, schools and other places people need to go are near one another and connected by safe and convenient walking and bicycling routes, people are more likely to walk or bike than if these amenities are located farther from one another.

Studies show that when residents take advantage of these opportunities to increase their everyday activity, it reduces their risks of obesity, diabetes and other chronic health conditions.[25] Spending less time in cars gives people more free time to spend with their families and communities, which can improve emotional well-being. [26]

Decisions on how buildings are designed, constructed and renovated have implications for health. Many communities have established architectural standards, green building requirements and other local policies that affect the health and safety of residents and tenants. For example, incorporating "universal design" principles into residential construction — such as simply requiring that at least one entry to each new or renovated residence be accessible for people with disabilities — can make a neighborhood safer for people of all ages and abilities.

Decisions on the type and character of public facilities and infrastructure affect the health and safety of residents. For example, neighborhood streets that carry fast auto traffic can be modified through traffic-calming measures to slow vehicle speeds. "Complete streets"

programs can provide safe routes for vehicles, bicycles, pedestrians and people with disabilities (for more about complete streets, see "An Overview of Planning Concepts for Health and the Built Environment" on page 16). These programs can help seniors and those with limited mobility cross busy streets and make it easier for children to safely walk and bike to school. As a result, the rate of injuries and deaths from traffic accidents typically declines.[27]

Decisions about the programs that are funded through the city or county budget can affect health. This applies to decisions beyond those typically thought of as health related, such as funding for clinics, senior meals and other traditional health and social services. For example, responding to a local budget crunch by closing parks or limiting the hours they are open can make it more difficult for residents to be physically active, even in neighborhoods where quality recreational facilities can be safely reached by biking or walking. This in turn can lead to declines in levels of health and fitness.

TO LEARN MORE

Visit the Institute's website to access these resources.

www.ca-ilg.org/HNGuide#Chapter1

Local Government Actions to Prevent Childhood Obesity, Institute of Medicine

Rural Obesity: Strategies to Support Rural Counties in Building Capacity, National Association of Counties

Action Strategies Toolkit: A Guide for Local and State Leaders Working to Create Healthy Communities and Prevent Childhood Obesity, Leadership for Healthy Communities, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

Fact Sheet: Why Adopt an Obesity Prevention Resolution? Public Health Law & Policy, National Policy & Legal Analysis Network to Prevent Childhood Obesity

Promoting and Protecting Healthy Communities: A City Officials Guide to Public Health, National Association of City and County Health Officials
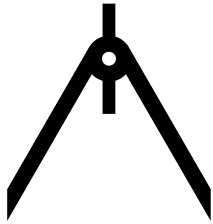
The Evolving Field of Land-Use Planning

The fields of land-use planning and community development have evolved in the past several decades to address a number of rising concerns. Some of the issues that have spurred changes in the way that communities are planned and built include:

- Longer commutes, rising gasoline prices, growing traffic congestion and declining mobility;

- Loss of farmland, wildlife habitat and natural resources as low-density development spreads into formerly undeveloped areas;

- Air-quality and climate-change issues associated with vehicle emissions and energy use in buildings;

- Inefficient water use and water-intensive plant selections in traditional landscaping;

- Investments in infrastructure and services that can't keep pace with growth and the need for maintenance and replacement; and

- Changes in the nature and location of work, along with a declining economic base in older urban and suburban neighborhoods as jobs and businesses shift to newer areas or leave the region altogether.

As the field of urban planning has evolved, issues that were once peripheral to planning have become more central. For example, concern about the environmental consequences of land use spurred policies and procedures to ensure that decision-makers and the public understand the environmental effects of decisions and that officials take steps to minimize or avoid environmental damage.

Demographic trends have also spurred changes in the types of housing and neighborhoods that people seek at each stage of their lives. These trends include changing family patterns, such as an increase in the number of smaller households, growing numbers of households with three or more generations under one roof and "downsizing" by empty-nest couples and retirees.

In fact, the fastest population growth is occurring at both ends of the age continuum, among young people and the elderly. Squeezed in between these two growing groups is a busy "sandwich generation" of middle-aged adults, many of whom are

caring for children, grandchildren or elderly parents. As a result of these demographic changes, local communities have found that they must plan for new patterns of land use and transportation and a wider variety of types of development.

Concerns about the relationship between health and the built environment are increasingly reflected in land-use planning. Local communities are working to invigorate downtowns and main streets, retrofit auto-oriented suburbs, find new uses for old strip malls and shopping centers and build new neighborhoods that work socially, economically and environmentally. Many efforts like these are motivated in part by a desire to create healthier and safer communities where residents have more opportunities to be physically active and have access to a variety of nutritious foods.

An Overview of Planning Concepts for Health and the Built Environment

These commonly used planning and land-use terms and concepts relate to creating healthy neighborhoods.

Active Living Community: A community designed to provide opportunities for people of all ages and abilities to incorporate physical activity into their daily routines.

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA): A federal law, for the purposes of planning and land use, that generally requires businesses and public facilities and conveyances be accessible to individuals with disabilities.

Complete Streets: Streets designed to accommodate all modes of travel and enable safe access for all users. Pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists and transit riders of all ages and abilities are able to safely move along and across a complete street.

Defensible Space: Open spaces, entry points and pathways configured to provide maximum opportunities for rightful users and/or residents to defend themselves against intruders and criminal activity.

Form-Based Codes: A method of regulating development to achieve a specific urban form primarily by controlling physical form, with a lesser focus on land use. Form-based codes address the relationship between building facades and the public realm, the form and mass of buildings in relation to one another and to the scale and types of streets and blocks.

Health Impact Assessment: A combination of procedures, methods and tools by which a policy, program or project may be judged in terms of its potential effects on the health of a population and the distribution of those effects within the population.

Neo-Traditional Development: Based on the characteristics typical of pre-World War II communities, neo-traditional development emphasizes distinct urban areas, each with its own commercial core and linked to one another by some form of transit. In addition to a central downtown, the many neighborhood centers provide a secondary service area that can be reached on foot from people's homes.
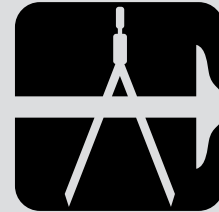
New Urbanism: A design philosophy intended to create a strong sense of community by incorporating features of traditional small towns or urban neighborhoods. Compact, walkable neighborhoods with active streets are a key hallmark of new urbanism.

Smart Growth: A planning approach to discourage suburban sprawl at the periphery of a region. Smart growth facilitates infill and redevelopment of existing urban areas and is characterized by mixed uses, a range of densities and multimodal transportation options.

Sustainable Development: 1. A pattern of physical development and resource use that aims to meet human needs while preserving the environment, often described as development meeting present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. 2. Physical development that simultaneously provides for economic prosperity, environmental quality and social equity.

Traffic Calming: A strategic set of physical changes to streets to reduce vehicle speeds and volumes. It refers to the use of street design techniques, such as curb extensions, widened sidewalks, traffic circles and speed humps, to slow and control the flow of automobile traffic.

Transit-Oriented Development: Moderate- to higher-density development, located within easy walk of a major transit stop, generally with a mix of residential, employment and shopping opportunities designed for pedestrians without excluding the auto.

TO LEARN MORE

Visit the Institute's website to access this resource.

www.ca-ilg.org/landusepubs

Understanding the Basics of Land Use and Planning: Glossary of Land Use and Planning Terms, Institute for Local Government, 2010

Chapter 2. The Healthy Planning Toolkit
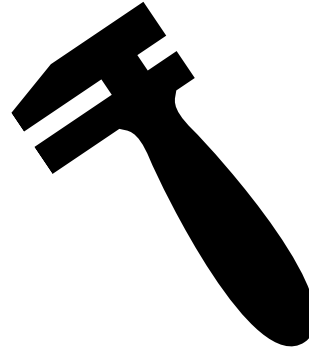
Cities and counties make planning and land-use decisions, both small and large, that can enhance health. This section describes a number of ways that local officials can integrate health concerns into the planning and land-use decisions they regularly make.

The toolkit is divided into these sections:

- Planning, Zoning and Environmental Review Tools;

- Economic Development and Redevelopment Tools;

- Public Facilities and Services; and

- Code Compliance and Enforcement Tools.

The toolkit also provides examples of strategies that local agencies can employ on a range of issues to promote healthy neighborhoods. Ideas for action in the following areas are covered in the toolkit:

- Transportation planning and community design;

- Housing and health;

- Food and nutrition; and

- Public safety.

Planning, Zoning and Environmental Review Tools

The General Plan

The general plan forms the foundation of local land-use planning.[28] When an agency adopts a general plan, it creates a vision for the foreseeable planning horizon — usually 10 to 20 years — and translates that vision into objectives, goals, policies and implementation programs for the community's physical development.

When a city or county embarks on an effort to revise or update its general plan, local officials have the opportunity to weave health considerations throughout the plan's elements. But health concerns can be included in the general plan in ways that are less time-consuming and costly than a full update or revision. For example, communities can opt to revise a particular general plan element or add a new element. In recent years, some communities have added an optional health element to their general plan. Other communities have used the process for amending their existing general plan to address the linkages between health and the built environment.

Other Local Plans

Cities and counties can also adopt **community plans** for specific neighborhoods or districts where issues of health, physical activity or nutrition are particularly important. Community plans are part of the general plan and allow a city or county to concentrate on the most salient issues, such as health, and develop planning strategies and actions best suited for specific communities. This can avoid the time and expense involved in revising or updating the general plan as a whole.

Unlike general plans, **specific plans** are optional. They are flexible planning tools often used for larger areas, such as a downtown or a major transportation corridor, to encourage comprehensive planning. While not technically a part of the general plan as are community plans, specific plans must be consistent with the general plan.

Cities and counties may establish a redevelopment agency to act as a catalyst for revitalizing blighted areas. Redevelopment agencies create a **redevelopment plan** outlining the programs and strategies the agency will employ to redevelop the areas included in its territory. Redevelopment plans must be consistent with the general plan.

Ideas for Action:
Transportation Planning and Community Design

A strong link exists between how a community is designed and the transportation choices people make.[29] For example, most Americans generally consider a 10-minute or quarter-mile walk a reasonable distance to reach a transit stop, public park, neighborhood shop or other nearby destination.[30]

Older neighborhoods tend to have shorter blocks and streets laid out in a grid that are convenient for pedestrians and encourage walking. New developments can be designed with similar features.

Long distances and traffic hazards are the top two barriers that prevent children from walking or biking to school.[31] Cities and counties can work with school districts to site schools within walking distance of most students' homes. Local agencies can also partner with schools to participate in state and federal Safe Routes to School funding opportunities and programs.[32]

Complete streets that include sidewalk improvements and bike lanes are among the most effective policy options for encouraging bicycling and walking.[33] Sidewalk improvements or additions, well-designed crosswalks and measures that reduce traffic speeds and volumes can make active commutes to school, work and shopping safer and more attractive for families.[34]

Bike storage and parking is essential to aid commuters on multimodal trips that include biking and walking or transit. Just as secure and convenient parking is necessary for vehicles, cyclists require similar facilities to support their trips.

TO LEARN MORE

Visit the Institute's website to access these resources.

www.ca-ilg.org/HNGuide#Chapter2

The Economic Benefits of Open Space, Recreation Facilities and Walkable Community Design, Active Living Research, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

Transportation Solutions to Create Active, Healthy Counties, National Association of Counties

The general plan and other local plans can be used in a variety of ways to create healthier neighborhoods. Two of the most important are increasing access to parks and improving the environment for walking and bicycling.

Steps to increase access to parks include the following:

- Local plans can establish enhanced development standards pertaining to park dedications, the size of neighborhood parks and their proximity to residences; and

- The general plan's circulation element can include policies and actions to connect parks and recreational facilities with a network of safe and continuous on-street and off-street bicycle routes.

Steps to improve the walking and bicycling environment include the following:

- Many neighborhoods are designed with circuitous streets and cul-de-sacs that limit people's ability to reach places conveniently on foot or by bicycle. Local plans can require that new developments are served by interconnected grids or networks of local streets. Dispersing traffic throughout a network of connected streets can give drivers many options for moving through the neighborhood and ensure that particular local streets are not overburdened by heavy traffic volumes.

- Many neighborhoods are isolated from one another by boundaries of arterial streets with few points of access and high traffic speeds and volume. Local plans can include policies and actions to provide sidewalks and bicycle routes to connect formerly isolated neighborhoods. Many local agencies have developed a Pedestrian and Bicycle Master Plan to guide long-term planning and capital improvements.

- Local plans can encourage or require new developments to include facilities that serve pedestrians and bicyclists, such as landscaped walkways through parking lots and secure parking for bicycles as well as autos.

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Visit the Institute's website to access these resources.

www.ca-ilg.org/HNGuide#Chapter2

Understanding the Basics of Land Use and Planning: Guide to Local Planning, Institute for Local Government

Understanding the Basics of Land Use and Planning: Glossary of Land Use and Planning Terms, Institute for Local Government

About General Plan Amendments, Institute for Local Government. This one-pager explains 1) what a "general plan amendment" is, 2) how general plan amendments fit into efforts to shape communities, and 3) how to participate in the decision-making process. Available in English and Spanish.

About Specific Plans, Institute for Local Government. This one-pager explains 1) what a "specific plan" is, 2) how specific plans fit into efforts to shape communities, and 3) how to participate in the decision-making process. Available in English and Spanish.

Planning and Land Use Solutions to Create Active, Healthy Counties, National Association of Counties

Smart Growth at the Frontier: Strategies and Resources for Rural Communities, Northeast – Midwest Institute

General Plans and Zoning: A Toolkit on Land Use and Health, Public Health Law & Policy

Healthy Planning Policies: A Compendium from California General Plans, Public Health Law & Policy

Regional Planning

While land-use planning is primarily a local responsibility, some issues related to land use and development transcend local boundaries. For example, California has established agencies to develop regional plans and programs to address transportation and air quality, two issues integrally related to public health. These agencies are governed by local officials selected by their peers to serve on agency boards.

Regional agencies work closely with the cities and counties in their region. As a consequence, local officials have a unique opportunity to raise health considerations in the regional planning process. Three of the most significant regional plans that affect the health of residents in local communities include:

1. The regional transportation plan and sustainable communities strategy;

2. The regional air quality management plan; and

3. The regional housing needs assessment.

In an effort to reduce greenhouse gases from motor vehicle trips, recent legislation (SB 375, Steinberg, 2008) modified the process that regional agencies use to develop plans for transportation and housing.[35]

By understanding how regional plans are developed and the role they play in guiding programs and investments in the region, local officials can have an impact on issues related to health and the built environment that extend beyond the boundaries of their individual jurisdictions.

TO LEARN MORE

Visit the Institute's website to access these resources.

www.ca-ilg.org/regionalplanning

The Institute for Local Government's online resource center on regional planning provides information on the role regional planning plays in public health and how local officials and residents can participate in the regional planning process.
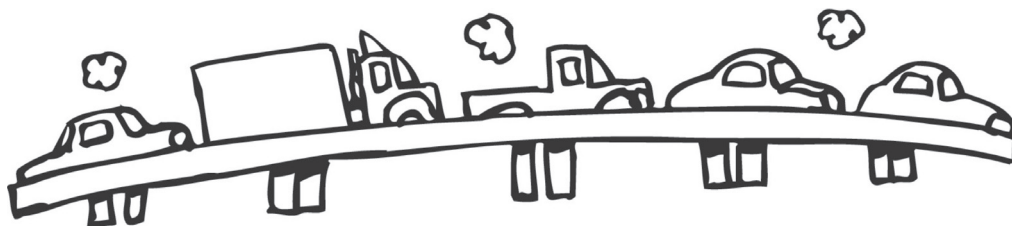
▶ Local Climate Action Plans
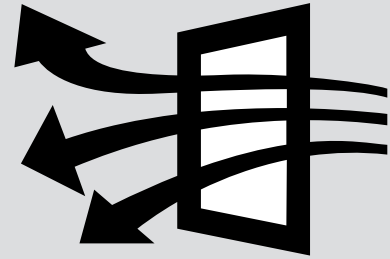
Climate change — sometimes referred to as global warming —
has emerged in recent years as an important focus of local
planning. Cities and counties are choosing to address the causes
and consequences of climate change for a variety of reasons, including public health. Some of
the potential health effects of climate change in California include increased heat-related deaths
(especially in the rapidly growing inland valley and desert regions); higher risks of death and injury
from more severe flooding, fires and storms; increased air pollution; and changes in the distribution or
characteristics of infectious diseases and their carriers.[36]

In recent years cities and counties have begun to develop plans for reducing the generation of greenhouse
gases that leads to climate change and to address the potential risks and hazards that rapid climate
change can pose to local communities. Commonly referred to as climate action plans, these efforts take
a variety of forms and approaches. Land-use and transportation strategies often include efforts to reduce
vehicle miles traveled, manage transportation demand and improve the jobs-housing balance.

Communities can use a climate action plan as a tool to understand how risks to health may change
in the future and what steps can be taken to ensure that health risks are managed, reduced or
avoided. The plans also provide insight into various co-benefits, including those related to individual
and community health and well-being, which can result from strategies to reduce greenhouse gas
emissions and adapt to changing climate conditions.

Climate action plans typically include an inventory of greenhouse gas emissions within the
community, an emissions target, and a series of actions and goals the community proposes to take
to reduce emissions. Such plans may also include an assessment of the hazards posed by climate
change, such as flood risks from rising water levels, effects on water quality and supply, or the
number and severity of wildfires, along with measures the community and its residents can take to
address the hazards.

TO LEARN MORE

The Institute for Local Government's California Climate Action Network helps local agencies play a
leadership role in responding to the challenges of climate change. Information is available on the
Institute's website at www.ca-ilg.org/climatechange and includes a useful publication titled *Climate
Change and Public Health: An Overview for Local Officials.*

Zoning and Conditional Use Permits

Zoning implements the general plan; it separates a community into districts, or "zones," that regulate land uses and the intensity of development. A zoning designation is assigned to every legally defined parcel within a zone in the community. A zoning map shows officials and the public the location of the various zones, and the zoning code specifies which uses are permitted in those zones and the standards that apply to each use.

The original impetus behind zoning was to protect public health and welfare by ensuring that neighboring land uses are compatible. For example, residential uses are generally incompatible with heavy industrial uses, such as a factory or food processing plant. In recent years, cities and counties have modified their zoning ordinances or other planning regulations in response to the growing awareness of how land use affects health.

Some communities have established mixed-use zones that combine a variety of residential, commercial and institutional uses within the same area. This can make it easier for people to reduce their reliance on driving to conduct their daily activities, thus promoting greater physical activity and reducing rates of traffic injuries. Zoning ordinances have also been revised to promote greater access to healthy food choices; for example, allowing full-service grocery stores in residential neighborhoods as well as lifting legal barriers to farmers markets and community gardens.

Zoning changes are often made following the adoption of new goals and policies in the general plan. It is important for local officials to avoid ad hoc decision-making that could raise legal concerns regarding the fairness or proportionality of zoning requirements. They can do this by making sure that the zoning regulations that set conditions on development are consistent with the long-range goals and policies established in the general plan.

Case Story: Zoning and Community Design
Town of Windsor, Sonoma County

Windsor adopted special area plans and compact zoning designations for key parts of the town. These plans channel growth into certain geographic areas and encourage mixed uses, smaller lot sizes and minimum two-story residential and commercial structures in these locations. Compact development can increase pedestrian activity contributing to increased physical activity rates, reduced neighborhood crime incidents, and a more vibrant active neighborhood.

Higher-density development is slated for land around the downtown train station. Windsor's downtown has evolved into a series of three-story, mixed-use buildings centered on a five-acre town green. All buildings in this area include ground-floor commercial uses with residential condominiums above. Commercial downtown building design requirements are flexible to accommodate large and small retailers.

In order to achieve this compact development and implement the adopted area plans, Windsor created three specific zoning designations:

1. **Compact residential** zoning allows 12 to 32 units per acre with a minimum 3,000 square-foot lot size. Flexibility in setback and height limitations helps applicants meet the desired density requirement;

2. **Boulevard mixed-use** zoning allows up to 32 residential units per acre and requires three-story buildings with a commercial ground floor. Typically, Windsor requires at least 24 residential units to the acre under this zoning designation; and

3. **Regional mixed-use** zoning allows more traditional, lower-density commercial development; only a limited number of acres in Windsor have this designation.

TO LEARN MORE

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www.ca-ilg.org/HealthyNeighborhoodCaseStories

Conditional use permits (also called special use permits) are another planning tool that can be used to advance health objectives. Conditional uses are land uses that because of their special nature may be suitable only in certain locations, or arranged or operated in a particular manner. For example:

- Local agencies can restrict the time, place and manner in which convenience stores, liquor stores and fast-food outlets operate;

- Community gardens can be allowed under specified conditions in certain zones; and

- As a condition of approval, large mixed-use development projects can be encouraged or required to offer to lease commercial space for a grocery store in a neighborhood that lacks access to healthy foods.

TO LEARN MORE

Visit the Institute's website to access these resources.

www.ca-ilg.org/HNGuide#Chapter2

About Conditional Use Permits, Institute for Local Government. This one-pager explains 1) what a "conditional use permit" is, 2) how such permits fit into efforts to shape communities, and 3) how to participate in the decision-making process.

About Zone Changes (Rezoning), Institute for Local Government. This one-pager explains 1) what a "zone change" is, 2) how zone changes fit into efforts to shape communities, and 3) how to participate in the decision-making process. Available in English and Spanish.

Creating a Regulatory Blueprint for Healthy Community Design: A Local Government Guide to Reforming Zoning and Land Development Codes, International City/County Management Association

Establishing Land Use Protections for Farmers' Markets, Public Health Law & Policy

Environmental Review and Health Impact Assessment

The environmental review process provides another way for local officials to address health issues when they are considering land-use plans and development proposals. Environmental review is intended to ensure that decision-makers understand and account for a project's environmental consequences, including its effects on health.

The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) is the environmental protection law most commonly applied to land-use decisions in California.[37] Under CEQA, local officials may not approve projects as proposed if there are feasible alternatives or mitigation measures that would substantially lessen significant environmental effects — unless local officials adopt a "statement of overriding considerations" that particular social or economic factors override the environmental concerns.

Based on the findings of the environmental review, local agencies can require that a project include specific measures to mitigate the potential effects on public health, such as exposure to air pollution or safety risks to pedestrians and bicyclists from auto traffic. The public is entitled to review the environmental documents prepared for local decision-makers and offer comments on the analysis of environmental effects and the feasibility and effectiveness of project alternatives or mitigation measures.

In addition to conducting a traditional environmental review of planning and land-use projects, some communities are using a new review tool, known as a Health Impact Assessment (HIA), in the planning process. The Health Impact Assessment provides a framework for local officials to determine the potential positive and negative effects of a proposed policy, plan or development project on human health and how those impacts might be distributed within the population.[38]

While not required by state law, local agencies can choose to conduct a Health Impact Assessment in tandem with the environmental review process to determine how a project could specifically affect health and then develop alternatives and mitigation measures that could reduce or eliminate its health effects.

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Visit the Institute's website to access these resources.

www.ca-ilg.org/HNGuide#Chapter2

Healthy Development Measurement Tool, San Francisco Department of Public Health

CDC Health Impact Assessment Fact Sheet, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Frequently Asked Questions about Integrating Health Impact Assessment into Environmental Impact Assessment, Human Impact Partners

Economic Development and Redevelopment Tools

Cities and counties use a variety of approaches to actively promote their local economy's growth and vitality. Economic development efforts also provide ways for local officials to promote healthier neighborhoods.

Research has shown that many businesses, particularly those that offer more generous wages and benefits, choose to locate and stay in communities that deliver a higher quality of life to current and prospective employees.[39] In many cases, these quality–of-life elements — trails and bikeways, parks and recreation programs, walkable town centers, urban forests and neighborhoods free of excessive noise and air pollution — also contribute to a healthier population.

As a consequence, local communities that have focused on providing community amenities and a high quality of life have found that an economic development strategy designed to attract businesses can also have important health benefits.[40]

In addition, local communities can gear their economic development programs to support and attract businesses that provide a healthy work environment for employees and customers. Some ways that local businesses can promote health include:

- Offering facilities (like secure bike parking) and incentives (such as a transportation benefit rather than "free" parking) to encourage employees to walk, bicycle, carpool or take transit to work;

- Locating their business in places that pedestrians, bicyclists and people using transit can reach easily and that minimize the need to use an auto for errands; and

- Providing employees with access to healthy food choices and places to walk or exercise, either on-site or nearby.

Redevelopment as A Tool for Healthy Neighborhoods

What Is Redevelopment?

Cities and counties have established **redevelopment agencies** to turn around blighted neighborhoods. Redevelopment agencies receive a portion of the increase in the property taxes generated within the redevelopment area as the neighborhood is improved. The agencies use these funds to acquire land for development, construct neighborhood improvements and build and rehabilitate affordable housing. Agencies often enter into public-private partnerships to develop land in redevelopment areas, and 20 percent of the property taxes received by redevelopment agencies must be set aside to support affordable housing.

How Can Redevelopment Help Create Healthier Neighborhoods?

Recent state legislation required redevelopment agencies to transfer significant amounts of their funds to the state to reduce its ongoing budget deficit. However, redevelopment agencies retained their authority and continue to function as important engines for local economic development and revitalization, now and in the future.

Health status correlates strongly with economic status and security. By providing affordable housing that is safe and attractive, redevelopment can help residents devote more of their income to health care coverage, nutritious food and opportunities for physical activity.

Redevelopment funds can be used to create environments where residents can be physically active. Examples include constructing and repairing sidewalks, installing playground equipment and implementing traffic-calming measures that reduce the speed and number of cars on neighborhood streets, making it safer and more convenient for residents to walk or ride bikes.

Redevelopment agencies can offer financial assistance and other incentives to encourage grocery stores and other healthy food sources to locate in underserved neighborhoods.

TO LEARN MORE

Visit the Institute's website to access this resource.

www.ca-ilg.org/HNGuide#Chapter2

Economic Development and Redevelopment: A Toolkit on Land Use and Health, Public Health Law & Policy

Ideas for Action:
Housing and Health

Healthy neighborhoods provide a range of housing types — single-family homes, duplexes, town homes and apartments — to suit the needs of a diverse cross section of residents. A neighborhood's housing stock can have implications for the health of its residents. Important factors in assessing the potential effects of housing on health include design, maintenance, location, affordability and conditions in the surrounding community.

- Homes should be designed to support residents throughout their lives. Housing layout is important especially when designing for populations with reduced mobility, such as the elderly or people with disabilities. These populations need wide doorways and alternatives to stairs.[41]

- Mixing commercial and residential uses (such as locating housing above ground-floor offices and shops) places residents within walking distance of stores, restaurants and other businesses and creates vibrant neighborhoods that promote social cohesion and encourage bicycling and walking for recreation and transportation.

- Inclusionary housing strategies can facilitate the creation of more diverse neighborhoods that contribute to improved social conditions and reduced incidences of crime and violence.[42] However, local agencies should carefully craft these strategies to comply with state law and recent court decisions.[43]

- Providing affordable housing reduces homelessness and overcrowding.[44] Overcrowding is directly related to poor mental health, developmental delay in children, heart disease and infectious diseases, such as tuberculosis and meningitis.[45]

- The number, intensity and length of extreme heat events are expected to increase due to climate change. This makes designing well-insulated new homes and offering programs that can improve insulation in existing homes even more important as part of efforts to protect vulnerable populations.[46]

- Homes with adequate ventilation, airflow control, moisture reduction and temperature control can reduce respiratory irritants, like mold and dust, and improve indoor air quality, which reduces the risk of respiratory diseases, such as asthma and allergies.[47]

Revitalizing neighborhoods

Communities change over time, evolving in response to demographic trends, changing economic conditions and other circumstances. Guiding this change in a positive direction is an important function of local government, particularly in older neighborhoods that have lost jobs and local businesses as their traditional economic activities have weakened or become obsolete. These neighborhoods often suffer from aging infrastructure and inadequate public and private investment as well as other social and economic challenges.

Residents in economically distressed neighborhoods often lack the economic resources, access to nutritious food, and opportunities for physical activity enjoyed by residents elsewhere, which can in turn lead to poor health outcomes.[48] Because
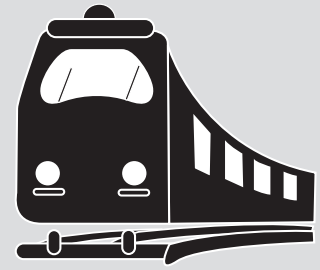
Case Story: Revitalizing Downtown Using Transit-Oriented Development
City of San Leandro, Alameda County

The City of San Leandro applied transit-oriented development strategies to revitalize its downtown retail core. With the goal of increasing transit ridership within a half-mile radius of the downtown Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) station, the city received a planning grant from the Metropolitan Transportation Commission to focus on the proposed downtown bus rapid transit corridor and existing BART service. San Leandro wanted to provide a safe, secure and accessible environment for pedestrians, bicyclists, transit riders and automobiles, while also increasing the supply of affordable housing for local employees.

Program Highlights

- Involving property owners and developers early in the planning process increased the opportunities for building consensus.

- Robust community and advocacy group outreach efforts and involvement made possible a unique and engaged citizens' advisory committee.

Lessons Learned

- The right affordable-housing development partner can contribute to well managed, high quality work-force housing that anchors transit-oriented development.

- Residents' involvement in meetings and other project activities can be increased by including community organizations in the planning process and making it easier for diverse groups to participate; for example, providing language translation services helps more people join in the process.

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www.ca-ilg.org/HealthyNeighborhoodCaseStories

income is one of the strongest and most consistent predictors of health, neighborhoods that offer a range of jobs and attract and retain local businesses and industries have healthier residents.[49]

Cities and counties have used a variety of tools to reverse neighborhood decline and revitalize communities.

For example, business improvement districts and similar public-private partnerships have been established to attract customers and otherwise help struggling neighborhoods generate local economic activity. These partnerships can develop and fund programs that improve the streetscape and facades of businesses, increase public safety, and provide services and cultural events. This economic activity can expand residents' opportunities for healthy eating and active living.

Local agencies have used Community Development Block Grants, affordable housing bonds and tax credits, energy efficiency and conservation grants and other federal and state funding programs to improve public facilities, underwrite housing development and rehabilitation and reduce business operating costs. These investments help attract and retain companies when revitalizing neighborhoods.

In developing public-private partnerships for redevelopment, local agencies have negotiated to secure specific benefits for the community, including measures that can improve public health. Examples of community benefits that can improve the economic status of residents and thereby improve health outcomes include local hiring and work-force development programs and requirements or incentives to offer living wages and other employee benefits. Community benefits can also include physical improvements that contribute to better health, such as community gardens and constructing or rehabilitating neighborhood parks and athletic facilities.[50]

TO LEARN MORE

Visit the Institute's website to access this resource.

www.ca-ilg.org/HNGuide#Chapter2

Restructuring the Commercial Strip: A Practical Guide for Planning the Revitalization of Deteriorating Strip Corridors, United States Environmental Protection Agency

Public Facilities And Services

Cities and counties provide an array of programs and services for their residents. These include direct services, constructing and maintaining public works and enforcing local regulations and building standards.

Local Programs and Services

Many local programs and services administered by cities and counties create opportunities to provide health benefits to residents and users; for example, park and recreation services offer increased options for physical activity. Other examples of services provided by local agencies that improve health and safety include emergency planning, elder care, job creation and financial assistance programs, among others.

However, local officials can also structure other services in ways that encourage healthy behavior. For example:

- Public safety programs can be instituted to improve traffic safety at dangerous intersections and make parks and neighborhoods safer places for local residents to walk and gather;

- Services offered to seniors and youth, library patrons and other residents at local community centers and other facilities can include physical activity programs, farmers markets, community gardening and nutrition education; and

- Cities and counties can take steps to offer healthy food choices to residents and employees and reduce or eliminate unhealthy foods from vending machines and snack bars in recreation centers, employee cafeterias and other locations.

Ideas for Action:
Food and Nutrition

Full-service grocery stores are valuable neighborhood assets. Providing incentives for grocery stores to locate in underserved neighborhoods is a beneficial strategy to improve health, because access to grocery stores is correlated with increased consumption of fruits and vegetables and decreased intake of fat.[53] Attracting and supporting grocery stores can also improve the neighborhood's economic sustainability by anchoring future retail development, providing tax revenue and creating local jobs.

Encouraging local restaurants to display nutritional information in retail food outlets offers a promising strategy to help people consume fewer calories.[54] Nutritional information can be provided on the menu, the menu board or as a separate readily available pamphlet.[55] Some local restaurants have found that reviewing their menus has allowed them to save time and money by standardizing food preparation.

Studies show low-income communities have less access to healthy affordable food vendors than wealthier communities.[56] Farmers markets and community gardens can be important supplementary food sources in such communities.[57] Establishing and supporting venues to sell local agricultural products also benefits area farmers and related businesses. Many California farmers markets have sought authorization to accept federal and state food benefits from the U.S. Department of Agriculture because market operators found them to be a major source of revenue.[58]

Local agencies can publicize and encourage enrollment events and other sign-up opportunities for the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Women, Infants and Children (WIC) nutrition program. Every dollar in benefits generates nearly twice that amount in local economic activity.[59] By increasing the number of people in SNAP and WIC, communities bring in additional federal expenditures to support local businesses.[60]

TO LEARN MORE

Visit the Institute's website to access these resources.

www.ca-ilg.org/HNGuide#Chapter2

Healthy Food, Healthy Communities: Improving Access and Opportunities through Food Retailing, PolicyLink

Healthy Food, Healthy Communities: Promising Strategies to Improve Access to Fresh, Healthy Food and Transform Communities, PolicyLink

Getting to Grocery: Tools for Attracting Healthy Food Retail to Underserved Neighborhoods, Public Health Law and Policy
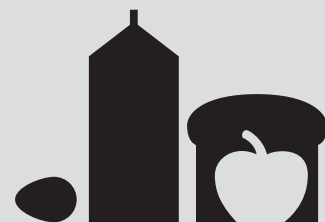
Capital Improvements and Public Works

Local agencies are responsible for building and maintaining much of the infrastructure and public facilities in their communities. Such capital improvements typically include a variety of civic buildings, water and sewer lines and treatment facilities, parks and recreational facilities and an extensive network of local streets and sidewalks. These public facilities and infrastructure offer another way for local officials to integrate health considerations into their decisions.

Cities and counties typically develop a multiyear capital improvement program to guide investments in infrastructure. When developing and reviewing the capital improvement program, local elected officials and agency administrators can assess the extent to which the proposed investments contribute to community goals for health. They can then give priority to public works projects that enhance health outcomes. For example:

■ Local agencies can make it a priority to construct and maintain a continuous, connected network of sidewalks and bikeways linking homes, schools, shops and places of employment;

■ Traffic-calming measures — such as intersection bulbs, raised crosswalks, traffic roundabouts, angled parking and bicycle lanes — can be installed to help control speeding vehicles in residential neighborhoods and near schools, thus reducing traffic accidents and exposure to auto emissions;

■ Maintenance projects to restripe, resurface or repair roadways provide a cost-effective way to redesign streets to work better for all users, including drivers, transit vehicles, bicyclists and pedestrians;

■ Street trees, street lighting, median and planter strips, sidewalks set back from the roadway and other landscaping improvements can be provided to create a more welcoming environment for pedestrians in residential neighborhoods and business districts;

■ Transit-stop improvements, including weather-protected seating and safety lighting, can be installed to encourage transit ridership in inclement weather or during night-time hours;

■ Joint-use agreements with local schools, recreation centers and sports complexes can provide

recreation space that is accessible and in close proximity to all residents. Making school playgrounds available for use before and after school hours can help provide park space for park-deficient neighborhoods, offering a low-cost recreation opportunity for area residents;[51] and

■ Equitably distributing parks, recreational facilities, trails and open spaces throughout the community can be addressed in park master plans and long-range capital improvement plans, which can include park design and trail standards and minimum acreage standards per resident.

▶ Characteristics of Pedestrian-Friendly Streets[52]

■ Narrow streets with marked pedestrian crossings that slow and alert motorists;

■ Landscaping along sidewalks;

■ Strategically placed parallel parking that shields pedestrians from street traffic; and

■ Interconnected parks, trails, sidewalks and pathways.

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Visit the Institute's website to access these resources.

www.ca-ilg.org/HNGuide#Chapter2

Planning Complete Street for an Aging America, AARP Public Policy Institute

Complete Streets Promote Good Health, National Complete Streets Coalition

Code Compliance
And Enforcement Tools

One important way that local officials can foster healthy neighborhoods is through local building codes, conditional uses and nuisance abatement programs. These are often referred to collectively as code compliance or code enforcement.

Poorly maintained property can create an unhealthy living environment for tenants. In addition, buildings that are abandoned, vandalized or covered with graffiti can harbor criminal activity and contribute to the perception that a neighborhood or district is an unsafe place. This perception can keep people indoors or discourage them from visiting the area. Local code enforcement can contribute to a more healthful built environment in many ways; for example:

■ To safely accommodate pedestrians, property owners can be required to maintain street trees and other landscaping and to keep sidewalks adjoining their homes or businesses in good condition. Similarly, cities can require that street trees be replaced when they are removed because of concerns about public safety or damage to streets and sidewalks.

■ Code enforcement and nuisance abatement programs can be used to require property owners to keep their property in an acceptable condition that meets community standards.

■ When agencies use conditional use permits to place restrictions on how property is used and businesses operate, the conditions must be enforced to be effective. Similarly, businesses that voluntarily agree to promote healthy practices in return for incentives, such as increased floor area or reduced requirements to provide parking, need to be monitored. For example, if stores near schools have agreed as a condition of approval to restrict the kinds of food and beverages they offer and advertise to minors local officials need to determine whether they are complying with the agreed-upon restrictions. Likewise, local agencies must ensure that businesses that have agreed to install secure bicycle parking for employees and customers have actually done so.

► **Ideas for Action:**
Public Safety

Neighborhoods that provide residents with a sense of place and a communal identity foster pride and cohesion and contribute to reduced rates of crime by increasing the number of "eyes on the street."[61] Fear of crime strongly influences one's sense of community.[62] Urban design features that increase neighborhood walkability and the mix of land uses contribute to a safer community by encouraging residents to be active in their neighborhood.[63]

Many of these principles and practices have been organized into the framework of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED).[64] The key elements of this framework are summarized below.

Natural Surveillance
Spaces should be designed to engage neighborhoods in street activity. Maximize sightlines and visibility to encourage patrons to observe the spaces around them, fostering natural surveillance.

Natural Access Control
Control access to spaces by defining entrances and exits using signage, lighting or landscaping. When supported by natural surveillance, defined access routes make it easier to identify intruders.

Natural Territorial Reinforcement
Design environments to delineate private space. Use fences, pavement, lighting and landscaping to demarcate private and public spaces, cultivating a sense of ownership among residents and producing an environment that makes it easier to identify intruders.

Maintenance
Neglected or poorly maintained spaces encourage criminal activity and discourage surveillance, access control and natural territorial reinforcement. Ignoring the need for repairs in one building can lead to broader problems as residents' sense of pride and territoriality diminishes.

TO LEARN MORE

Visit the Institute's website to access this resource.

www.ca-ilg.org/HNGuide#Chapter2

Considering Safety through Comprehensive Planning and Ordinances, Design for Health, University of Minnesota

Chapter 3:
Tips for Taking Action

Some of the key challenges that local officials may face when working to improve the health of the built environment include:

- Assessing needs and understanding special populations;
- Forging partnerships;
- Identifying funding and resources; and
- Reaching and engaging the public.

This chapter addresses each of these challenges.

Assessing Needs And Understanding Special Populations

Taking steps to provide a built environment that promotes physical activity, increases access to nutritious food and reduces exposure to safety risks and environmental hazards benefits all segments of the community. However, specific subsets of the general population may be especially vulnerable to particular health effects and may benefit most from certain actions. Conducting an initial health assessment to determine community needs and trends constitutes an important first step in understanding their needs.

For example, young people have particularly high rates of overweight and obesity compared with adults.[65] Similarly, residents in predominantly low-income communities may have less access to fresh, healthy food.[66]

Determining the most important health concerns within the community may not be obvious. There are a number of ways that local officials can gather information to assess health needs and trends. Potential sources of information include:

- Local public health officers and health departments;

- State and federal health agencies, such as the California Department of Public Health and the Centers for Disease Control;

- Local universities, including university medical research centers;

- Local hospitals, clinics and associations of health professionals; and

- Community-based organizations working on health issues.

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www.ca-ilg.org/HNGuide#Chapter3

Building Public Understanding: The Link between Health and Planning, Design for Health, University of Minnesota

Active Living for Older Adults: Management Strategies for Healthy and Livable Communities, International City/County Management Association

Growing Smarter Living Healthier: A Guide to Smart Growth and Active Aging, United States Environmental Protection Agency

Institute for Local Government: Public Engagement and Collaborative Governance program (http://www.ca-ilg.org/engagement)

Forging Partnerships

One of the most powerful approaches that cities and counties have used to achieve ambitious goals for creating healthy neighborhoods through partnerships, particularly in an era of tight budgets for local agencies and community organizations.

Working alone, an individual local agency may lack the resources, knowledge or reach to accomplish major change. However, partnering with others provides a way for local officials to develop a common agenda for action, leverage resources and tap into outside expertise. In short, combining the efforts of individual partners can greatly magnify the effects of healthy neighborhood policy and program initiatives launched by local agencies.

Local partnerships typically involve one or both of the following elements:

- Coordination within a public agency or department; and
- Collaboration among public agencies and other public or community-based organizations.

Coordination

Internal coordination. In many instances, implementing changes in policy or practice requires crossing internal administrative boundaries within a particular local agency. Local officials can ensure that the various departments within the agency are pulling together. The challenge for local officials is to make sure that leadership is provided at each of the necessary points to foster effective coordination.

A city initiative to improve safety for pedestrians and bicyclists provides an example. The effort may require the planning department to revise zoning codes, the public works department to re-program street and sidewalk improvements and the police department to enforce traffic restrictions. Meanwhile, the city manager's office may need to set deadlines and priorities and facilitate ongoing communication among city departments and with planning commissioners, city council members, the mayor and the public. Coordinating all of these internal activities can be a key component of a successful local partnership.

Collaboration

Collaboration among independent entities involves a different approach and set of skills than coordination within an organization, where there are clear lines of authority and accountability. A collaborative partnership often involves establishing new relationships and channels of communication among the partners.

Collaboration among independent organizations usually involves some type of agreement, either formal or informal, between the partners. Such agreements often articulate the partnership's goals, how work is to be accomplished and directed, what resources each partner is expected to contribute to the effort, how disagreements or differences of opinion among the partners will be resolved and how results will be evaluated.

Local officials may collaborate with a variety of organizations in efforts to create healthier neighborhoods. Typical examples of local officials' collaborative partners include:

- Other local public agencies, such as neighboring cities and counties, redevelopment and housing agencies, school districts, special districts (like park and recreation districts), transit operators and regional agencies;

- Private sector organizations, such as energy utilities, health-care insurance companies, business associations and individual businesses;

- Nonprofit and community-based organizations, such as community clinics and other health providers, social service organizations, youth groups, environmental groups, and neighborhood associations, as well as local academic institutions; and

- Philanthropic organizations and foundations, which often contribute funding, technical assistance and other support to local collaborative partnerships.

Case Story: A Joint-Use Partnership to Promote Physical Activity
City of Merced, Merced County
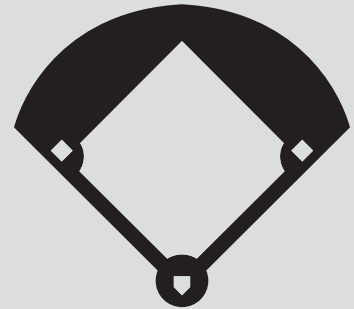
A population growth spurt in the early 1990s left the residents of Merced without adequate parks and recreation facilities. Joint-use agreements allowed the City of Merced, the Merced High School District and the Merced City School District to develop a partnership that continues to provide residents, students and community groups with places to gather for various activities. The partnership has grown beyond standard joint-use facility agreements. The city and the school district now collaborate on grant opportunities and work together to revitalize blighted facilities and develop new recreational spaces.

Program Highlights

- The city and school district partnership led to a culture of collaboration and grew to include the local university, nonprofit groups, senior centers and youth sports leagues.

- Redeveloping blighted facilities and providing matching funds to build new facilities expanded the partnership's reach during lean times to improve residents' health and safety.

In Merced, creating good working relationships proved essential to building momentum and consensus to address and resolve the sensitive aspects of joint-use agreements. A key lesson learned was that partnerships are most successful when staff of partnering agencies work together, providing the creativity and effort necessary to address the needs of all the participants.

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Partnering with local health departments in particular can help launch and support efforts at all stages of the process. In addition to providing data and information, health departments have the ability to educate and mobilize residents and stakeholders to promote local efforts. Local agencies can encourage local public health departments to review and comment on the health impacts of land-use decision-making to ensure that public health interests are identified and protected.

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www.ca-ilg.org/HNGuide#Chapter3

Opening School Grounds to the Community After Hours: A Toolkit for Increasing Physical Activity Through Joint Use Agreements, Public Health Law & Policy

Identifying Funding Opportunities

Finding ways to pay for efforts to create healthy neighborhoods challenges all local officials involved in such efforts. Some policy changes have modest costs or can even save money; examples include crafting joint-use agreements with other public agencies to share facilities, such as athletic fields or community centers. But in many cases, initiatives to promote healthy neighborhoods entail some combination of local support and outside funding. Some of the most common sources of funding are described in this section.

Local Agency Funding

Local agencies fund some health-related programs and investments directly from existing revenue sources. In many cases these may not be specifically identified as "health" expenditures. Understanding the health implications of a wide range of local agency expenditures and capital investments can yield a variety of co-benefits that include better health outcomes along with other programmatic goals, at little additional cost.

For example, routine maintenance of local streets and roads can include improvements to sidewalks, crosswalks and other facilities that improve pedestrian safety along routes to schools, parks, shops and other walking destinations. Similarly, the local redevelopment agency can provide financial assistance to attract grocery stores as a part of neighborhood revitalization projects.

Regional Funding Programs

Regional agencies provide transportation funding that can be allocated to assist local agencies in their efforts to create healthier neighborhoods. For example, a number of regional metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) award special infrastructure funding to cities and counties that promote development that is accessible by walking, bicycling and transit. Examples include:

- The Transportation for Livable Communities program administered by the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) in the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area; www.mtc.ca.gov

- The Smart Growth Incentive Program offered by the San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG); www.sandag.org and

- The Sacramento Area Council of Government's Community Design Program. www.sacog.org/regionalfunding

Local officials can encourage regional agencies with innovative funding programs to expand them and can also work to establish similar funding programs in regions where they don't currently exist. Because local elected officials comprise the governing boards of these regional agencies, they can be effective advocates for setting funding priorities to support transportation investments that encourage physical activity.

State Funding Programs

A wide variety of funding programs available through state agencies can support local efforts to increase opportunities for physical activity, promote healthy eating and reduce exposure to environmental hazards. While some of these programs have an explicit health purpose, such as funding to clean up land and water contaminated with toxic compounds, other programs that were developed primarily for other purposes can also deliver health co-benefits. For example:

- The Office of Local Assistance in the California Department of Parks and Recreation provides funding for local park improvements; www.parks.ca.gov

- The State Allocation Board provides funding to construct and renovate schools, which can include playgrounds, athletic facilities and community or school-use gardens; www.opsc.dgs.ca.gov/AboutUs/aboutSAB

- The California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) administers the Safe Routes to Schools program that funds infrastructure improvements, such as constructing sidewalks and crosswalks, creating bicycle paths and installing count-down signals. Funds are also available for "non-infrastructure" projects to educate and encourage young people to walk and ride their bikes; www.dot.ca.gov/hq/LocalPrograms/saferoutes/saferoutes.htm

- The Strategic Growth Council offers grants to local and regional agencies to support General Plans and other planning efforts that promote the development of sustainable communities; www.sgc.ca.gov/

- The California Department of Public Health funds the California Healthy Cities and Communities (CHCC) Program, which has awarded grants to 75 communities to date. The CHCC Network, a membership program, supports healthy city and community work and alerts members about funding and other resources. www.civicpartnerships.org

Federal Funding Programs

The relationship between health and the built environment has emerged as an important priority for several federal agencies and programs. The federal interest is driven in large part by concerns about the social, economic and fiscal implications of an increasingly unhealthy population. This concern has spurred a number of federal initiatives that are potential sources of funding and other resources for local efforts to create healthy neighborhoods.

- The Environmental Protection Agency, Department of Transportation, and Department of Housing and Urban Development have initiated an Interagency Partnership for Sustainable Communities to provide resources and technical assistance to state and local agencies. www.epa.gov/dced/partnership

- The Department of Health and Human Services, through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, administers a competitive grant program for state and local health departments to develop community partnerships that address obesity, physical activity and nutrition. www.hhs.gov/fbci/funding

- The Department of Housing and Urban Development provides Community Development Block Grants to local agencies, which can be used to improve neighborhoods, increase the supply of affordable housing and attract new economic uses, such as grocery stores, to underserved communities. www.hud.gov/offices/cpd/communitydevelopment

- The Department of Agriculture operates a number of programs to provide nutrition services and support community-based agriculture. These programs can assist local agencies that are working to conserve farmland and to promote farmers markets, community gardens and other efforts to increase access to nutritious food. www.usda.gov

Foundation Funding

Philanthropic organizations have stepped forward to partner with community-based organizations and local agencies to create healthier communities and neighborhoods. This support has allowed communities to test a range of approaches to improve health outcomes, providing valuable lessons and models for other communities to learn from and emulate. Some of the most prominent current and recent place-based and statewide foundation initiatives in California include:

■ Building Healthy Communities (BHC), a program of The California Endowment; www.calendow.org

■ Active Living By Design, founded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation; www.activelivingbydesign.org

■ Healthy Eating, Active Living (HEAL) Cities Campaign, a joint effort of the League of California Cities, California Center for Public Health Advocacy, the Cities Counties Schools Partnership and supported by Kaiser Permanente; www.healcitiescampaign.org

■ The Food and Fitness Initiative of the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. www.wkkf.org

These efforts, as well as initiatives sponsored by the California Department of Public Health and the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, provide opportunities to collaborate and share information with one another through the California Convergence, a statewide partnership network. www.californiaconvergence.org

▶ Case Story: Building Successful Partnerships with Philanthropy
City of La Mesa, San Diego County

As a built-out city with an aging population, the City of La Mesa has pursued an ambitious agenda to improve community health. La Mesa's efforts have been led by its Community Services Department and directed by the expressed needs and extensive involvement of the community. In the process, La Mesa has pioneered community wellness efforts that are collaborative, innovative and effective in protecting and improving the health of its diverse residents.

La Mesa's ability to secure philanthropic and government grants to fund these efforts has been key to its success. Philanthropic support can bolster local agency activities to protect and promote health, but foundation support is rarely open-ended. La Mesa has learned to deliver on its promises specified in grant agreements and to be prepared for the time when foundation funding ends.

Program Highlights

- The city council supported creating a separate 501(c)3 nonprofit organization in response to the Community Services Department's needs. The nonprofit's board of directors comprises community members exclusively.

- Long-standing partnerships with La Mesa-Spring Valley School District and the San Diego County Department of Health and Human Services increased La Mesa's profile with funders and expanded grant opportunities for health promotion efforts.

Collaborating with traditional grantees — public health departments, community-based organizations and current grantees — increased the city's visibility and competitiveness as a grantee.

TO LEARN MORE

Visit the Institute's website to access more case stories.

www.ca-ilg.org/HealthyNeighborhoodCaseStories

Reaching and Engaging the Public

Effective partnerships are not just about the individual organizations involved in a particular project. Because efforts to improve the health of the built environment involve a multitude of individual choices and actions, informing and engaging the broader community is essential. In a broader sense, the community can be considered a member of the partnership.

Involving the public can help ensure that a local partnership's actions appropriately reflect the views, concerns and priorities of key segments of the community. This in turn can lead to enhanced buy-in for local actions and a growing reservoir of community support as the partnership's efforts take hold over time.

Local agencies can develop good information to educate the public about efforts to create healthier neighborhoods but may still find it difficult to reach people and encourage their participation. The traditional local agency decision-making process relies on the public to come forward at public hearings and other meetings to learn the details of development projects, budget proposals, policy and program changes and other agency decisions. Consequently the number of people actively involved in these decisions is usually a small minority of those who may be interested or affected.

Local officials can use a variety of approaches to inform and engage the community in efforts to create healthier neighborhoods. This guide uses "public engagement" as an overall term for a broad range of methods that local officials frequently employ to inform and involve the public. This broader term covers three important — and different — forms of engagement:

1. Public information (or outreach) that informs residents and other members of the community about a public problem, issue or policy matter. This is typically one-way communication from local officials to the public. Examples include information provided on a county website, a presentation by municipal staff to a community group, or a city manager's column in a local newspaper;

2. Public consultation in which local officials ask for information and views from the public. The information generated consists of individual (rather than collective) opinions or recommendations, and those solicited have not been in discussion with one another to exchange views or further inform their thinking. Examples include a typical public hearing, telephone poll or mailed survey to residents; and

3. Public participation (or deliberation) that typically includes informed dialogue and/or deliberation among participants in the process. The result is a give and take in formulating group ideas and recommendations that are intended to inform the decision-making or other actions of local officials.

The particular form that public engagement takes depends on the nature of the decision facing the local agency and the resources available to foster public involvement. The Institute for Local Government's Public Engagement and Collaborative Governance Program provides access to a variety of tools and resources on how local officials can choose the most appropriate approach to involve the public in decision-making. Information is available online at www.ca-ilg.org/engagement.

Principles of Local Government Public Engagement

The Institute for Local Government's Public Engagement and Collaborative Governance Program has developed the following 10 principles to serve as helpful indicators of effective and ethical public engagement practice by local governments. These principles may also help guide city, county and other local officials in the design of public engagement processes and strategies.

1. **Inclusive Planning:** The planning and design of a public engagement process includes input from appropriate local officials as well as from members of intended participant communities.

2. **Transparency:** There is clarity and transparency about public engagement process sponsorship, purpose, design, and how decision-makers will use the process results.

3. **Authentic Intent:** A primary purpose of the public engagement process is to generate public views and ideas to help shape local government action or policy, rather than persuade residents to accept a decision that has already been made.

4. **Breadth of Participation:** The public engagement process includes people and viewpoints that are broadly reflective of the local agency's population of affected residents.

5. **Informed Participation:** Participants in the public engagement process have information and/or access to expertise consistent with the work that sponsors and conveners ask them to do.

6. **Accessible Participation:** Public engagement processes are broadly accessible in terms of location, time and language, and they support the involvement of residents with disabilities.

7. **Appropriate Process:** The public engagement process uses one or more discussion formats that respond to the needs of identified participant groups, and it encourages full, authentic, effective and equitable participation consistent with process purposes. This may include relationships with existing community forums.

8. **Authentic Use of Information Received:** The ideas, preferences and/or recommendations contributed by the public are documented and seriously considered by decision-makers.

9. **Feedback to Participants:** Local officials communicate ultimate decisions back to process participants and the broader public with a description of how the public input was considered and used.

10. **Evaluation:** Sponsors and participants evaluate each public engagement process, with the collected feedback and learning shared broadly and applied to future engagement efforts.

Source: Principles of Local Government Public Engagement, Institute for Local Government, 2010, http://www.ca-ilg.org/publicengagementprinciples .

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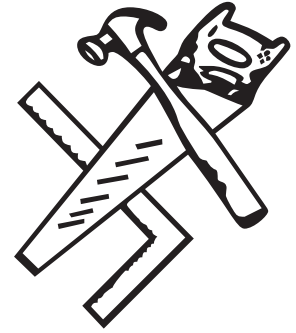
A variety of outside technical assistance providers are available to help local officials design, implement, and evaluate efforts to create healthy neighborhoods. In addition, many local efforts can also benefit from the involvement and support of state and federal agencies and organizations that can provide funding and expertise, and connect local efforts with similar initiatives elsewhere. Some of the technical assistance resources that are available include:

- Institute for Local Government Healthy Neighborhoods Project, www.ca-ilg.org/HealthyNeighborhoods

- Planning for Healthy Places, Public Health Law and Policy, www.PHLPnet.org/healthy-planning

- Center for Civic Partnerships, www.CivicPartnerships.org

- Cities Counties Schools Partnership, www.CCSPartnership.org

- Healthy Eating Active Living (HEAL) Cities Campaign, www.HealCitiesCampaign.org

- Healthy Eating, Active Communities, www.HealthyEatingActiveCommunities.org

- Leadership for Healthy Communities, www.LeadershipforHealthyCommunities.org

- California Convergence, www.CaliforniaConvergence.org
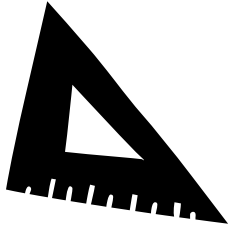
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- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Designing and Building Healthy Places, www.cdc.gov/HealthyPlaces/

- Partnership for Sustainable Communities (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Department of Transportation and Housing and Urban Development) www.epa.gov/dced/partnership

To learn more about the technical support provided by these and other organizations, visit the Institute for Local Government's Healthy Neighborhoods Online Resource Center at www.ca-ilg/org/HealthyNeighborhoods.

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The Institute for Local Government is the nonprofit research affiliate of the League of California Cities and the California State Association of Counties. Its mission is to promote good government at the local level.

The Institute's current program areas include:

- Climate Change;
- Healthy Communities;
- Intergovernmental Conflict Resolution;
- Land Use and Environment;
- Local Government 101;
- Public Engagement and Collaborative Governance; and
- Public Service Ethics.

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