

Building Active Communities



TRANSPORTATION, LANDUSE, PLANNING,
COMMUNITY DESIGN

Transportation, Land Use Planning, Community Design

Obesity and sedentary lifestyles are major contributors to chronic disease for both adults and children. In 2011, three out of every five Montana adults were overweight or obese and nearly half did not get the recommended amount of aerobic activity. In that same year, over 40 percent of Montana 7th and 8th grade students and 70 percent of Montana high school students did not get the recommended 60 minutes of daily physical activity necessary for health and to reduce their risk of chronic disease.

Solving the obesity epidemic is a complex issue and will require multifaceted strategies and coordinated change at multiple levels—from individuals, to families, to organizations, to communities as a whole. Encouraging active lifestyles and increasing access to places to be active are critical public health strategies that can lower the burden of chronic disease and increase quality of life.

It is clear that the way we design our communities—our buildings, landscapes, streets and neighborhoods—influence the way we live and therefore can affect our health and well-being. Adopting healthy behaviors, such as physical activity and healthy eating, is easier if our environment is built to support us in making healthy choices.

Building active communities takes working together at all levels of government in collaboration with the private sector and community groups to grow the vision of a healthy community and then work together to make that vision a reality.

Below is a list of recommended strategies to support active living and healthy communities through supportive policies, well-designed projects and increased promotion.



Improve access to and promote active transportation and public transportation

Plan, build, retrofit and maintain a well connected and ADA accessible network of safe and attractive walking, biking and transit facilities for recreation as well as for transportation (e.g., shared use paths, bike lanes, sidewalks, safe crosswalks, trails, greenways, convenient and accessible transit stops and shelters, etc.) These facilities should be built for people of all ages and abilities and should create a balanced and connected transportation system.

- Create and/or update policy documents to support walking, bicycling and transit (e.g., comprehensive plans, transportation plans, recreational plans, subdivision and street standards, building codes, complete streets policies, etc.).
- Incorporate design features and incentives to promote the safety, aesthetics and usage of pedestrian, bicycle and transit facilities (e.g., wayfinding signage, bike parking, shower facilities, appropriate lighting, maximum building setbacks, sidewalk furniture, traffic calming, street trees, pedestrian islands, transit pull-outs and shelters, curb extensions, pedestrian countdown timers and audible signals, pricing strategies for transportation demand management, etc.)
- Support community Safe Routes to School programs (e.g., prioritize projects and programs that make it safer and more convenient for children to walk or bike to school).
- Develop social marketing campaigns and encouragement/incentive programs to increase promotion and use of active and public transportation options.
- Develop bicycle and pedestrian safety education and awareness programs for pedestrians, bicyclists, transit riders and motorists to encourage more safe travel for all modes.



Increase access to safe and attractive recreational facilities such as parks, open space, trails, rivers and other natural features and public lands and promote usage

Build, maintain and promote ADA accessible parks, playgrounds and recreational facilities and access routes to natural features and public lands that are safe and attractive, and in close proximity to residential areas and other important destinations such as schools, worksites, childcare, etc.

- Increase the percentage of residential parcels within a local jurisdiction that are located within a ½-mile network distance (i.e., shortest distance between two locations by way of the public street network) of at least one outdoor public recreational facility.

- Increase the safety, attractiveness, ADA accessibility and usability of public parks and recreational facilities (e.g., pocket parks, playground equipment, police presence, limited amount of abandoned lots and buildings and physical disorder, well-maintained parks, park lighting, park design to promote physical activity, etc.).
- Create and implement a funding strategy for community (city/ county) parks. Utilize existing funding such as Land and Water Conservation Fund or create a Park District to provide additional funding at the local level. Consider both development and operations support in any funding effort.
- Promote the usage of recreational facilities by a variety of means (e.g., signage, programming, public awareness campaigns, etc.).

Incorporate appropriate residential density, diversity of land use and design quality of the built environment into local policies to enhance active living

Increase residential density (where appropriate) and the proximity of residential areas to important destinations and facilities such as stores, jobs, schools (and other public facilities), transit, farmers markets, community gardens, and recreational areas.

- Promote mixed-use zoning designations
- Explore the use of form-based codes and/or design review
- Promote a connected street and trail network to promote active and public transportation options between and within subdivisions and to connect with important destinations (e.g., avoid cul-de-sac and dead end streets)
- Encourage collaborative school planning between cities/ counties and schools
- Create school siting policies that support locating new schools and or refurbishing/repairing schools in locations that maximize accessibility (by walking and biking) and proximity to student population
- Utilize tools available (i.e., Health Impact Assessment (HIA)) to help inform public/decision makers of long-term impact of school and other public facility siting decisions (e.g., transportation, health, environment, etc.)
- Increase the percentage of residential and commercial parcels in the local jurisdiction that are located within a ¼-mile network distance of fast, affordable and convenient public transportation (if public transportation is available or planned)
- Promote geographic and ADA accessibility of grocery stores, community gardens, and farmers markets especially in underserved areas
- Preserve open space, agriculture lands, and critical environmental areas by using a variety of tools (e.g., conservation easements, transfer of development rights, infill development, etc.)

Incorporate high quality design of the built environment to foster distinctive, attractive communities with a strong sense of place where people can gather and interact (e.g., welcoming public places, public art, quality landscape features, street furniture, appropriate green space, front porches, rear alleys, etc.)

References

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