

ActiveLiving Community Vision

Hennepin County Assessment Analysis Report - June 2007 -



In September 2006, Hennepin County was awarded funding from Blue Cross Blue Shield of Minnesota to engage citizens, local governments, non-profit agencies and community groups in creating an active living vision and principles for the county. Active living is a way of life that integrates physical activity into daily routines. This community supported vision and principles will guide policy and decision-making in the future for the places that people live, work, play, shop and learn. The *Active Living Community Vision* project is lead by the Hennepin County Housing, Community Works and Transit Department and supported through technical assistance from the Active Living by Design Program (ALbD) based at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

A Planning Group comprised of representatives from public health, business, recreation, transportation, community development and other disciplines participate in the project. In order to better understand the challenges and opportunities for creating active communities in the Hennepin County region, the Planning Group initiated an assessment process with the following goals:

- To gain a better understanding of the attitudes and perceptions towards active living and physical activity.
- To gain targeted information on the infrastructure needs of youth, seniors and persons with disabilities.

The Hennepin County assessment process gathered information about resident's attitudes and environmental conditions for active living from two primary sources: a random phone survey of Hennepin County residents and interviews conducted in the pilot communities of Brooklyn Park, Golden Valley and Independence during March – May 2007. In addition, all three communities photographed areas in their communities that demonstrated current pedestrian and bicycle conditions. Golden Valley also conducted a walking workshop in its downtown area.

Building on the assessment data, this report identifies key themes and recommendations to guide community engagement activities over the summer months. The assessment data was analyzed by ALbD in response to three questions:

- Are Hennepin County residents integrating physical activity into daily routines?
- Do the places that people live, work, shop, play and learn in Hennepin County support daily physical activity?
- Is a walking and biking infrastructure – sidewalks, bike lanes and trails- in place, safe and connected?
- Do existing plans and policies support active living?

Survey

The random phone survey was conducted by Directions in Research, a national data collection firm and included 727 residents. Survey respondents include 505 residents county-wide, 105 in the city of Brooklyn Park, 100 in the city of Golden Valley and 70 in the city of Independence. The survey asked adults questions concerning general demographics, levels of physical activity, attitudes and barriers around walking and biking, community destinations and environmental conditions.

A 30-page summary and analysis of the survey results was provided to ALbD by Hennepin County. After reviewing the survey results, ALbD sorted the data into demographics, levels of physical activity and four key components of active living communities: access to facilities, destinations, networks and safety. A portion of the survey results are provided in this report.

Health Status

Adults living in Hennepin County have a positive view of their health status. Twenty-three percent of adults say their health status is “excellent,” and another 39 percent say their health is “very good.” Over a quarter of adults (26%) say their health is “good,” with only 10 percent saying they are in “fair” condition and 2 percent in “poor” condition.

There is also some relationship between perceptions of health status and activity, with respondents with higher activity levels more likely to rate their health higher. Sixty-four percent (64%) of respondents who get *physical activity five-to-seven days per week* rate their health status as “excellent” or “very good” compared to 39 percent who get *physical activity two or fewer days per week*.

Looking specifically at those who bike and walk, frequent bikers (*once a week or more*) and walkers (*30 or more minutes per day*) rate their health “excellent” or “very good” (77% and 66% respectively) as compared to those who *never bike* (54%) or *walk* (49%). Also, 36 percent of those who *bike or walk to work* rate their health as “excellent” versus 21 percent *who do not*.

LEVELS of PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Hennepin County adults claim to lead very active lives. When asked the question: during an average week, thinking about your activities at work, at home, and anywhere else, on how many days do you get at least 30 minutes of physical activity? – the countywide average (mean) is almost 5 days per week. In fact, 29 percent of respondents say they are active seven days per week, with more than a third (35%) saying they are active five or six days per week. On the other hand, only 12 percent say they are active two or fewer days per week.

Types of Activity

Walking is by far the most common form of physical activity – with 64 percent of respondents saying they walk. Biking is the second most common form of activity – with almost a quarter of respondents saying they are bikers. Other activities with high mentions include gardening / yard work (17%), use of exercise machines (15%), fitness classes (10%), and running (10%).

Respondents were asked how many times per week they exercise at a gym, health club, community center, or through a recreation program. Sixty-nine percent of respondents *did not exercise at one of these facilities*. Of those who do exercise through one of these facilities, on average they participate three days per week.

Walking and Biking Activity

On average, respondents indicate that they walk 65 minutes each weekday. Note, however, that this mean average is skewed by a few respondents who walk a lot each day (such as people who walk as part of their jobs) – the median number of minutes walked each weekday is 30. Note that 7 percent of respondents indicate they do not walk on an average day, while 9 percent walk more than two hours each day.

Half of respondents (51%) say, weather permitting, that they “never” ride a bike. Another 17 percent of respondents are infrequent riders – riding less than once a month. On the other hand, only 3 percent of riders ride on a daily basis, while another 22 percent ride on one to several times per week.

Respondents who ride bikes do it for “exercise” (45%) or “recreation / socializing” (43%) – only a small percentage ride for “transportation” reasons (11%). Income levels show one of the greatest differences in biking for transportation: those with *incomes under \$40,000* are more likely than those with *incomes \$40,000+* to ride for “transportation” purposes (28% versus 9%). Two other findings: *Minneapolis residents* (20%) are more likely than *suburban residents* (6%) to ride for “transportation” purposes, and *males* (15%) are more likely than *females* (6%) to ride for “transportation” purposes.

Characteristics Encouraging Biking and Walking

Respondents were asked in an open-ended format to identify the factors or characteristics that encourage them to bike in their neighborhood. Infrastructure-related characteristics (34%), such as paths and sidewalks; opportunities for activity and exercise (30%); access to the natural environment (27%); and accessibility (23%) are the most mentioned factors.

Barriers to Biking and Walking

Respondents were also asked an open-ended question to identify the barriers to walking and biking in their neighborhoods. Personal issues (22%) – such as lack of time and health issues – are most frequently mentioned. Issues such as traffic (16%), natural barriers (13%), safety (11%), and lack of infrastructure (10%) are also mentioned.

ACCESS TO FACILITIES

Parks and Trails

Parks and playgrounds are widespread across the County. Eight-in-ten residents (81%) “strongly agree” that there is a park or playground within walking distance of their home, and another 9 percent “somewhat agree” – only 10 percent “disagree.” Not surprisingly, access to parks / playgrounds is related to location. Residents of the suburban pilot communities of *Brooklyn Park* (90%) and *Golden Valley* (93%) both “agree” that parks and playgrounds are within walking distance. On the other hand, residents of *Independence* are split, with 43 percent “agreeing” and 54 percent “disagreeing” that parks / playgrounds are within walking distance.

Recreational trails are also prevalent throughout Hennepin County. A total of 58 percent of respondents “strongly agree” that there are recreational trails within walking distance of their homes, and another 18 percent “somewhat agree” with the statement. On the other hand, only 21 percent of respondents “disagree” with the statement. Community differences also are apparent on this question. In *Golden Valley*, 85 percent of residents “agree” while 11 percent “disagree” that there are recreation trails within walking distance from their home. In the second-ring suburb of *Brooklyn Park*, the number drops to 69 percent “agree” and 30 percent “disagree.” Residents of rural *Independence* are the least likely to say they have recreation trails within walking distance: 54% “agree” to 46% “disagree”.

Sidewalks on Streets near Home

Almost two-thirds (65%) of respondents “agree” that there are sidewalks along the streets near their home – including 53 percent who “strongly agree” with the statement. On the other hand, 31 percent “disagree” with the statement, including one-quarter in “strong disagreement.” As might be expected, location has a lot to do with a respondent’s answer to this question. In *Minneapolis*, 97 percent of respondents agree with the statement, compared to 53 percent of *suburban residents* and 26 percent of *rural Hennepin residents*.

A second relationship that is suggested by the results is that respondents who bike or walk are also more likely to live in areas with sidewalks along the street. Specifically, respondents who *bike or walk to transit stations* are more likely than *those who do not* to “agree” that there are sidewalks near their homes (86% to 62%). Similarly, those that *bike or walk to work* (80% “agree” versus 67% among those *who do not*) and those that *walk to destinations* (76% “agree” versus 53% among those that *do not walk*) are also more likely to “agree” that there are sidewalks near their homes.

DESTINATIONS

This section looks at physical activity as it relates to accessing destinations. Specifically, this section looks at identifying current activity and future willingness among County residents to walk and bike to destinations.

Frequency of Walking to Destinations

Early in this report noted that County residents are walking on average (median) 30 minutes per day. Two-in-ten are walking over an hour each day, while only 7 percent are not walking at all. Looking at current behavior, however, County residents are not doing much walking for the purposes of going to destinations.

On average, people walk to a destination 2.8 times per week. This number is skewed upwards by a few people who walk a lot – looking at the median, the average person walks to a destination once per week. More telling, perhaps, is the fact that 46 percent of respondents did not walk to any destination in the previous week. Only 11 percent walked to a destination seven or more times that week (the equivalent of once per day).

Walking or Biking to Transit, Work, or School

Looking at some specific destinations, respondents continued to indicate low frequency of walking or biking to those destinations:

- Almost nine-in-ten (87%) of respondents indicate that they do not bike or walk to transit stops. Six percent (6%) say they walk/bike one-to-three times per week, 4 percent say four to six times per week, and 2 percent say seven or more times per week. As would be expected – given the urban-nature of transit service – *Minneapolis* has the highest percentage of respondents who have walked or biked to transit (23%).
- Eighty-four percent (84%) of employed respondents (which is 65% of the adult respondents) did not bike, skate, or walk from their home to work in the previous two weeks.
- Eighty-two percent (82%) of adults with children (which is 28% of the total) say their children do not walk, bike, or skate to school.

Minutes Willing to Walk to a Destination

Considering the limited amount of destination-oriented walking done by County residents, the next question provides a theoretical look at how long adults would be willing to walk to get to a destination, such as work, shopping, entertainment. Somewhat surprisingly, respondents say they would be willing to walk, a mean average of 19 minutes / median of 15 minutes to get to a destination. Only 8 percent say they would not walk any distance, and 5 percent say they would walk one to five minutes. On the other hand, 24 percent would walk 21 to 30 minutes and 6 percent over 30 minutes to get to a destination.

A series of six questions asked respondents whether there are specific types of destinations within a 15-minute walk from their homes. As might be expected, residents of *Minneapolis* have the greatest accessibility to different types of destination, with the level of accessibility decreasing as distance from the urban area increases.

Overall, 81 percent of respondents say they are within a 15-minute walk of a “transit stop.” Almost three-quarters (74%) are within walking distance of a “restaurant / coffee shop” and 65 percent within walking distance of “other stores or retail shops.” Just over half of respondents are within a 15-minute walk of a “grocery store” (55%) or “services,” including accountants, dry cleaners, lawyers, or banks” (54%). “Civic buildings” (libraries, post offices, etc.) are within walking distance of 43 percent of respondents.

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SAFETY

Safe for Children to Walk to School

By a three-to-one margin (70% to 23%), respondents “agree” that it is safe for children to walk to school in their neighborhoods. In fact, 37 percent “strongly agree” with the statement while only 12 percent “strongly disagree” with the statement.

Traffic Makes It Difficult to Bike/Walk

Most respondents (70%) “disagree” that traffic makes it difficult to walk or bike in their neighborhood. In fact, 40 percent “strongly disagree” and 30 percent “somewhat disagree,” while just 29% “agree” with the statement. Interestingly, respondents that are likely to have personal experience with traffic in their neighborhoods (those who bike and walk to work or transit) also are most likely to “agree” that traffic makes it difficult.

Worry of Being a Victim of Crime

Perhaps most surprising, only 26 percent say they worry about being a victim of crime while walking in their neighborhood (9% “strongly agreeing” and 17% “somewhat agreeing”). Conversely, 44 percent “strongly disagree” with the statement and 29 percent “somewhat disagree.”

Several characteristics are most closely linked to concerns about crime: gender, urban/suburban location, race, and socio-economic status. *Males* are less likely to “agree” that they worry about being a victim of crime (21%) versus *females* (30%). This difference is most striking in Minneapolis, where 36 percent of *males* “agree” and 52 percent of *females* “agree” that they worry about being a victim of crime.

On the other hand, *suburban residents* are more likely to “disagree” with the statement (79%), compared to 56 percent of *Minneapolis residents*. Rural Hennepin residents, as exemplified by the responses from *Independence*, are least likely to be concerned: 91 percent “disagree” that they are concerned about being a victim of crime. *Non-whites* (42%) are more likely than *whites* (24%) to “agree” that they are concerned about being a victim of crime while walking/biking.

PHYSICAL IMPROVEMENTS

Respondents were asked their opinions about a series of improvements that could be made to make biking and walking in their neighborhood more appealing. They rated each improvement as to whether they would make them “much more likely,” “somewhat more likely,” “less likely,” or “neither more nor less likely” to bike or walk in their neighborhood.

Off-Street Biking and Walking Trails

Off-street biking and walking trails are the most likely improvements to make respondents more likely to bike or walk in their neighborhoods. Six-in-ten respondents say off-street bike and walking trails would make them “more likely” to bike or walk in their neighborhood. This number includes 34 percent who indicate it would make them “much more likely” and 26 percent “somewhat more likely.” One-third says it would have no impact, and 7 percent say it would make them “less likely.”

Well-Lit Streets at Night

“Well-lit streets at night” ranks second in improvements most likely to increase biking and walking. Overall, 57 percent say it would make them “more likely” (30% “much more likely” and 28% “somewhat more likely”) to walk or bike in their neighborhood. One-third of residents say it would have no influence, and 9 percent say it would make them “less likely” to bike or walk.

Sidewalks Separated from Traffic by Trees, Grass, or Landscaping

Almost one half of respondents (48%) say that sidewalks separated from traffic lanes by trees, grass, or landscaping would make them more willing to bike or walk in their neighborhoods. One-quarter say it would make them “much more likely,” while 23% say it would make them “somewhat more likely;” conversely, 42 percent say it would have no affect and 9 percent say it would make them “less likely” to bike or walk.

Paved Sidewalks

A similar percentage of respondents (48%) say that paved sidewalks would make them more willing to bike or walk in their neighborhoods – with the percentages divided evenly between those saying “much more likely” and “somewhat more likely.” In addition, 40 percent say it would have no effect and 9 percent say it would make them “less likely” to bike or walk.

Traffic Controls to Slow Down Traffic

Overall, 45 percent (23% “much more likely” and 22 percent “somewhat more likely”) say that traffic controls to slow down the speed of traffic would make them “more likely” to bike or walk in their neighborhoods. Eight percent (8%) say it would make them “less likely” to bike or walk, while 46 percent say it would make them “neither more nor less likely.”

KEY INTERVIEWS

A series of interviews were conducted with elected officials, city staff and citizens in the case study communities of Brooklyn Park, Golden Valley and Independence to gain more in-depth perspective surrounding active living. Each participant was asked the same 15 questions about physical activity and built environment issues, barriers and opportunities. Responses were sorted and analyzed by both municipality and interviewee category. Similar themes and challenges were noted among the participants.

CITY of BROOKLYN PARK

Nine interviews were conducted with the mayor, a councilmember, city staff including the manager, engineer, planner, and parks maintenance as well as three citizens representing business and families.

BARRIERS TO ACTIVE LIVING

Interviewees expressed three main barriers to physical activity in Brooklyn Park. First, much of the city was designed for automobiles and requires driving to key commercial and residential locations. This traditional suburban design has led to isolated service areas that are often divided by big roads. With an aging population, it is even more difficult to walk distances and navigate busy intersections.

Transportation for young people, seniors and lower income residents was identified as the second barrier. The poor public transit system makes it difficult for seniors and people with disabilities to get around town. Currently, residents have to take a bus to downtown Minneapolis to reach the other side of Brooklyn Park.

Finally, a lack of connectivity between older and newer sections of the city was mentioned. Parts of the community aren't pedestrian friendly and retrofitting them is perceived to be difficult and expensive. For many residents, there may be some walking distance between destinations and crossing busy streets is a concern. Trails were identified as important linkages between places, but interviewees perceive that only a small percentage of the population uses them.

ACCESS TO FACILITIES AND PROGRAMS

Overall, interviewees feel that the city has done a good job locating parks that are accessible to residents. Many of the 66 parks within the city are connected by sidewalks and trails. Sliding hills and ice rinks for winter activities are also promoted through the city. The Community Activity Center and its indoor walking track were identified as popular places.

Overwhelmingly, interviewees mentioned the city's great park and recreation programs that provide a variety of activities for various ages and skill levels. Some felt that these programs need to support after school and weekend activities for greater family interaction. Other interviewees suggested that more recreational opportunities for teens need to be offered to help prevent gang activity and crime. An active senior club and other programs for older adults are also available. Interviewees mentioned the changing cultural base and expressed interest in exploring programs and activities that respond to different cultures.

In response to a question about involvement of the business community, interviewees mentioned sponsorship of events such as Tater Daze and various sports teams. Some businesses have responded to requests for support, especially community programs. One interviewee remarked that businesses like locating in new areas of the city that are more pedestrian friendly.

Providing information to residents regarding available activities, trails, corridors and walking areas was mentioned by the interviewees. Many felt that the city already had many existing opportunities through websites, mailings, brochures, city newsletter, utility bills, Park Pages and the local "post" weekly newspaper to get the word out about activities.

DESTINATIONS, SAFETY AND TRANSPORTATION

Interviewees were asked a series of questions regarding the built environment including what changes in Brooklyn Park would support greater opportunities for physical activity. Interviewees mentioned the city was beginning to redevelop differently in ways that put commercial near residential. Village Creek Development was cited as an example where walking paths connect retail and residential areas. Also, interviewees expressed the importance of public transit planning (Bottineau Blvd in particular) and support for transit-oriented design. They recognized the need to design space for activity by incorporating more plazas and public spaces that are inviting as shopping points/destinations.

Creating a safe and comfortable environment for activity was identified by interviewees as an important priority. They mentioned communities that provide safe crossings for pedestrians, bicyclists and other uses will promote physical activity for all ages.

Improving trail systems and connections to parks and other community destinations was mentioned frequently by interviewees. Interviewees identified trails as an important community asset. One interviewee remarked that where trails have been built, people are increasingly using them and recognizing their benefits. Interviewees mentioned the future construction of park trails and city sidewalks where prudent, such as in large parks and on arterial streets.

Interviewees mentioned the improved acceptance by policy makers to fund programs and infrastructure. They expressed that a solid annual maintenance budget to keep trails and sidewalks in good condition was essential. Both prioritized funding in the annual Capital Improvement Program for construction and rehabilitation and the operating budget would be necessary make the needed changes in Brooklyn Park.

CITY of INDEPENDENCE

Nine interviews were conducted with citizens, city staff, the police chief, and current and former members of the parks committee and city council.

BARRIERS TO ACTIVE LIVING

Interviewees indicated that living in a rural area is challenging for daily walking and biking, especially for transportation. Places are spread out and people tend to drive to most destinations. Interviewees perceived the distance between community destinations to be too far to walk for bike. Others indicated that the limited number of trails and connectivity to local parks made it difficult to recreate or exercise.

Highway 12 is perceived by the interviewees as a huge barrier because it dissects the city and is unsafe to cross on foot or by bike. Young moms and parents have a hard time finding safe places for strollers and bikes. Many residents use the road shoulders to walk and bike. As new people move into the community, they are looking for safer places for physical activity.

ACCESS TO FACILITIES AND PROGRAMS

Many interviewees mentioned a common perception in the community that most people can exercise and recreate on their own land. People have large sections of property and often create their own amenities like ice skating rinks, swimming pools and playgrounds.

Organized sports such as soccer and baseball are well supported by community members. Demand for these activities has created limited field space and the city is currently planning for a new baseball diamond in conjunction with the new park. The city lacks a community center for more formal programs. Seniors use facilities in Orono and Delano for various activities. There are a few trails such as the Luce Line that accommodate walking, biking and equestrian use. Interviewees indicated that the city's comprehensive plan provides for a trail network utilizing the existing road network. As roads are reconstructed, trails will be added.

DESTINATIONS, SAFETY AND TRANSPORTATION

Most interviewees mentioned that there are few businesses in Independence and people need to drive to adjacent communities for services and shopping. A few people mentioned that the Luce Line (trail) runs close to a local business, the Yoke Ox where people stop for food and beverages. Interviewees have observed residents walking and biking to McBeary's Irish Pub and local parks. There are no schools located in Independence.

There were many facility and transportation improvements suggested by the interviewees. Creating more places for recreation such as parks, trails, tennis courts, and sliding hills were a first priority. In conjunction with these new facilities, interviewees expressed the need to work with the surrounding municipalities and county to create a park and trail network. They emphasized the importance of working with developers to plan for trails and open space in new areas.

Paving more shoulders along roads and creating safe crossings, especially for Highway 12, were suggested by the interviewees as a way to encourage walking and biking to local destinations such as Pioneer Creek Park. Some interviewees indicated that a mass transit system should be promoted along with residential cluster development.

Many interviewees expressed the need to educate residents about how to integrate physical activity into their rural lifestyle. Along with promoting more walking and biking, information about sharing road corridors for multiple uses should be provided.

CITY OF GOLDEN VALLEY

Eight interviews were conducted with the mayor, city manager, deputy police chief, park and recreation department staff, public works director, senior citizens activities coordinator, and two citizens representing seniors and the Courage Center.

BARRIERS TO ACTIVE LIVING

Interviewees expressed that the number of freeways and large county roads that cross through the city impede people's ability to move on foot or bicycle through the area. They felt that most first-ring suburbs like Golden Valley cater to the automobile and were built with little emphasis on sidewalks and trails. This lack of pedestrian-oriented infrastructure leads to unsafe conditions for people wishing to walk and bike around the community.

Safety, both real and perceived, is the one of the strongest barriers to physical activity in the City of Golden Valley, according to the interviewees. People feel that it is not safe to be out alone in an urban environment, particularly after dark, and therefore opt not to use parks, trails and other facilities. Far fewer crimes actually occur than the general public seems to believe. There have been several incidents where pedestrians have been injured by cars while walking in the streets. Many senior citizens in Golden Valley are not active because of safety concerns ranging from fear of traffic volumes, to fear of being the victim of a crime.

Some of the interviewees felt that local businesses, in general, do not respond well to the needs of residents for integrating daily physical activity. Interviewees believe that people are sometimes discouraged to shop or dine in certain areas of the city because they feel intimidated by the vast amounts of traffic in and around the parking lots. Area businesses are perceived by the interviewees as very auto-focused and make things difficult for pedestrians. Local businesses do not cater to the "every day needs" of people because there are few grocery or drug stores within walking distance from homes. Many businesses in town do not provide bike racks.

ACCESS TO FACILITIES AND PROGRAMS

Interviewees emphasized that the city provides many opportunities for citizens to participate in active living through park and recreation programs, senior centers, preschool programs, and other venues that attract people of all ages. Those interviewed believe that the City of Golden Valley responds well to the needs of residents for more physical activity opportunities. In particular, there is a wide array of programs that offer senior citizens chances to be physically, mentally, and socially active. The Courage Center provides various opportunities for disabled people in Golden Valley, such as open-pool times and open gym times.

Many interviewees felt that large Golden Valley such as General Mills, Allianz Insurance, and Tennant Company are examples of companies that provide time and facilities for exercise to all employees. Regional shopping areas, such as Brookdale, Ridgedale, and the Shoppes at Arbor Lakes offer mall walking programs that permit users to enter the shopping center before it opens and stay after it closes. Interviewees thought the City has also made key areas accessible by foot. City Hall, the Post Office, the library, and neighborhood shopping centers are all linked with a good system of trails and sidewalks.

The various parks and trails throughout the city were seen by the interviewees as important assets for increasing physical activity opportunities. Interviewees noted that the trails that are within and around Theodore Wirth Park are excellent. The city of Golden Valley provides yearlong opportunities for active living to residents by maintaining city sidewalks and trails within 24 hours of a snowfall.

DESTINATIONS, SAFETY AND TRANSPORTATION

Interviewees were asked a series of questions regarding the built environment including what changes in Golden Valley would support greater opportunities for physical activity.

Influencing the planning process in new communities to allow for trails, sidewalks, and convenient mixed-use commercial areas is seen by interviewees as critical in learning from the mistakes of older cities such as Golden Valley. Retrofitting communities with pedestrian and bicycling infrastructure is often more expensive and time consuming. Incorporating active living in the land use portion of the comprehensive plan is an important first step.

Interviewees expressed that one of most important things that Golden Valley can do to improve physical activity among residents is to complete the sidewalk and trail system. They recognize that if people are not offered safe and efficient trail and sidewalk systems, they will continue to rely on automobiles as primary modes of transportation. The City continues to add and improve sidewalks on neighborhood streets that were originally developed with no means of pedestrian travel.

Many of the interviewees stressed the need to balance between providing adequate auto transportation for residents and providing adequate pedestrian and bicycling transportation avenues. Creating more or improving existing crossings over large roads and railways is necessary to overcome some of the physical barriers.

GOLDEN VALLEY WALKING WORKSHOP

In May 2007, the City of Golden Valley, in association with Hennepin County Public Works organized and implemented a Walkable Community Workshop. The workshop intended to raise awareness of the health benefits of incorporating forms of active living into everyday activities and also highlighted current community design features in Golden Valley. The purpose of the workshop was to gather ideas and methods to make the city more pedestrian and biker friendly.

Participants of the workshop included residents of Golden Valley, city staff, various elected officials, and public health representatives. The group was given a walking tour of the Valley Square area of Golden Valley, commonly referred to as "downtown." This area, seen to the left, is bordered by 10th Ave N to the north,

Rhode Island Ave to the east, Highway 55 to the south, and Wisconsin Ave N to the west. Golden Valley, through redevelopment opportunities, is redirecting emphasis on pedestrian and bicycle connectivity and accessibility.

Recommendations from the Walking Workshop

Upon completing the walking tour, participants were asked to brainstorm ideas for improvement along the route. The Golden Valley Director of Planning and Development, Director of Public Works, Chief of Police, and Chief of Fire were on hand to help facilitate ideas. Listed below are the ideas for improvement in the Valley Square area of Golden Valley:

- Create a crosswalk on Winnetka Ave near McDonalds
- Improve the Highway 55 / Rhode Island Ave crosswalk
- Create a crosswalk over Highway 55 from Golden Valley Commons
- Create a crosswalk on Golden Valley Road between Golden Valley Shopping Center and townhome developments
- Improve visibility at the intersection of Rhode Island Ave and Country Club Dr
- Improve pedestrian access to Golden Valley Shopping Center from Winnetka Ave
- Install a sidewalk from 10th Ave to the Hennepin County Library entrance
- Connect sidewalk by the liquor store and Rhode Island Ave
- Improve pedestrian crossings over Golden Valley Road near Calvary Lutheran Church
- Encourage local shopping areas to improve accessibility for the disabled
- Create a crosswalk from the City Hall Campus to Golden Valley Commons Shopping Center
- Create a “connection” between Golden Valley Commons and Golden Valley Shopping Center

Several recommended items from the walking workshop were repeated by different individuals. Creating a crosswalk on Winnetka Ave between the Common Bond Homes and McDonald’s was a popular suggestion. Several participants mentioned improving various walking-related features at the Golden Valley Shopping Center. Also, improving pedestrian access across Highway 55 at Rhode Island Ave was mentioned several times. After brainstorming ideas for improvement, participants ranked ideas in order of priority and feasibility. Various city and county agencies were identified as the lead in taking action on these recommendations.

The Walkable Community Workshop in Golden Valley was a success. Input was received from a wide range of people. Walking tour suggestions were very insightful, and at the same time reasonable. Golden Valley has gained a new understanding of walkability through community involvement. Future walking workshops have been considered for the area along the Douglas Drive (CSAH 102) corridor.

ANALYSIS

The ALbD team reviewed the assessment data provided by Hennepin County staff and compared the results to a series of questions. The end result is themes and recommendations to help guide community engagement over the summer months. Ultimately, both the assessment and engagement activities will influence and build support for the county's active living vision and principles.

Are Hennepin County residents integrating physical activity into daily routines?

The majority of residents in Hennepin County are not walking or biking for utilitarian purposes.

Overall, approximately 60% of residents in the county and three case study communities indicated that they achieve 30 minutes of moderate physical activity five times per week. The majority of respondents are walking and biking for exercise and recreation. In Independence, respondents indicated higher rates of gardening/yard work over biking. The overwhelming majority of residents (69%) do not exercise at a gym, health club, community center or through a recreation program. Most people use the road, sidewalk and trail infrastructure for daily physical activity.

Few residents are walking or biking for utilitarian purposes. Transportation to key community destinations such as work, shopping or school is still by private vehicle even though survey respondents indicated they would be willing to walk or bike 15 minutes to those destinations.

In general, residents throughout the county and in the first-ring suburb of Golden Valley and the second-ring suburban area of Brooklyn Park reported that 81-89% respectively have a transit location within 15 minutes from home. But 87-91% of these residents don't walk or bike to that transit location on a daily basis. Similarly, more than 90% of case study areas and 84 % of county residents haven't walked or biked to work in the last two weeks. The vast majority (82%) of adults with children say their children don't walk or bike to school. Yet by a three-to-one margin, respondents agreed it was safe for their children to walk to schools in their neighborhoods.

Do the places that people live, work, shop, play and learn in Hennepin County support daily physical activity?

The current infrastructure and distance between schools, workplace, homes and services is not supportive of active living.

For Hennepin County residents, there is a notable difference in the availability of community destinations depending on location. For most first-ring suburbs like Golden Valley, 85% of residents noted that there are parks, playgrounds, trails and sidewalks in close proximity to their homes. Second-ring suburban communities such as Brooklyn Park observed less access to facilities and sidewalks (60%). Rural places like Independence have the least amount of community destinations with higher percentages for recreation facilities (54%) and low rates of sidewalks (26%). The availability and distance between destinations makes it difficult for people to run errands, commute to work, or take a walk as part of their daily routine.

Is a walking and biking infrastructure – sidewalks, bike lanes and trails- in place, safe and connected?

Transportation and recreation facilities exist, but are not connected to form a network for active living.

Based on survey responses and interviews, people identified that individual facilities are available in most communities. But there are few trails, sidewalk systems or on-road bike lanes in proximity to each other to increase utilitarian use. Interviewees expressed that the number of freeways and large county roads that cross through the various cities in Hennepin County impede people's ability to move safely on foot or bicycle. In each of the three case study areas, most interviewees noted safety concerns around walking or biking because of traffic speed or volume.

Do existing plans and policies support active living?

Individual policies and plans without integration is not enough to create more active communities.

Each pilot community has some type of planning document that references goals or policies related to bicycling and pedestrian facilities and networks. No specific policies supportive of commuting or physical activity in the workplace or schools were identified through the interview process in the pilot communities. Given the distances between destinations, integration of plans and policies for communities, schools and workplace will yield a better environment for active living.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For the community engagement process, ALbD suggests the Planning Group consider focusing efforts on the following areas in building support for an active living vision and principles:

Transportation Network

Hennepin County is an active partner in promoting bicycling and pedestrian accommodations in the pilot communities and county. Recruiting advocates from other transportation-related government agencies and departments will be essential for implementation of long-term policy change. City and county engineers, public works and street departments, state and county highway agencies and private transportation planners should be consulted with to elevate awareness of the project and active living ideas. In addition, users of the transportation network especially seniors, youth and lower income families have an important perspective on the need for a coordinated and connected system.

Employers, Schools and Services

Most adults and children spend a significant portion of their day at work, in school and/or running errands. Engaging employers, school administrators, teachers, parents and local businesses in the active living conversation will help ensure that communities are looking comprehensively at creating active places. Since few employers, schools or business interests currently have policies promoting walking or biking, there seems to be an excellent opportunity now to raise awareness of active living.

Walking and Bicycling

Increasing walking and bicycle use are essential for routine physical activity. Trail associations, bike clubs, walking clubs, pedestrian committees, law enforcement agencies and other groups that provide training and encouragement for walking and biking can be important advocates for active living principles. Their perspective on barriers to and opportunities for increasing physical activity can help influence physical changes and policies.