

# Active Living Design Checklist



Maple Grove, MN

January 2012

# **Active Living Hennepin County**

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### **Introduction and Overview**

The majority of people get their daily exercise by incorporating activities such as walking, biking, and gardening into their routines, not by a workout at a health club. The ease or difficulty of doing these activities plays a significant role in how active and subsequently how healthy a person is.

It is now recognized that how a community is designed, from land uses to site layout, impacts the health of its residents. Because of this, land use planning and transportation are evolving to incorporate design elements that improve community health.

The goal is to make the built environment conducive – and perhaps even seductive – to exercise. The principles are simple. Locate a mix of uses in close proximity to encourage fewer automobile trips. Build the pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure that accommodates these forms of transportation. Assure that residents have access to recreational areas and mass transit.

It is essential to not just answer the question, “Can you walk there?” but, “Will you walk there?” When you are forced to walk across a parking lot full of vehicles to reach a business, the message is being sent that this is a place for cars rather than people. When the elevator is the first thing you see when you enter a building, but you have to search for the staircase, which are you likely to choose? Is the sidewalk well-lit and designed at a pedestrian scale, or does it feel dangerous?

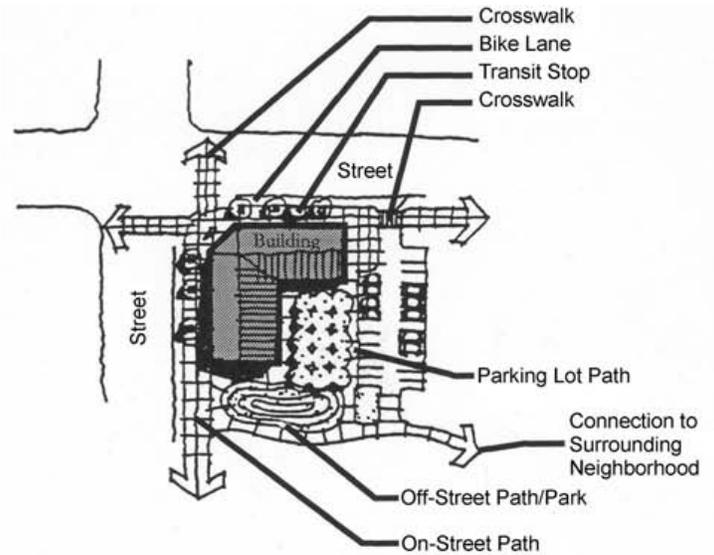
This holistic approach has benefits beyond those of improved health. Reduced automobile emissions, less congestion, prevention of sprawl, life-cycle communities, and social interaction are just some of the additional benefits of active living design.

These guidelines are intended to be used to start the conversation. They may be used by a developer to evaluate how supportive their proposed development is of active living principles. They may be used by planning commission members to identify opportunities to improve a project. Cities may elect to make certain elements requirements or incorporate a point system. These guidelines are intended to be flexible, thought-provoking and exciting.

Each community is unique, and some elements will be influenced by the context (rural vs. urban) and values of the residents. Use this tool as a starting point to identify how future land use, infrastructure, and development decisions can reap long-term health benefits for your residents.

## BUILDING LOCATION AND SITING

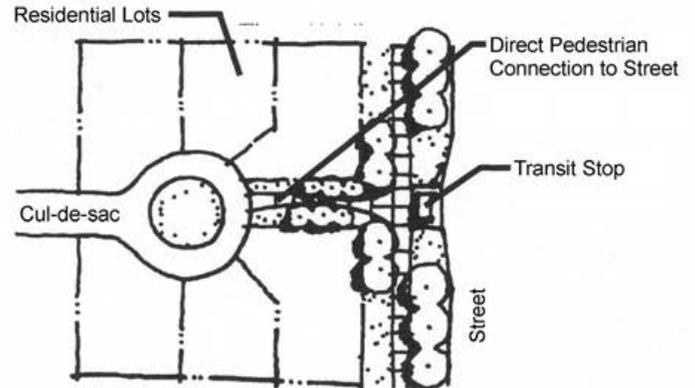
- 1. Buildings are sited in ways to make the entries or intended uses clear to and convenient for pedestrians.
- 2. Buildings are connected to public streets via sidewalks.
- 3. Public safety is considered during building location and site connectivity decisions using CPTED (Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design) principles, including connection to well-lit sidewalks that are buffered by street trees or other amenities.
- 4. Pedestrian level building windows front the street, and entrances are well-lit for user security.
- 5. Locate buildings near or at the lot line and orient them to the street.



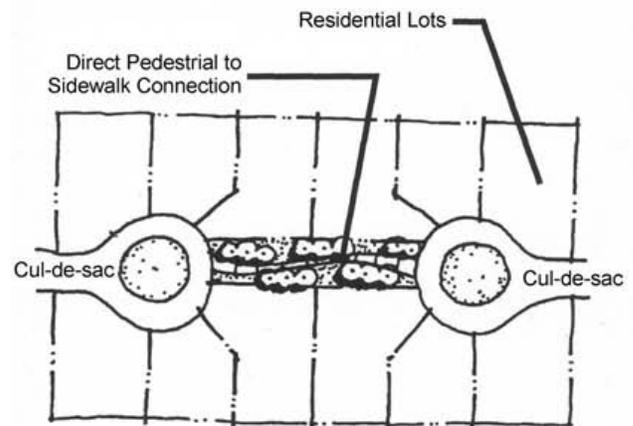
**Pedestrian-oriented Commercial Design**

## ACCESS TO TRANSIT

- 1. Locate main building entrances so they are oriented to public transit stops and higher density buildings along transit corridors.
- 2. Provide signage that includes a map with nearby destinations and the distance, time, route, and calories burned to the nearest or next transit stop.
- 3. If project has transit stop, encourage transit use by furnishing pedestrian conveniences.
  - a. Design sidewalks to comfortably accommodate pedestrians, including those with disabilities: a minimum of five feet wide in all areas, and 8-12 feet in walkable areas such as town centers and mixed use developments.
  - b. Consider incorporating transit benches and shelter into the side of the building.



**Sidewalk cut-through to street**



**Sidewalk cut-through to street**

## **PARKS, OPEN SPACES, AND RECREATION FACILITIES**

- 1. When planning a new development, use cluster development principles to aggregate open space in one common area rather than dispersing open space among private lots. Where possible, provide residents with access to open space within a ten-minute walk.
- 2. Locate new projects near existing public and private recreational facilities and encourage development of new facilities, including indoor activity spaces.
- 3. Use site design to orient development towards nearby parks and recreation facilities.
- 4. Locate buildings near parks or other public open spaces.
- 5. Design parks, open spaces, and recreational facilities to complement the cultural preferences of the local population, and to accommodate a range of age groups.
- 6. Create partnerships with organizations to sponsor and maintain green spaces and gardens.
- 7. Provide paths, running tracks, playgrounds, sports courts, and drinking fountains.
- 8. When designing offices and commercial spaces, provide exercise facilities or walking paths nearby.
- 9. Make green spaces available for use as community gardens or meeting areas.
- 10. Consider adjacent trails and opportunities to complete, enhance, and promote one mile circuits.
- 11. Design courtyards, gardens, terraces, and roofs that can serve as outdoor spaces for recreation for children and adults
- 12. When designing playgrounds, provide flexible space by including ground markings indicating dedicated areas for sports and multiple use.
- 13. Preserve or create natural terrain in children's outdoor play areas.
- 14. Provide appropriate lighting for sidewalks and active play areas to extend opportunities for physical activity into the evening.
- 15. In the design of parks and playgrounds, create a variety of climate environments to facilitate activity in different seasons and weather conditions.

## **VEHICLE AND BICYCLE PARKING MANAGEMENT**

- 1. Design parking facilities to safely accommodate pedestrian, bicycle, and transit access to the building. Consider installing sidewalks and crosswalks to connect parking to allow for safe pedestrian movement through the parking lot.
- 2. Design parking lots to facilitate shared parking between businesses. Consider designing parking lots as multi-use spaces for off-hour activities, such as

farmer's markets or recreational spaces.





Bicycle corral

- 3. Provide a majority of auto parking behind or under the building.
- 4. Install secure bicycle parking in multi-family residential sites at a ratio of one parking space for every 1 – 5 residential units. Indoor bicycle racks, controlled-access bicycle storage room, bicycle lockers, and bicycle corrals are secure parking options. Provide secured bicycle parking in a safe environment that is weather protected.

- 5. Install one bicycle parking space for every 10 - 20 non-residential off-street vehicle parking spaces.
- 6. Install short-term bicycle parking adjacent to building entrances so it is visible to all guests.



On-street bicycle parking  
[www.pedbikeimages.org](http://www.pedbikeimages.org) / Dustin White



Bicycle parking near building entrance

## STREETSCAPING / PLAZAS

- 1. Create attractive sidewalks and plaza spaces that meet or exceed ADA requirements and are well-maintained.
- 2. Seek partnerships with community groups to maintain and program plazas to maximize types of uses.
- 3. Locate public plazas along popular pedestrian streets and near transit stops.
- 4. Make plazas accessible to bicyclists.
- 5. Create plazas that are level with the sidewalk.
- 6. Design plazas that allow for diverse functions.



Jamison Square: Portland, OR

- 7. Design plazas to accommodate use in a variety of weather conditions.
- 8. Utilize tree canopy over sidewalks and streets.
- 9. Utilize pedestrian level lighting.
- 10. Utilize benches along walkways.
- 11. Create a buffer to separate pedestrians from moving vehicles using street furniture, trees, and other sidewalk infrastructure.
- 12. Provide seating, drinking fountains, restrooms, and other infrastructure that support increased frequency and duration of walking.

- 13. Provide pedestrian level lighting along streets and outdoor paths.
- 14. Include trees and objects of visual interest on streets and sidewalks.
- 15. Make sidewalk widths consistent with their use (see Transit 3. a.).
- 16. Provide enhanced pedestrian crossings at intersections such as countdown timers, medians or additional signage, and at any mid-block crossings as well.



Pedestrian refuge median



Countdown timer

- 17. If development includes roadway construction, design curb extensions along sections of the sidewalk that tend to attract greater pedestrian congestion.

- 18. When designing large urban-scale developments, create on-site pathways as extensions to public sidewalks.
- 19. Create or orient paths and sidewalks toward interesting views.
- 20. Provide marked, measured walking paths on sites as part of a wayfinding system targeted to pedestrians and bicyclists.
- 21. Make streets and paths universally accessible. Create:
  - a. Paths that are smooth, sufficiently wide, and that have curb cuts and turning radii adequate for a wheelchair or walker. <http://www.access-board.gov/prowac/alterations/guide.htm>
  - b. Paths with auditory crossing signals, adequate crossing times, clear signage, visible access ramps, and connections to walking, cycling, and public transit routes.

### STREET CONNECTIVITY

- 1. In large-scale developments, design well-connected streets with sidewalks and keep block sizes between 500 – 800 feet. Provide mid-block pedestrian connections approximately every 300 feet.
- 2. On arterials, provide potentially signalized, full-movement intersections for connections with collector or local streets. Locate these approximately every one-quarter (¼) mile along arterial streets.
- 3. On arterials, place non-signalized, potentially limited movement, collector or local street intersections at intervals of about one-eighth (1/8) mile between full movement collector or local street intersections.
- 4. Align new streets to safely connect with planned or existing streets. Especially consider the needs of pedestrians, bicyclists and potential transit riders.
- 5. Include only through streets (no dead-end/cul de sacs) except in cases where such streets are clearly designed to connect with future streets on abutting land
- 6. Avoid creating pedestrian over- and underpasses that force pedestrians to change levels.
- 7. Design dedicated pedestrian and bicycle paths that continue beyond dead-end streets to provide access to destinations even where cars cannot pass.
- 8. Minimize addition of mid-block vehicular curb cuts on streets with heavy foot traffic.
- 9. Provide signage and warning systems where sidewalks cross driveways and parking access.



Midblock pedestrian crossing

## BIKEWAYS

- 1. Ensure sightlines are not adversely impacted at intersections with bikeways and other points where the street form changes, in order to mitigate potential visibility issues and turning conflicts.
- 2. Avoid potential conflicts between cyclists and opening car doors—for example, by widening parking lanes or creating buffered bike lanes where appropriate.



Wide parking lane near bike lane

- 6. Consider bicycle sharing programs to increase access to bicycles for employees, residents, and visitors.
- 7. Use on-street markings or signage to visually reinforce the separation of areas for bicyclists and motorists.
- 8. Expand existing bikeways where use has exceeded capacity.



National Complete Streets Coalition,  
<http://www.completestreets.org/>



Bicycle stair ramp

- 3. Design Greenways into development so that residents can commute to work and also recreate. Connect them to the regional park system.
- 4. Consider shared-use paths in areas with viewing attractions.
- 5. Construct bicycle ramps along outdoor stairways, such as those on “step streets” so that those on bicycles can roll their bikes up/down stairs to continue their journey.

## TRAVEL DEMAND MANAGEMENT

- 1. Travel Demand Management (TDM) Plan has been prepared with the following Active Living considerations:
  - a. Provide education and encouragement for walking, bicycling, and transit.
  - b. Provide secure bicycle parking.
  - c. Provide locker and shower facilities for employees.
  - d. Design complete streets to encourage walking, bicycling, and transit

## INTERNAL BUILDING FEATURES AND BUILDING OPERATION

- 1. Locate community rooms and centers of activity near stairs rather than elevators to encourage stair use.
- 2. Place stairs in visible, convenient and well-traveled areas to encourage their use.
- 3. Integrate stair design features that are colorful, inviting and provide users with the perception of safety.



Photo courtesy of Paulsen Architects, Mankato, MN



Blue Cross Blue Shield "Do" Campaign

- 4. Locate point-of-decision prompts near elevators, at stairs, and in stairwells to encourage stair use.
- 5. Provide brochures such as walking route maps, health information, local park locations and recreation programs via kiosks or other educational methods.

## LARGE-SCALE DEVELOPMENTS

- 1. Incorporate a mix of uses, for example: residences, offices, schools, retail stores, cultural and community spaces, and recreational facilities.
- 2. Develop a policy so that building space is available to walkers, exercise groups, and community members during off hours.
- 3. Design public open spaces as part of large-scale developments.
- 4. Design roads to have the minimum number of lanes and minimum lane width as practicable. Use additional right of way to provide bicycle and pedestrian facilities.



- 5. Incorporate Complete Streets principles.
- 6. Incorporate traffic calming street additions such as curb extensions, medians, and speed bumps.
- 7. Consider other physical design measures where appropriate, for example:
  - a. Horizontal deflections such as curved roadway alignments
  - b. Vertical deflections such as raised intersections or crossings
  - c. Traffic diverters, roundabouts, and mini-traffic circles
  - d. Signal phasing plan with a protected left-turn lag phase
  - e. Signage (e.g. “Yield to Pedestrian,” “Stop for Pedestrian in Crosswalk,” and “Share the Road”)
  - f. Avoidance of right turn slip lanes and wide curb radii
- 8. Provide safe walking and bicycle paths between densely populated areas and destinations such as grocery stores and farmers’ markets.
- 9. Design commercial sites to accommodate pedestrians, bicyclists, vehicles, and trucks safely and conveniently. Provide infrastructure such as bike racks and drinking fountains.



## SCHOOLS

- 1. Design school sports and physical activity facilities to allow for public use outside of school hours.
- 2. Encourage schools to participate in a Safe Routes to School program.
- 3. Locate new schools to allow/promote walkability.



This document was created by the Development Policy Committee of Active Living Hennepin County with contributions from numerous individuals and sources.

Special thanks and recognition goes to the New York City (NYC) Active Design Guidelines. For more information on the NYC guidelines please visit: [www.nyc.gov/adg](http://www.nyc.gov/adg)

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