



Healthy Community Design

Healthy community design means planning and designing communities to make it easier for people to live healthy lives. Researchers and community members recognize that an environment that supports active living, and expands access to healthy and affordable foods, is essential for good health. Healthy community design changes the physical environment, community infrastructure and local policy to create such an environment.

Recommended Community Strategies for Obesity Prevention from the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC) describes a range of strategies that communities can use to support physical activity and healthy eating. Of these, the following four are most relevant for Vermont's population, rural character and framework for local planning.

Concentrated Mixed-Use Development

Building residential, retail, industrial, medical and educational facilities close together creates walkable communities, and encourages people of all ages and abilities to make physical activity a part of everyday living. Concentrated mixed-use development can also create a greater market for healthy foods, resulting in greater access to healthy food choices. It also concentrates infrastructure investments (e.g., sidewalks and bike paths), creates options for public transportation, maintains green space, reduces air pollution, and promotes greater social interaction.

Fast Fact:

- People who live in walkable, mixed-used communities are more than twice as likely to be physically active 30 minutes or more each day, compared to those who live in communities oriented to motor vehicles.¹

Bicycle- and Pedestrian-Friendly Communities

Well-designed, interconnected bicycle and pedestrian networks and facilities support an active lifestyle. Bicycle- and pedestrian-friendly communities take into consideration safety, comfort and aesthetics by providing bicycle lanes and parking, sidewalks, crosswalks, shared use paths, lighting, benches and trees along the street.

Fast Facts:

- Studies show a 35% increase in physical activity among people who live in communities that have inviting, safe environments for walking, exercise and play.²
- Safety measures, such as traffic calming or clear street crossings, encourage exercise: 43% of people who live within 10 minutes of a safe place to walk meet physical activity recommendations.³
- Narrow streets and slower speeds provide safety — drivers move faster on wider roads.⁴
- Slowing traffic from 30 to 20 mph reduces injuries to pedestrians by more than 70%.⁵
- Slowing traffic from 40 to 20 mph improves a person's chances of surviving being hit by a car from 5% to 85%.⁶

Parks, Recreational Facilities and Open Spaces

Access to recreational facilities (such as parks and green spaces, outdoor sports fields and facilities, walking and biking trails, public pools and playgrounds) supports active and healthy living with safe places to play and socialize. Access to these places is affected by distance from homes or schools, cost, hours of operation, and available transportation.

Fast Facts:

- Increasing access or creating new places for physical activity can raise the percentage of residents who are physically active by 25%.⁷
- People who live within one-quarter mile of a park are 25% more likely to be physically active.⁸
- Having a network of well-connected trails to community destinations removes some barriers to physical activity.⁹

Fresh and Healthy Foods

Fresh and healthy foods are essential for a healthy diet. Lack of access to affordable fresh produce and nutritious foods contributes to obesity and associated health problems. Key strategies for expanding access to healthy food and local food production include use of public spaces for farmers' markets and community gardens, support for community-based agricultural enterprises, incentives for retailers to offer healthier foods, and zoning and other actions that attract food markets and restaurants.

Fast Facts:

- Rural, low-income and underserved communities are less likely to have larger food markets with a variety of fruit, vegetables and other healthy foods.¹⁰
- Having a grocery store in the community is linked to higher fruit and vegetable consumption and lower prevalence of overweight and obesity.¹¹

All of these strategies promote health at the same time as they promote economically and socially vibrant communities. This guide provides tools, tips, resources and examples to help identify which of these strategies are best for your community, and to make implementing your chosen strategies a reality.