



California Healthy Cities and Communities

Becoming a Pedestrian and Bicycle-Friendly Community: The Willits Experience

It's hard to imagine creating a pedestrian and bicycle-friendly community when your city's Main Street is part of U.S. 101, but that is exactly what the City of Willits is doing.

Walkability vs. Traffic Flow

Situated at the intersection of U.S. Highway 101 and State Route 20 in rural Northern California, the City of Willits has long dreamed of a community where residents and visitors can safely walk or bike to work, school, shopping, and restaurants, while enjoying their beautiful environment. Although that vision is in direct conflict with the priorities of Caltrans and the transportation industry that seek to move people and goods as quickly as possible through small towns along major highways, Willits is taking a significant step toward achieving its vision with the development of its Bicycle and Pedestrian Specific Plan.

The City of Willits (population 5,073) lies in the center of Mendocino County, 35 miles east of the Pacific Ocean and 150 miles north of San Francisco. When Willits became a California Healthy City in June 2008, it had a long history of undertaking innovative strategies to improve community health. The City's commitment to walkability goes back to a three-day workshop in 1999 that energized community leaders to transform Willits' downtown and neighborhoods into safe places for

everyone to walk and bike.

As a core group of city officials, business leaders and environmentalists began identifying the types of changes they would like to see, their ideas for traffic calming measures and increased pedestrian and bicyclist safety quickly collided with Caltrans' mission to get traffic through Willits as fast as possible. There were several attempts to move a plan forward, but as other projects commanded the available staff and financial resources, the walkability plans were sidelined.

Timing is Everything!

In early 2008 the timing was right for Willits to refocus its attention on creating a walking and bicycling friendly community. Many of the original participants in the 1999 workshop and the subsequent planning efforts were still committed to the concept. Funding from the California River Parkways Program was supporting the construction of a bike trail along Haehl Creek. There was also a growing movement to "localize" the Willits economy and create a more sustainable community. All these factors created fertile ground for the implementation of a Healthy Cities program and the selection of the Bicycle and Pedestrian Specific Plan (BPSP) as an initial project.

Willits established a Healthy Cities steering committee consisting of many of the participants involved in the original walkability efforts, as

well as some new faces, including representatives from community-based organizations, schools, downtown businesses and collaborative groups addressing community health and sustainability.



Willits High School student volunteers congratulate 96-year old Abner Liggett at the halfway point station for participating in the Willits Healthy Action Team (WHAT) 10,000 Steps Walk.

Putting the Plan Together

Willits used the development of its BPSP as an opportunity to engage residents with diverse perspectives

continued on page 2

Inside This Issue ...

Page 2 ...

- The City of Glendale Develops Monterey Road Eco-Community Garden

Page 3 ...

- Lifelong Learning - Opportunities Abound When Mixing Generations!

Page 4 ...

- Events and Resources

continued from page 1

in improving community health and safety. Over 500 residents contributed their ideas and priorities to develop the goals, policies and implementation steps of the Bicycle and Pedestrian Specific Plan. Residents completed surveys of their walking and bicycling behaviors and priorities, provided input at two community workshops, and participated in a public hearing to finalize the plan. Almost 100 residents attended the workshops to develop the BPSP's goals, policies and standards, a significant turn-out in a community of only 5,000 people! Holly Madrigal, a second-term City Councilmember, commented, "The ground work for what we want our town to look like has come from the community, which is wonderful!"

Civic engagement in Willits' BPSP went far beyond attending public workshops and hearings. The renewed interest in improving walking and bicycling opportunities generated by the initiation of Willits' Healthy Cities project was quickly channeled into action.

The Willits Healthy Action Team (WHAT) started a 10,000 Steps Walk (approximately 5 miles) to encourage residents of all ages to walk for enjoyment and exercise. At the March 2009 event, participants received pre-walk information about safety and design issues via a community email tree. During the walk they were encouraged to look for general obstacles, hazards and other impediments and to consider several pre-identified alternatives for improvements at specific intersections. After completing the walk, participants provided their observations and recommendations on comment cards. The results were reviewed by the WHAT and Healthy Cities Steering Committee and incorporated in the BPSP.

Input from the various meetings and events, steering committee members and city staff was compiled by the city's general plan contractor, PMC, to create the final draft version of the BPSP. In June 2009, the City Council conducted a public hearing and unanimously adopted the BPSP.

What Is In the BPSP and What Will It Do?

Willits' Bicycle and Pedestrian Specific Plan supports the city's evolution from a natural resources management (lumber and timber) base to a light manufacturing, services and tourism base. Enhancing the city's walking and bicycling environment is intended to attract visitors, encourage greater physical activity among residents, reduce automobile traffic and contribute to improved health, preservation of the environment and reductions in greenhouse gases. Implementation of the plan will result in a citywide system of interconnected paths, lanes, routes and support facilities that will encourage and facilitate residents' and visitors' choices to walk or bike to work, school, shopping, entertainment and other services. The objective is to double the current level of walking and bicycling in Willits by 2020.

As an element of the city's General Plan, the policies and objectives of the BPSP have the force of general plan law and development approvals must be consistent with those policies. The Plan provides the basis for requiring design and construction improvements for bicycle and pedestrian access and safety as conditions of the permit process for new construction and redevelopment. City staff will use the BPSP to guide street and sidewalk improvement projects to facilitate safe walking and bicycling throughout Willits.

The BPSP will also increase Willits' competitiveness for infrastructure funding to become a walking and bicycling friendly community.

Spin-Off Efforts Didn't Wait for the Plan

The engaged citizenry that Willits fosters and supports has begun transforming their community into a healthier place. Even prior to adoption of the BPSP, sub-groups of the steering committee had already organized an award-winning bike locker project, quarterly 10,000 Steps Walk events, Walk for Wellness Month, Walk to School Day and the

Haehl Creek Trail and Safe Routes to School projects.

Willits' residents and city leaders want to see the planning efforts they invest in become real. The BPSP is no exception. With the commitment of residents, energetic volunteer leadership and committed city officials, Willits is well on its way to achieving its vision of becoming a pedestrian and bicycling friendly community.

For more information, contact:

*Alan Falleri
Community Development Director
City of Willits
(707) 459-7124
Email: arf@willitscity.com*



The City of Glendale Develops Monterey Road Eco-Community Garden

The City of Glendale has been working with the Coalition for a Green Glendale (CGG) to develop an exciting environmental project, the Monterey Road Eco-Community Garden.



Gardeners hosted Grand Opening tours. From L-R: Caroline Jackman, Maria Elena Caballero, Tom Brady, Eleanor Wacker, and Pauline Ferguson.

With sustainable living in their "Jewel City" as a main priority, CGG has been able to provide over 25 families in the neighborhood with their own garden beds to plant vegetables and plants. In collaboration with the City of Glendale and the State of California, permits to allow recycled water to be used in a community garden were obtained – a California first! For more information about the project, please visit www.green-glendale.org

Opportunities Abound When Mixing Generations!

This article is part of an ongoing series on innovative and promising practices that expand upon six domains featured in our publication, "A Healthy Community Perspective on Aging Well." The domains are: Varied Housing Options, Mobility, Community Involvement, Employment, Lifelong Learning, and Supportive Services.

The City of Indio, located in Riverside County, has a total population of 83,937. The city is one of the fastest growing in the nation, with a population increase of nearly 60% from 2000 to 2007 (U.S. Census). Indio is ethnically diverse with community members self-identifying as 75% Hispanic/Latino, 19% White, and over 42% as "other races."

Lifelong learning is an important avenue for older people to remain intellectually active and socially engaged. Very often, cities fail to capitalize on potential opportunities to meet the needs of both younger and older community members through programming that offers both learning opportunities and constructive, social interaction.

Indio is creating an intergenerational campus with facilities such as the Senior and Teen Centers, Library, High School and Elementary schools, all located within walking distance from each other. The city pooled resources in order to bring together facilities to create opportunities for learning across generations.

A recent report published by the American Education Council and MetLife Foundation (2008) discussing higher education and older adults noted, "lifelong learning at the right time and in the right amount of time can foster critical forms of mobility... across workplaces, communities and generations."

City Manager Glenn Southard recalled

the great similarity of ideas expressed by teens and older adults during the planning process, "Both groups expressed interest in center sponsored educational events and outings. We took the time to think it through and involved everyone in the community in the process."

In anticipation of the future activities planned for the intergenerational campus, the Indio Human Services staff initiated a program targeting older adults and teenagers that began with a bus trip to a nearby theatrical production. During the activity, Human Services (Senior Services) Supervisor Michael Moreland observed, "They didn't interact. No one talked to each other." Prior to the next outing, city staff planned ahead to ensure interaction among participants.

In advance of the trip, staff members spoke, in separate meetings, with the two age groups about the special opportunity afforded by the event. In addition, staff members established a seating arrangement on the bus that placed younger people next to older participants and provided "icebreaker" activities.




Hector Gutierrez, Jr. and Mary Lou Peggs waiting to board the bus in Indio.

The strategies and approaches to encouraging interaction and learning among the generations proved highly successful. Moreland noted that the program, "made for a better understanding and tolerance of each other's background and cultural history," among the predominately Caucasian older adults and younger Hispanic and Latino youth. The events

became so popular that staff had to institute sign up sheets and a drawing to select participants. With increased demand, there was a modest increase in costs. Consequently, staff sought and received outside support from local Native American tribes and the Rotary Club.

Combining lifelong learning opportunities in an intergenerational setting is a win-win for everyone involved. Typical senior center events do not attract younger people. If teens do attend an event at the senior center, they do not meaningfully engage with older adults. Intergenerational activities are usually "one-way" in nature -- either the older adult is the "teacher" or "mentor" or the young person is the "friendly visitor." Indio has created a "level playing field" among the age groups.

Research on intergenerational learning (Loewen, 1996) revealed that "in the best programs, the lines between those served and those serving are blurred to the point of irrelevance." In this instance, because everyone is a student and a teacher, regardless of age, the learning environment is enhanced.

The life experience shared and support extended by older adults to younger people are invaluable and provide an additional circle of nurturing and guidance during challenging economic times for many families. By using existing facilities and pooling resources, cities can stretch dollars and improve program efficiency. 

For more information contact:

Glenn Southard, City Manager
City of Indio
(760) 391-4015
Email: gsouthard@indio.org

Michael D. Moreland, Human Services Supervisor/Seniors
(760) 391-4170
Email: mmoreland@indio.org

Connections is a publication of California Healthy Cities and Communities (CHCC). It is published three times per year. CHCC is conducted by the Center for Civic Partnerships, Public Health Institute, under Contract #07-65423 with the California Department of Public Health, supported by the Preventive Health and Health Services Block Grant from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official view of the CDC.

California Healthy Cities and Communities (CHCC) assists cities and communities with developing, implementing and evaluating inclusionary, community-driven programs, policies and plans, which address environmental, social and economic determinants of health. CHCC advocates a broad definition of health: a shared vision; widespread community participation; system reform; collaborative partnerships; engaging local assets; and a means to measure progress and base improvements upon results.

Executive Editor	Editor	Guest Writers	Designer
Joan Twiss	Nicole Hara	Linda Peek & Clare Smith	Jade Chin

California Healthy Cities and Communities
Tel: 916/646-8680 Fax: 916/646-8660
Email: chcc@civicpartnerships.org

© 2009, State of California, Department of Public Health. This material may not be reproduced or disseminated without prior written permission from the California Department of Public Health.

Connections

Center for Civic Partnerships
California Healthy Cities and Communities
1851 Heritage Lane, Suite 250
Sacramento, CA 95815



A Center of the Public Health Institute

Events & Resources

Events

30th Annual Non-Profit Housing Conference

October 13, 2009
San Francisco, CA
http://ga0.org/nphaction/events/2009_nph_conference/details.tcl

National Preservation Conference 2009

October 13-17, 2009
Nashville, TN
<http://www.preservationnation.org/resources/training/npc/>

American Public Health Association Annual Meeting and Exposition: Water and Public Health

November 7-11, 2009
Philadelphia, PA
<http://www.apha.org/meetings>

9th Annual New Partners for Smart Growth Conference: Building Safe, Healthy and Livable Communities Conference

February 4-6, 2010
Seattle, WA
<http://www.newpartners.org>

Web Sites

The Sustaining Rural Places

Toolkit – A collaborative effort between the Sierra Business Council and Saving the Sierra, this toolkit offers information on steps you can take to sustain the land, water, and open space in your community for generations to come. <http://www.sbcouncil.org/Publications/Sustaining-Rural-Places-Toolkit>

Audience Response Systems –

Hand-held devices/software used for interaction with audience members at focus groups, conferences, etc. For more information, visit Turning Technologies at <http://www.turningtechnologies.com> and Padgett at <http://www.pcipro.com>

The Transportation and Climate Change Clearinghouse –

This website has been designed as a one-stop source of information on transportation and climate change issues. <http://www.climate.dot.gov/>

LandScape America: Open Space Maps and Data –

A collaborative project of NatureServe and the National Geographic Society,

this new online resource uses an interactive map viewer to bring together maps, data, photos and stories and present them in dynamic and accessible formats. It also provides useful tools and resources for strategic conversation planning and priority-setting. <http://www.landscape.org/>

Publications

Planning Complete Streets for

an Aging America – This report, released by AARP, addresses the need to create Complete Streets that are safe and convenient for travel by automobile, foot, bicycle and transit regardless of age or ability. To view the report, please visit the following website: http://assets.aarp.org/rgcenter/il/2009_02_streets.pdf

Measuring the Economic Value of

a City Park System – The Trust for Public Land's (TPL's) Center for City Park Excellence has identified seven attributes of city park systems that provide economic value and can be measured. To view the report, please visit the following website: http://www.tpl.org/tier3_cd.cfm?content_item_id=22879&folder_id=3208