

## **Moving Toward an Active Delaware Through Community Design**

**Keynote: Creating a Legacy: The Importance of Healthy and Livable Communities,** *Richard Killingsworth, Director of Strategic Planning and Operations, Nemours Health & Prevention Services*

Killingsworth's presentation addresses the importance of healthy and livable communities through both personal and community-wide responsibility. He reflects on the issue of physical inactivity among Americans, which has increased over the decades as a result of automobiles, use of television, computers, convenience engineering, and the built environment. He emphasizes the prevalence of these sedentary determinants through staggering figures, which indicate that one in four adults lead sedentary lifestyles resulting in nearly two-thirds of the adult population being overweight and nearly a third percent are obese. In addition, nearly 80 percent of overweight children remain overweight as adults, emphasizing the drastic need for healthy habits to be formed in adolescence. These alarming rates of unhealthy living are associated with more than \$78.5 billion in medical costs annually, highlighting the overwhelming healthcare issue present in our society.

In response to the alarming consequences of sedentary behaviors, Killingsworth offers the following recommendations to help combat physical inactivity: (1) provide social and physical environments to support an extra 15-30 minutes of walking per day to expend enough calories to control weight gain of about one pound per month; and (2) increase accessibility, availability, and safety of walkable communities to promote a greater likelihood of individuals walking to their destination instead of driving. By incorporating social and physical supportive environments of active living, community initiatives and personal responsibility can help to lower the excessive healthcare costs, prevent up to 1.7 pounds of weight gain per year, encourage 40 percent more physical activity, decrease the amount of time spent in a car, and increase life expectancy by four years.

**Statewide Approach to Address Healthy Eating & Active Living,** *Michelle Eichinger, Physical Activity Program Administrator, Delaware Division of Public Health*

Through this presentation, Eichinger explains the state of Delaware's approach to addressing the obesity epidemic. The definitions of "overweight" and "obesity" are provided, and Delaware's adult overweight and obesity rates are represented graphically. The physical activity trends in the state indicate that over half of Delaware's adults are not meeting CDC recommendations for daily physical activity.

The evolution of the Delaware Partners to Promote Healthy Eating and Active Living is presented as a way to work toward obesity prevention. The program uses a socio-ecological approach to address two of the main factors contributing to obesity—behavior and environment. Six settings—including schools, healthcare, worksites, families in communities, environment and policy, and social marketing and communications—are highlighted as areas covered by Delaware Partners to Promote Healthy Eating and Active Living.

**Capitalizing on Citizen Interest in Active Living**, *Kendall Sommers, Outdoor Recreation Planner, Delaware Division of Parks & Recreation*

Sommers presented on the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP), which identifies public recreation-use patterns and preferences as well as the public's landscape perception. In 2008, 27 percent of Delaware residents viewed outdoor recreation to be somewhat important, whereas 64 percent viewed it to be very important. In addition, the top four reasons why Delawareans participate in outdoor recreation were identified:

- physical fitness
- relaxation
- being with family and friends
- being close to nature

Of those surveyed, 71 percent travel less than nine miles to the recreational area they visit most frequently and they choose to visit the area because they live close by (61%), the area has facilities that are of interest to them (29%), and the aesthetics are appealing (13%). This assessment tool is updated every five years to analyze the supply and demand of outdoor recreation in the state of Delaware in order to direct future recreational investments.

**Why Active Living is Essential Across the Lifespan**, *Dr. Karyl Rattay, Director, Delaware Division of Public Health*

Dr. Rattay highlights the benefits of physical activity and emphasizes the importance of prioritizing disease *prevention* over disease *treatment*. Rattay cites President Obama as an important supporter of health promotion and disease prevention. These ideas are in line with the mission of the Division of Public Health—to protect and enhance the health of the people of Delaware.

Physical activity is not only associated with chronic disease prevention but with improved mental health and a longer lifespan. Physical activity does not have to be achieved through exercise. Improvements at the community level in public spaces and transportation will encourage individuals to lead a more active lifestyle. It is also possible to reduce health disparities among varying ethnic groups by improving the design of public spaces. Elected officials can help shift the focus from healthcare reform to simply health reform through improved urban planning and economic development.

**The Key Ingredients to Healthy, Rewarding Communities: Laying the Groundwork for Smarter Growth in Delaware**, *Connie Holland, Director, Office of State Planning Coordination*

Holland's presentation focused on the impact of sprawling land-use patterns, which have increased over time in response to the demand for infrastructure to support residential needs and services located in suburban communities. There has been a more recent call for better land-use

patterns, such as newer housing options and developments that promote density, to support substantial growth within the state over the past several decades. For example, several residential areas in Delaware have been developed to include easily accessible places to dine, shop, and walk. Additionally, historic sites, buildings, and facilities are being restored for new contemporary purposes throughout the state. Holland presented a chart to support the benefit of density, indicating that low-density sprawl has the highest costs associated with community development, whereas high-density, planned communities have the lowest costs.

As Delaware continues to grow and the population ages, the overall costs and quality-of-life factors associated with how communities are built and citizens live need to be taken into consideration for sustainable growth. Ideally, community design should incorporate livability and smart-growth principles to effectively maximize mobility and improve overall quality of life among Delaware residents.

**Building Great Communities**, *Marcia Scott, Associate Policy Scientist, Institute for Public Administration, University of Delaware*

The presentation introduces the University of Delaware's Institute for Public Administration (IPA) and explains its role in working with communities in relation to developing healthier lifestyles. IPA's Healthy Community Resource Guide, available as a downloadable document at [dspace.udel.edu:8080/dspace/handle/19716/3410](https://dspace.udel.edu:8080/dspace/handle/19716/3410), is also showcased. It is explained that the resource guide is part of a larger IPA project which aims to create more walkable communities to achieve health, environmental, and economic benefits.

Recurrent themes are reviewed, including less walkable communities, which has led to decreases in physical activity levels and the increasing incidence of obesity. Careful planning to incorporate built infrastructure will lead to increases in physical activity by supporting more active lifestyles. IPA's future plans include the development of an online toolkit and an assessment tool for communities. IPA also plans to continue partnering and working with communities and developing training to be used in municipal planning.

### **Lessons from the Field: Breakthrough Strategies in Newark, Milford, Lewes, and Dover**

*Newark*, *Charlie Emerson, Director, City of Newark Department of Parks and Recreation, and Mike Fortner, Planner, City of Newark*

Emerson's presentation introduced the various public lands and trails present throughout the City of Newark, such as the James F. Hall Trail (1.76 miles), Pomeroy and Newark Rail Trail (1.80 miles), Newark Reservoir and Redd Park (~3 miles), and Christiana Creek/Mason Dixon Trail (~4 miles). For example, Emerson discussed how the James F. Hall trail connects residential neighborhoods, three city parks, University of Delaware facilities, student housing, a shopping center, Amtrak's passenger rail, and two schools. Similar to the connectivity present along the James F. Hall trail, the Newark Reservoir and Redd Park as well as the Christiana Creek/Mason Dixon Trail connect residential neighborhoods with local shopping centers, schools, and parks. The Pomeroy and Newark Rail Trail is currently under construction and scheduled to be open for

use by late 2010. The availability of these public lands and trails provides Newark residents access to components of a healthy community.

*Milford, Gary Emory, Director, City of Milford Department of Parks and Recreation*

In this presentation, Emory showcases Milford's Mispillion Riverwalk. The plan to develop the walkway began in 2004 with the purpose of promoting the health and history of Milford. The trail connects two paths (the two-mile Greenway trail and the 1.5-mile Historic Loop) and provides walkers with a look at many of Milford's historic houses.

*Lewes, Mike Lynn, President, RDM, Inc.*

Lynn presented on the new urbanism in Sussex County through a focus on Lewes. He introduced the core values of the town by acknowledging the diversity that exists as a result of the cohesion of good pedestrian traffic present throughout the town, such as easy walking distances, porches, sidewalks, safe streets, key focal points of activity, an identifiable town center, and community activities. Therefore, one design principle is to develop a mix residential housing for people of varied income integrated with retail services and recreational facilities in a pedestrian-oriented site plan. A second is to develop a town center as the central axis, locating all neighborhood business along a maintain street and link the residential housing to retail services with an extensive network of sidewalks, pathways, and safe bikeways.

*Dover, Ann Marie Townshend, AICP, Planning Director, City of Dover*

Townshend explains the role that the city must take in creating an active community through design. She proposes that the city set minimum zoning requirements to incorporate elements that would encourage physical activity, including sidewalks, bicycle amenities, and interconnections between paths. Townshend finishes with examples of Dover's comprehensive city plans.

**Wrap-up Session, Chris Oakes, Environment and Policy Setting Co-Chair, Delaware Partners to Promote Healthy Eating and Active Living (HEAL)**

The final presentation continues to emphasize the need for policy change and incorporation of the built environment for obesity prevention. Adjusting both policy and environment will benefit the entire community, as opposed to only one individual. Oakes presents goals and objectives for the state of Delaware over the next five years. The presentation concludes with reasons for elected officials to get involved, including the ability to lead by example, providing more opportunities for children to play in their environment, and keeping a sense of community.

***Summary of Forum Evaluation for Public Dissemination***

By convening a diverse group of stakeholders and presenting compelling evidence about the role of community design on health, social and community well-being, and economic prosperity, the Forum Planning Group intended to encourage participants to take an active role in improving

Delaware's built environment. As such, the main purpose of the evaluation was to capture information regarding participants' intentions to engage in activities that would help improve Delaware's built environment, primarily by assessing if participants intended to answer the call to action issued at the conclusion of the forum by signing up for one of the *ad hoc* committees being formed to implement the Environment and Policy objectives of the Delaware HEAL Five-Year Comprehensive Plan. The forum hosted over 80 attendees with an estimated 56 percent survey response rate (48.9% government, 21% nonprofits, 10% private business, and 20.1% "other").

### *Evaluation Results*

Approximately 71 percent of the respondents indicated that they believed the information presented via the forum was either *useful* or *very useful* to them (27% Very Useful, 44% Useful). Fifty-three percent *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that they would be signing up for a Delaware HEAL committee immediately, 42 percent were *neutral* about signing up on the day of the Forum, and a mere five percent indicated that they did not intend to sign up on the day of the Forum. Additionally, 65 percent of respondents *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that they intended to be actively involved in an *ad hoc* committee within the next three months, whereas only two percent indicated that they did not.

Respondents also indicated they were interested in pursuing a number of opportunities for promoting active living as indicated by the following responses:

- 62% were interested in learning about making environmental/policy changes for healthy communities.
- 38% would participate in the technical advisory committee from SCORP.
- 27% would attend a planning education class.
- 27% would sign up for an NHPS e-news brief.
- 24% would join a friends group for state or local park.
- 20% would present at public hearings for land-use plans, development, or transportation projects.