Introduction

The Healthy Communities Comprehensive Plan Assessment Tool is a checklist-based document designed to aid Delaware municipalities in the process of writing comprehensive plans that emphasize planning for and building healthier communities. This tool is intended for use by local government officials, planning commissions, or other individuals involved in writing or updating their community’s comprehensive plan. By focusing on policy initiatives and urban design guidelines that can increase physical activity and encourage healthier lifestyles, the Comprehensive Plan Assessment Tool will ultimately result in comprehensive plans that set the stage for a new era of health-focused community planning.

One goal of this Assessment Tool is to stress that planning for healthy communities is about more than just walkability. There are several elements of community planning and design that contribute to whether or not a particular community fosters healthy lifestyles. Many of these elements are included in the focal item of this document, the Comprehensive Plan Healthy-Community Checklist (found on page 14). This checklist provides a user-friendly format for guidance and review during the comprehensive-planning process. While the checklist contains 24 unique items, there are five overarching principles of planning for a healthy community that structure the checklist. If aspects of each of these five principles are included in a comprehensive plan, then the plan should score very highly on the checklist:

1. **Bicycle and Pedestrian Accessibility**: Every effort should be made to provide facilities that allow for the safe movement of pedestrians and bicyclists throughout the town for the purposes of transportation as well as recreation. Basic facilities should be provided, including sidewalks, bike lanes, and multi-use trails.

2. **Complete Streets Principles**: While bicycle and pedestrian accessibility is one of the main components of Complete Streets, truly “complete” streets are convenient and accessible for all users of the transportation system—motorists, transit users, pedestrians, and bicyclists of all ages and abilities. This convenience and accessibility includes accessory factors such as streetscaping improvements and human-scaled design practices. Towns should strive for all aspects of Complete Streets principles in addition to basic infrastructure.

3. **Parks and Open Spaces**: Sufficient parks and open spaces should be made available to town residents for active and passive recreational opportunities. Open spaces also enhance the visual attractiveness of an area while helping to improve air quality.

4. **Compact and Mixed-Use Development**: The design and benefits of compact and mixed-use development often go hand-in-hand. The town should provide areas of mixed use to its residents because of the increased opportunities to walk or bicycle to common destinations (such as grocery stores and restaurants) therein. Compact development
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should also be encouraged, as low-density development results in destinations that are physically separated by long distances, requiring automobile transportation. Municipalities can encourage more compact development by using context-sensitive designs that will result in destinations that are close enough to access by bicycling or walking.

- **Convenient Access to Healthy Food**: Every resident of the town should have convenient access to healthy-food retailers. These locations should be accessible by automobiles as well as pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit users.

The majority of this document is designed to provide background information and best practices that informed the development of the Comprehensive Plan Healthy-Community Checklist. **Part One** includes general information on healthy communities concepts and state and national best practices. **Part Two** explains the process of developing the checklist. **Part Three** includes the actual Comprehensive Plan Healthy-Community Checklist, an explanation of its intended audience and use, and a list of examples illustrating each element it includes. It is recommended that users of this checklist read the entire document in order to become more familiar with the checklist and healthy-communities concepts before moving forward with assessing their own comprehensive plans. However, it is also possible to use the checklist by referencing material from Part Three only.