**How Recreation Programming Encourages Use of Infrastructure, Trails, or Walkable Facilities**

### What is Recreation Programming?

“If you build it, they will come” may have worked for Kevin Costner in the film *Field of Dreams*, but it cannot be assumed that community members will actively seek fitness or engage in healthy lifestyle opportunities once infrastructure (e.g., trails, sidewalk projects, streetscape enhancements, shared-use paths, recreation facilities) is built. More success can be anticipated if a large number of community members are involved with the process from start to finish. In order for the community to see the benefit in using a particular infrastructure, trail, or facility, it is necessary to engage community members, educate them on the benefits of healthy living, involve citizens in initiatives to create active and healthy communities, and initiate community partnerships. While physical changes to the environment provide the infrastructure needed for physical activity, recreation programming promotes the social change for active and healthy lifestyles (“Healthy Communities Tool Kit”).

Recreation programming is “designing and delivering recreation and leisure services” (Rossman and Schlatter, viii). It creates active and healthy lifestyles through recreation and fitness experiences. The practice of recreation programming is created around the belief that parks and exercise enhance the social, emotional, and physical qualities of life. Traditionally, the mission of parks and recreation departments or community-based recreation organizations was to provide access to local parks, open spaces, and recreation opportunities to provide leisure experiences. Recreation programming originally focused on providing leisure activities such as visual arts and crafts, athletic leagues and sports programs, fitness classes, dance, nature appreciation, and special events.

Increasingly, recreation programming involves a complex set of delivery formats and techniques. Today, many park and recreation departments and recreation organizations are joining forces with community health organizations and public health practitioners to launch educational programs geared toward increased physical activity and a healthier lifestyle. In fact, a recent survey by the International City/County Management Association (ICMA) indicates that nearly 90 percent of city managers feel that parks and recreation departments should have a leading role in developing community facilities and recreation programs that are conducive to an active lifestyle (“Inactive America: What Can Parks Do?”).

Listed below are major park and recreation organizations that are assisting communities in initiating and sustaining healthy communities (“Mission, Vision, Goals”).
Major Organizations Engaged in Recreation Programming

National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA)

NRPA was created to promote awareness and support for recreational facilities, parks, and leisure services to create social stability in a community and the physical/mental health of individuals. It also facilitates the development, maintenance, and expansion of social and relevant environmental public policies that support recreation programming through parks and facilities. The association also collects and cultivates a body of knowledge that helps parks and recreation professionals improve the delivery of service, increase the understanding of recreational behavior, and provide outreach to community members.

NRPA has embarked on several initiatives to advocate the use of parks to combat obesity and promote physical activity. “Hearts ‘N Parks” is a joint program of NRPA and the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute. The goal of the program is to use local parks as the setting for family-oriented health education programs designed to promote healthy eating, physical fitness, and participation in recreational activities (“Inactive America: What Can Parks Do?”).

NRPA has also aligned itself with many other organizations such as the American Heart Association, Institute for Cancer Prevention, East Coast Greenway Alliance, and Preventive Cardiovascular Nurses Association to advocate park and recreation grant funding for state and local governments. The groups recognize the need for sustained levels of grant funding to target programs that combat rising mortality due to physical inactivity and poor diet. The National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion observed that “characteristics of our communities such as the accessibility and location of parks, trails, sidewalks, and recreation centers…may play an even greater (than social environments) role in promoting or discouraging an individual or family level of physical activity.” A focus of NPRA and its partners has been to lobby collaboratively for support of active recreation programs, which improve mental health and reduce feelings of depression and anxiety (“Health Organizations and Parks and Recreation Advocates Unite”).

In addition, NRPA created the “NRPA Health Management Resource: Strategies for Sustainability.” With real-life examples and resources to aid implementation, NRPA hopes to help people initiate and sustain healthy changes within a community. Some of the resources that the guide offers demonstrate the role of community design in the relationship between transportation and health, the economic benefit of trails, how to start a walking program, and how to determine the walkability of communities (“Health Management Practice Resource”).

YMCAs

YMCAs across America are urging people of all ages to become active through the national
Healthy Communities: A Resource Guide for Delaware Municipalities

organization Activate America. Created by the YMCA, the Pioneering Healthier Communities (PHC) project has been funded by $1.4 million from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The plan of the project is to bring important health issues into the national policy debate arena and support local communities in developing more effective approaches to promoting healthy lifestyles. More specifically, goals of PHC include (“YMCA Leads the Way to Healthier Communities”):

- Changing the environment of after-school programs implemented by the YMCA and other community organizations so kids participate in physical activity and are offered healthy foods such as fresh fruits and vegetables and water.
- Influencing policymakers to put physical education back in schools and include physical activity in after-school programs.
- Building new or enhance existing walking/biking trails and sidewalks for residents to be active.
- Providing opportunities for residents to purchase and consume fresh fruits and vegetables through community gardens, farmers markets, and other activities.

PHC recognizes that the challenge in changing a behavior is the lack of readiness to make that particular change. Even when communities are ready, the real challenge is creating a change that is long lasting. The initiative advocates ten lessons for creating sustainable, healthy changes in communities. Five of those lessons, in particular, assist communities in making sustainable health changes through recreational programming (“Pioneering Healthier Communities”):

- **Seek technical assistance**, tools, and advice from experts, before programming starts, to determine the right methods to improve healthy eating and active living. This helps communities create programs that have a lasting effect on community members’ quality of life. Expert advice is needed because political, civic, and other community leaders often find that there is not just one solution, but many that can together make an impact.

- **Involve a diverse team from the private, public, and nonprofit sectors** to ensure a joined success. That way, different parts of the plan can be handled by those who have strong ties to the particular department (e.g., program design and delivery, policy and regulatory change, communications, urban planning and design, and evaluation). Communities can also involve organizations with access to large audiences.

- **Ensure sustainability of the program** by incorporating individual team goals in the overall goal of the program. It is important for communities to remember that each part of the team is bringing a different goal to the table and to bring the team together around shared goals that do not forgo those individual objectives of the organizations involved.

- **Enhance the delivery systems by using team partners** at various branches or sites of the organization. If the partner organizations make a commitment to creating a healthier
environment at their own work site, they make a lasting contribution for sustainability and help to make the healthy choice equivalent to the easy choice.

- Create policies and systems for sustainable change that impact an entire population instead of just those people participating in a program. Programs alone do not create lasting change, but they are necessary to build trust among members of the team and create a shared vision for a healthier community.

**National Organizations Supporting Healthy Community Initiatives**

Other national public service organizations are recognizing that creating healthy communities requires support and advocacy among community leaders, elected officials, public health practitioners, transportation engineers, land-use planners, and citizens. The following organizations are mobilizing stakeholders to develop public policies, utilize existing or create new pedestrian-oriented infrastructure, establish innovative recreation programs, and spur social change to create healthier community environments.

**Active Living Resource Center** – The mission of the Active Living Resource Center is to provide technical assistance to create more active and more bicycle- and pedestrian-friendly communities. The website provides an online library of resources, a directory of experts, regional success stories, and examples of program initiatives to promote active lifestyles and encourage physical activity of children.

See: [www.activelivingresources.org](http://www.activelivingresources.org)

**American Hiking Society** – This national organization is dedicated to promoting and protecting America’s hiking trails, striving for trail advocacy, encouraging stewardship of hiking trails through volunteer vacations, and forming alliance hiking organizations.

See: [www.americanhiking.org](http://www.americanhiking.org)

**American Public Health Association** – Founded in 1972, the American Public Health Association (APHA) aims to protect Americans from preventable health threats and attempts to make sure that community-based health promotion, disease prevention activities, and preventive health services are all readily available throughout the United States. APHA strives to create a unified voice through many different areas of healthcare-related professions and people who care about their own health and the health of others.

See: [www.apha.org](http://www.apha.org)

**American Trails** – This is the only national, nonprofit organization that works on behalf of all trail interests like hiking, biking, water trails, horseback riding, four-wheeling, and cross-country skiing. Their goal is for all trail interests to come together in support of America’s trails. They worked with the National Park Service, the USDA Forest Service, Bureau of Land...
Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and other organizations to revitalize the National Recreation Trails program. American Trails also prints the American Trails Magazine and provides resources such as trail planning and building, trail promotion, management of trails, the impact of trails, and how to educate communities about trails. On their website, American Trails helps raise awareness of resources to locate funding for any trail-related projects. See: www.americantrails.org or the National Recreation Trails database (tutsan.forest.net/trails)

**America Walks** – This organization consists of grassroots advocacy groups dedicated to creating more walkable communities. This is done through creating community pedestrian advocacy groups that in turn educate the public on the benefits of walking and, when necessary, act as a voice for walking advocates. The website offers resources referring to pedestrian and bicycle education, pedestrian advocacy, safe built environments for children, and tools for pedestrian advocates. See: www.americawalks.org

**Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)** – CDC’s Active Community Environments Initiative promotes walking, biking, and the development of neighborhood recreation facilities. It was developed with data concerning public health, urban design, and transportation planning. The initiative helps with characteristics of communities such as proximity of facilities, street design, amount of housing, and availability of prime pedestrian and bicycling conditions along with public transit. See: www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/physical/health_professionals/active_environments/aces.htm

**Center for Livable Communities** – The Local Government Commission (LGC) is a nonprofit organization that provides resources, technical assistance, and networking to local elected officials and other dedicated community leaders who are working to create healthy, walkable, and resource-efficient communities. LGC promotes active living communities, which are those designed to provide opportunities for routine daily physical activity by people of all ages and abilities. A nationwide initiative of the LGC is the Center for Livable Communities. The Center for Livable Communities helps local governments and community leaders to be proactive in their land use and transportation planning and adopt programs and policies that lead to more livable and resource-efficient land-use patterns. See: www.lgc.org/center

**Healthy Transportation Network** – This organization works with communities to create safe conditions for bicycle and pedestrian behaviors, encourage more biking and walking as options for public transportation, and create communities that are walkable and bicycle-friendly. The network provides “successful stories” for local elected officials, land-use planners, transportation engineers, and community members. See: www.healthytransportation.net/about.html

**International City/County Management Association (ICMA)** – The Active Living
Ambassador’s program is a peer network among ICMA members interested in building healthy communities. Monthly electronic updates are provided to ambassadors on topics of healthy eating, healthy communities, and active-living-related initiatives. Ambassadors are asked to share this information with other regional local government leaders. The program provides a forum for sharing active living and recreation program information with other communities to promote healthy lifestyles.


**National Transportation Enhancements Clearinghouse** – This clearinghouse provides project details of Transportation Enhancements activities. These projects are federally funded, community-based activities that expand travel choices and enhance transportation experiences by improving the historic, aesthetic, cultural, and environmental aspects of transportation infrastructure.

See: [www.enhancements.org](www.enhancements.org)

**Nemours Health and Prevention Services (NHPS)** – NHPS is working to educate parents and children about healthy eating and physical activity. In Delaware, Nemours has launched an initiative, “Grow Up Healthy,” to change the climate and culture within the state to better support health promotion and disease prevention. The campaign is designed to help make Delaware’s kids healthy and urges community leaders to advocate physical education and school wellness policies, the design of more walkable communities and places to play, and programs to finance childhood weight management programs. Online resources are available to provide guidance to parents and caregivers ways to promote children’s health, good nutrition, and increased physical activity.

See: [www.nemours.org](www.nemours.org) and [www.growuphealthy.org](www.growuphealthy.org)

**Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center** – This resource provides information about health, safety, engineering, advocacy, enforcement, access, education, and mobility for pedestrians and bicyclists. The Center aids anyone interested in pedestrian and bicycle issues including engineers, private citizens, planners, police enforcement, educators, advocates, and the health community. It provides aid by promoting and distributing current and accurate bicycle and pedestrian information, providing technical assistance to various audiences and professionals to ensure they receive the best information, and generating a network of informed individuals and organizations that disseminate knowledge of pedestrian and bicyclist issues to the public.

See: [www.walkinginfo.org](www.walkinginfo.org)

**Rails-to-Trails Conservancy** – This organization provides technical assistance, information resources, and referrals to trail and greenways experts and advocates nationwide. Services are available to communities, government organizations, nonprofits, or other entities interested in creating, managing, or programming trails and greenways.

See: [www.railtrails.org](www.railtrails.org)
Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

• **Active Living by Design** – This national program creates and evaluates new approaches to encouraging physical activity through public policy, community design, and strategies involving communication. They offer education and training, resources (tool kits, case studies, and successful practices), coaching and facilitation, and program development, implementation, and evaluation. See: [www.activelivingbydesign.org/index.php?id=499](http://www.activelivingbydesign.org/index.php?id=499)

• **Leadership for Healthy Communities** – The Foundation created “Leadership for Healthy Communities” that supports government leaders as they create policies to reduce childhood obesity. They do so by supporting active living, access to healthy foods, and a healthy diet. They offer expertise in developing plans that support healthy eating and active living. They also identify the best practices and policies to use for particular community types and help in finding the key funding sources for each community. Finally, they offer training and technical assistance with the initiation of healthy communities. See: [www.leadershipforhealthycommunities.org](http://www.leadershipforhealthycommunities.org)

• **The Active Living Network** – This network focuses on how a built environment including neighborhoods, buildings, parks, transportation systems, and open spaces assist in living an active life. The source is designed for professionals, advocates, and people associated with implementing programs from a wide range of professions such as public health, transportation, and urban planning. The site contains a large database featuring current projects, programs, and initiatives in a variety of states and types of communities (e.g., urban, suburban, rural, and exurban). See: [www.activeliving.org/about](http://www.activeliving.org/about)

**Smart Growth Network** – This group concentrates investment of time, resources, and attention into individual center cities and older suburbs. Smart Growth is both town-centered and pedestrian- and transit-oriented and promotes a greater mix of housing, commercial, and retail uses. Some of the principles that make up Smart Growth include the following:

• Creating walkable neighborhoods.
• Encouraging community and stakeholder collaboration.
• Making development decisions predictable, fair, and cost effective.
• Strengthening and directing development to already existing communities.
• Fostering distinctive, attractive communities with a strong sense of place.

See: [www.smartgrowth.org/about](http://www.smartgrowth.org/about)

**The National Center for Bicycling and Walking (NCBW)** – The main mission of NCBW is to create bicycle-friendly and walkable communities. The organization seeks to change the way
communities are planned, designed, and maintained in order to provide greater opportunities for biking, walking, and active lifestyles within communities. One of NCBW main initiatives has been the Walkable Community Workshop program, a planning process to help communities realize a more walkable and bike-friendly future. See: www.bikewalk.org/workshops.php

In New Castle County, WILMAPCO has been selected by NCBW to facilitate interactive Walkable Community Workshops, which identify real-world problems and hands-on solutions to enhance walkability in local communities. See: www.wilmapco.org/walk/#Background_Information

**United States Access Board** – This is an independent federal agency devoted to the improvement of accessibility for people with disabilities. It was established in 1973 to ensure access to federally funded facilities and is now the leading source of information for accessibility design. The Access Board develops and maintains design criteria for the built environment, electronic and information technology, transit vehicles, and telecommunications equipment. It also provides training and technical assistance on these requirements and accessible design. In addition, it continues to enforce accessibility standards that cover federally funded facilities. See: www.access-board.gov

**Local Entities Supporting Healthy Community Initiatives**

**Delaware Council on Greenways and Trails** – The Delaware General Assembly established the Council on Greenways and Trails in 1995 to foster a cooperative effort to preserve, protect, and link green open spaces. The Council advises the Secretary of the Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control (DNREC), reviews Delaware Land and Water Conservation Trust Fund greenways and trail grant applications, serves as a resource for organizations seeking to link open space areas, and provides online maps and links for trail information in Delaware. See: www.destateparks.com/greenway/council.htm

**Delaware Greenways** – This organization leads grassroots efforts throughout New Castle County and Delaware to leverage public and private investment for greenways and trails, promoting policies for conservation and open space initiatives, creating livable communities, and preserving scenic landscapes. Greenways initiatives generally target initiatives that are not within parks systems of units of government and follow greenway corridors that are targeted for recreation or conservation. See: www.delawaregreenways.org

**Delaware Trailspinners** – This nonprofit organization of mountain bikers is committed to
preserving trails through education and advocacy. Volunteers donate significant time and effort to construct, preserve, and improve trail systems for shared use. Delaware Trailspinners sponsor an Adopt-A-Trail program for volunteers to lead trail maintenance and improve trails and provide an opportunity for stewardship of its members.

See: www.trailspinners.org

**DNREC’s Greenways and Trails Program** – This program, administered by DNREC’s Parks and Recreation division, provides grants under the Delaware Land and Water Conservation Trust Fund for greenways and trails, and resources for communities seeking to initiate greenway and trail projects.

See: www.destateparks.com/greenway

**East Coast Greenway** – The goal of the East Coast Greenway is to connect cities and towns along the East Coast with a continuous, traffic-free scenic pathway as a national greenway. Eventually, the East Coast Greenway will provide a 3,000 mile, multi-use trail stretching from Maine to Florida. According to a 2006 “State of the Trail” report, Delaware has completed a blueprint for action and boasts the highest percentage of completed trail miles. The East Coast Greenway traverses the Christina Walkway in Wilmington, New Castle Riverfront Greenway, and James F. Hall Trail in Newark.

See: www.greenway.org