Background

*Walkability Matters*

As indicated in a number of recent research studies and articles, an increase in moderate physical activity among Americans could substantially improve the nation’s public health. Given Delaware’s current obesity trends, it is important to keep the state’s residents active and engaged. Walking is one of the easiest and cheapest ways to stay physically fit.

In addition to keeping residents physically active and healthy, community spaces that promote walking can draw people together safely and provide more opportunities for people of all ages and abilities to stay socially connected and engaged. Local areas with good pedestrian networks can also have substantial economic and environmental benefits to a local area.

*Economic Benefits*

Towns and cities that develop recreational programming that encourages the use of pedestrian networks, infrastructure, trails, or walkable facilities can help revitalize a downtown, increase private investment, increase property values, promote tourism, and support the development of a good business climate. A growing body of research connects higher property values and economically sound communities to better walkability and closer proximity among certain neighborhood destinations, including houses, parks, schools, businesses, services, and social venues. Main streets can benefit economically from good sidewalks and the ability to easily and safely peruse shops, restaurants, and local services.

*Environmental Benefits*

By decreasing car travel, walkable communities can have substantial environmental benefits. In fact, Delaware is one of few states to have an executive-ordered Complete Streets policy that encourages walking and biking as a means to decrease harmful auto emissions.

*About the Assessment Process*

The Walkability Assessment Tool involves a three-step process designed to aid local governments in determining their town’s walkability. It is recommended that the assessment process should be completed by an authorized representative of a Delaware municipality. Walkability representatives will vary, depending on the size and composition of the municipality. For example, larger, full-service municipalities might appoint elected officials, paid professional staff (e.g., City Planner/Planning Staff), Main Street Program representatives, or members of an appointed committee (e.g., planning commission, parks and recreation commission, citizen-advisory group, etc.) to complete the process. Smaller towns, on the other
hand, might consider inviting a member of an *ad hoc* committee or someone who is familiar with healthy-community issues to help with the assessment process, particularly if other staff or formal committees are not an option.

**The Three-Step Assessment Process**

**Step 1: The Pre-Assessment Questionnaire** is intended to help answer the “*who, what, why,* and *how*” questions related to evaluating the walkability of an area or specific neighborhood within a jurisdiction. It requires thoughtful consideration of who will be responsible for conducting the assessment and what will be done with the assessment results.

**Step 2: Delaware’s Walkability Checklist** is to be completed after the pre-assessment questionnaire. It is an “in-the-field” assessment checklist designed to rate specific walkability elements of a defined area within the municipality. These elements include the condition and maintenance of walking facilities (e.g., sidewalks, curbs), pedestrian amenities, safety, and destinations available within the area.

**Step 3: The Post-Assessment** is designed to help analyze the results of the first two steps and identify major issues and problem areas. It provides an opportunity to summarize results, consider potential changes, and identify next steps in improving the overall walkability of the town or city.