



I. Living Healthier and Longer in Our Communities

“We’re all familiar with the saying ‘You are what you eat.’

Perhaps it’s time to add a new saying:

‘You are where you live’.”

Healthy Communities

Sustainable Communities

The 21st Century Planning Challenge

We can describe a healthy built environment several ways. But whether we call it age-friendly, a livable community or smart growth, the end result is the same: age-friendly communities use the built environment to create healthier places in which to grow up and grow old.

HEALTH AND THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

The built environment profoundly impacts our health. Places with clean air and water and access to healthful food, safe streets, parks and pedestrian-friendly neighborhoods provide an environment which contributes to better health.

Growing research points to a number of land-use elements that influence human activity, facilitate health and mental well-being, and promote social interaction and inclusion. They include:

- Layout, design, connectivity and maintenance of sidewalks, roads, bicycle lanes, paths and trails.
- Some combination of homes, stores, businesses, institutions, industries and community and cultural facilities.
- Compactness, density and accessibility of built areas.
- Access to recreational facilities and green spaces.
- Safe, comfortable and attractive streets, public spaces, buildings and structures.
- Healthy and resilient natural environments and biodiversity.

Today, the link between health and the built environment is being reconnected. This link matters because arrangement and design affect people's health and the way they physically and psychologically relate to and interact with their community and the wider world. (Planning by Design - Ontario, 2009)

Impact on our health

Regular physical activity plays a critical role in offsetting many of the physical and mental health problems facing our aging population. Physical activity can maintain good health or delay the onset of many negative health conditions, including chronic disease. Walking or other moderate activities can alleviate depression and improve older residents' quality of life. Walking in one's community may generate psychological benefits that come with increased social interaction.

In 2001, then-Surgeon General David Satcher issued a landmark statement, saying obesity in America had reached epidemic proportions. In Clark County, a 2008 study found that more than 26 percent of adults are considered obese and 64 percent are considered obese or overweight. (Cantor, 2009) A community's design can provide greater opportunity for everyone to achieve a healthy lifestyle.



ELEMENTS OF A HEALTHY COMMUNITY

Older adults who practice good physical, psychological and social behaviors are more likely to remain healthy, live independently and incur fewer health-related costs. These outcomes often are achieved in communities that address basic needs, promote optimal health and well-being, foster civic and social engagement, and support the independence of an aging population. A healthy community is a livable community for people of all ages.



Characteristics of a healthy community identified by the Aging Readiness Subcommittee on Healthy Communities include the existence of “complete neighborhoods.” These are neighborhoods that provide a variety of ways to get around and a mix of housing types, stores, businesses, healthful food choices and access to parks and open spaces.

Complete neighborhoods

A healthy community has neighborhoods with a well-rounded offering of daily goods and services that can be reached within a comfortable walking distance. This includes convenient access to “third places,” spots were

people like to gather such as parks, community facilities, schools, libraries and coffee shops. Convenient access to a wide variety of neighborhood goods and services promotes physical activity, reduces reliance on automobiles, and improves neighborhood safety.

In addition, having transportation and mobility options aside from the automobile – walking, cycling and public transit, for example – improves the environment and our health through exercise.

Access to parks, recreation and open space

Access to parks, recreation and open space has a direct effect on our health. Public health practitioners have documented a 40 percent increase in physical activity when people have access to parks and open space. One study looked at how long patients took to recover from surgery based on whether they could see trees from their hospital windows. Patients with treed views had shorter hospital stays, used less analgesic medications, and generated fewer negative nurse notes. Another study found that Japanese elders who had access to green spaces lived an average of seven years longer than those who did not. (Frumkin, 2011)



Healthful food choices

A healthy community provides a readily available, affordable and abundant selection of healthful eating options through conveniently located fresh produce markets, grocery stores, farmers' markets and community gardens. Farmers' markets and community gardens provide an excellent source of fresh, locally grown and often organic food, which may help residents meet the standards for recommended daily consumption of fruits and vegetables.



Outcomes of living in a healthy community

We all age differently. But generally, people want to maintain their quality of life as they grow older. By avoiding or managing chronic disease, maintaining high cognitive mental and physical health, engaging in activities, and planning for the future, everyone can influence their own aging process. Keeping people healthier is one of the most effective ways to reduce health care costs.

A recent study concluded that an investment of \$10 per person per year in proven, community-based disease prevention programs can yield a national savings of more than \$2.8 billion annually in one to two years.



These community programs lead to improved physical activity and nutrition. A state-by-state return on investment estimated that Washington would see a rate of return of 0.94:1 in the first two years. (Cantor, 2009)

Physical activity can improve health and quality of life for people of all ages. In addition to being better able to fight chronic diseases, seniors who exercise have stronger hearts, more fit and flexible muscles, stronger bones and joints and happier moods. Exercise helps decrease the need for hospitalizations, doctor visits and some medications. (CDC, 2011)

“Walkable communities are destined for people...safe, secure, balanced, mixed, vibrant, successful, healthful, enjoyable, and comfortable..” (Burden, 2011)

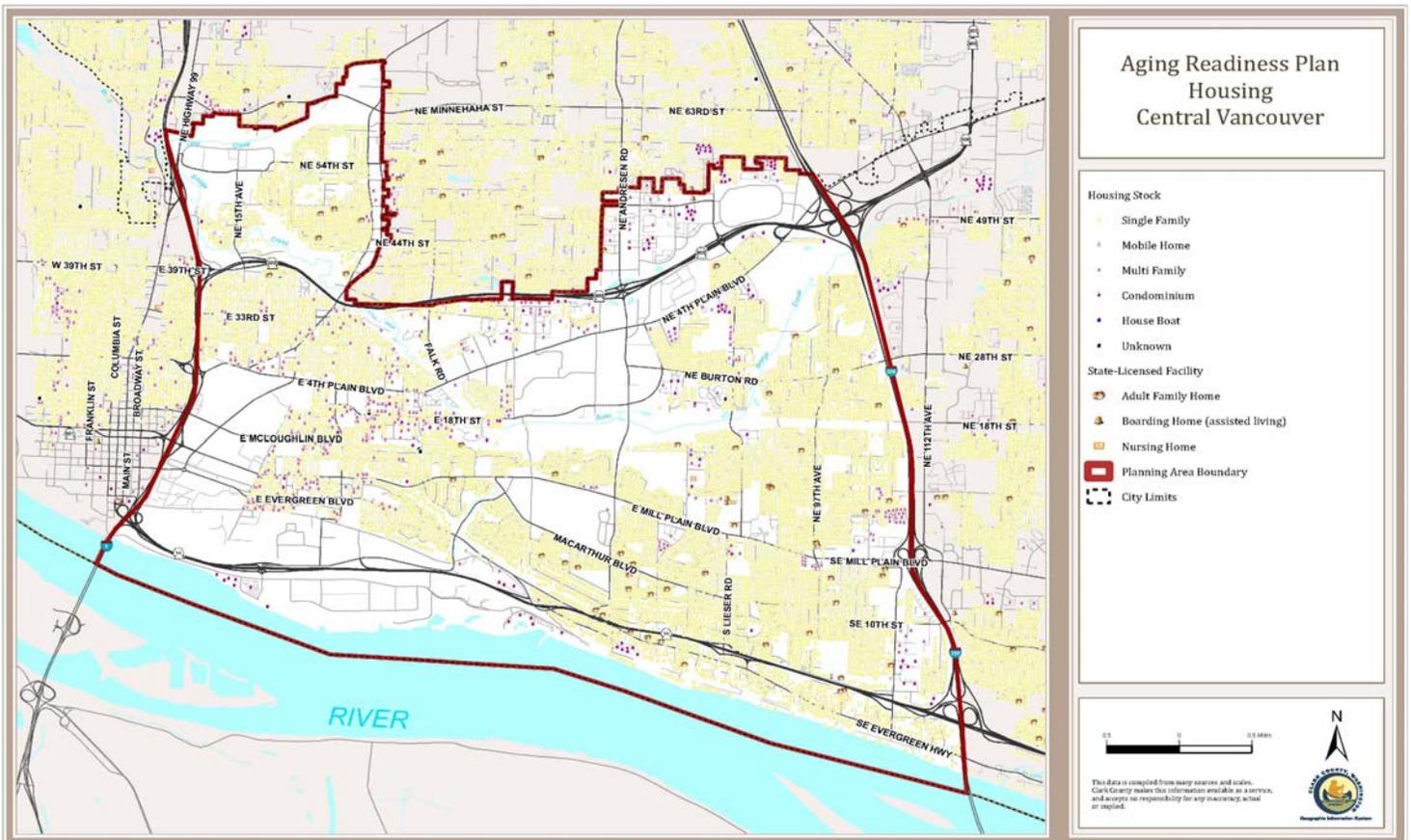
ASSESSING CLARK COUNTY COMMUNITIES

Most suburbs are not designed with aging residents in mind. Homes are segregated from all other buildings, goods and services, creating an over-dependence on the automobile. Land use decisions can determine our ability to be physically active through a feature called “connectivity,” which means you can walk or bike from your home to other destinations on a street, path or road. A purely residential neighborhood with cul-de-sacs may be a safe place for children, but it does not provide any connectivity to other places without having to get in your car.

Healthy community indicators

The Task Force Subcommittee on Healthy Communities explored and discussed elements that contribute to a healthy community. To illustrate these elements in a familiar location, the subcommittee decided to highlight central Vancouver. Using Clark County’s Geographical Information System, subcommittee members chose indicators they believe were characteristics of a healthy community: residential areas good for walking; proximity to parks; transit; and healthful food choices.

The central Vancouver area is approximately 18 square miles and has a population of 66,297. The area includes 25 neighborhoods and a variety of housing, retail, businesses, parks and food options. Below is a map of the planning area boundaries and housing types. (A larger map is included in Appendix C.)



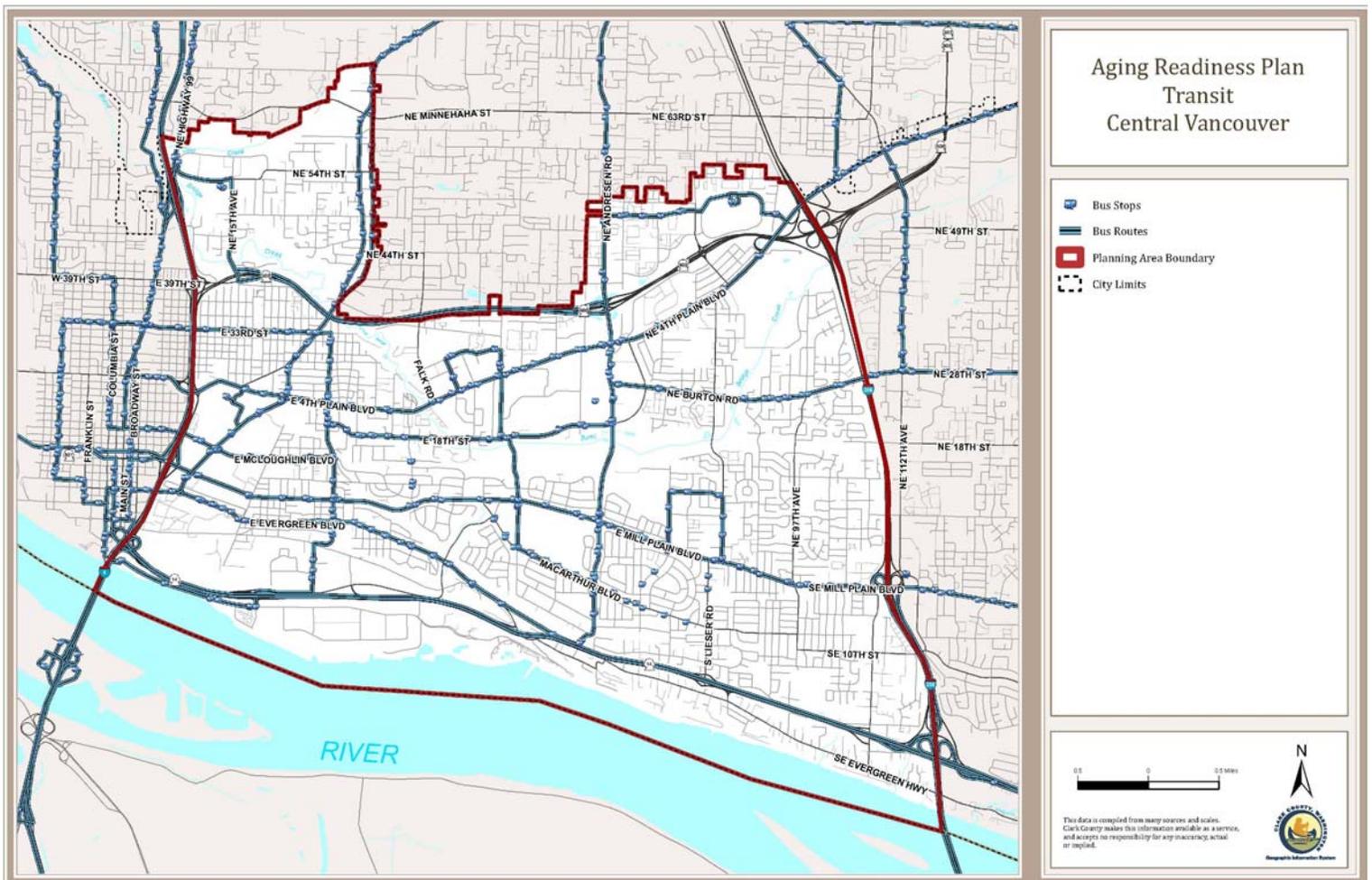
Mobility - Transit

In order to age in place independently, older adults who cannot or choose not to drive – about 20 percent of those age 65+ – must be able to run errands, visit family and friends, get to work and keep doctors appointments. (AARP)

Accessible and affordable alternatives to the automobile can give older adults the opportunity to remain independent and active. Clark County offers a wide variety of transportation options which are explored further in Chapter III. Transit access, sidewalks, trails and cycling are strong indicators of a healthy neighborhood. However, not all neighborhoods are served by public transit.

Clark County Public Transportation Benefit Authority (C-TRAN) provides fixed route bus service along established urban and suburban routes, express commuter service to Portland and door-to-door paratransit services (CVAN Program) for those unable to use the fixed route buses. All CVAN buses are ADA-compliant and equipped with wheelchair lifts. Fixed-route buses have kneeling capability to make boarding easier. Reduced rate fares are available for low income individuals, seniors, youths and people with disabilities.

C-TRAN's goal is to provide frequent transit service within a half-mile walking distance from residences. The map below shows bus routes and stops in the central Vancouver area. (A larger map is included in the Appendix C.)



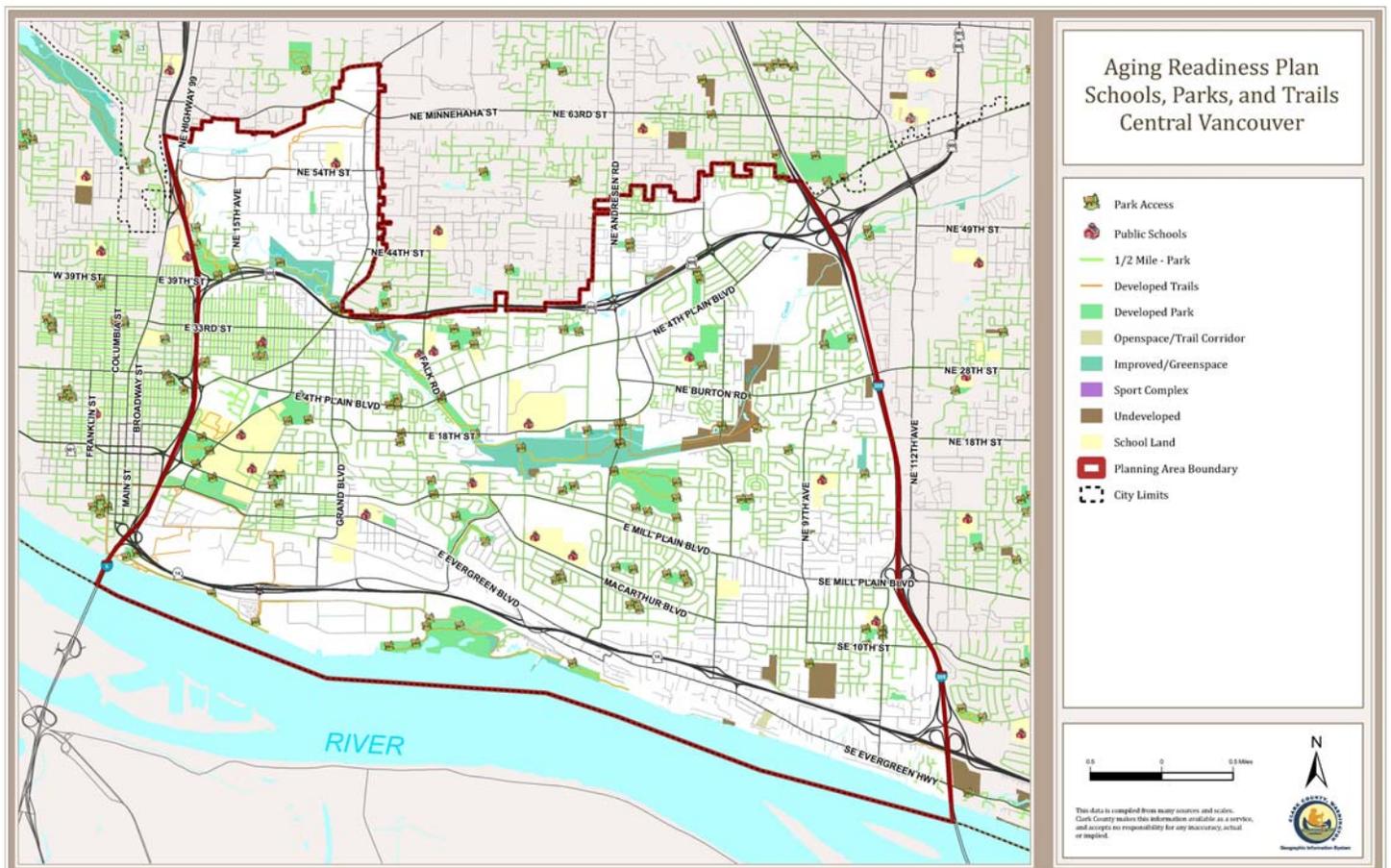
Parks and open spaces

Convenient access to parks, open spaces and quality recreational facilities and programs greatly increases the likelihood of physical activity. Regular participation in physical activity can provide social and emotional benefits by reducing depression and anxiety, improving mood and enhancing the ability to perform daily tasks throughout a person's life. (San Joaquin Valley Toolkit)

Vancouver-Clark Parks and Recreation (VCPR) manages a variety of parks in each of its six park classifications. As of 2010, the system included more than 7,400 acres of parkland at 239 sites. VCPR currently provides regional parks, special facilities, trails, greenways and natural areas throughout Clark County, and neighborhood and community parks and sports fields in the

Vancouver urban area. Recreation programs are offered only in the city of Vancouver, although they are open to all area residents. VCPR neighborhood parks range in size from 0.25 acre to 13 acres, and when combined, total more than 583 acres. They include selected school grounds of sufficient size and with necessary facilities to serve as neighborhood parks.

The map below indicates all parks, trails, open spaces, green spaces and school land in the central Vancouver planning area. VCPR uses a half-mile walking distance from residential areas as a guide for park development and solicits neighborhood ideas about park amenities. (A larger map is included in the Appendix C.)



WHAT DOES OUR COMMUNITY WANT & NEED

A healthy community addresses basic needs, promotes optimal health and well-being, fosters civic and social engagement, and supports the independence of the aging population. To find out what characteristics are important to our local community, the Aging Readiness Task Force hosted a community workshop asking the question.

Aging Readiness Healthy Community Workshop

More than 80 people attended the Jan. 20 workshop facilitated by County Administrator Bill Barron. Jesse Dunn, task force chair, welcomed attendees and John Wiesman, director of Public Health, introduced keynote speaker Dr. Howard Frumkin.

Howard Frumkin is dean of the University of Washington School of Public Health, an internist, environmental and occupational medicine specialist and epidemiologist. From 2005 to 2010, he served at the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention as director of the National Center for Environmental Health and Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry and special assistant to the director for Climate Change and Public Health. Previously, he was professor and chair of the Department of Environmental and Occupational Health at Emory University's Rollins School of Public Health and professor of medicine at Emory Medical School in Atlanta, GA.

Dr. Frumkin's research interests include: public health aspects of the built environment; air pollution; metal and PCB toxicity; climate change; health benefits of contact with nature; environmental and occupational health policy, especially regarding minority communities and

developing nations. He is the author or co-author of more than 180 scientific journal articles as well as several books.

Dr. Frumkin asked the audience to think about place and to think geographically, saying we all can relate to a sense of place. Place can be thought of as the built environment where people live, work, play and study. Places can be broken into small, intermediate and large scale places. Small scale includes homes, schools and work places. Intermediate scale includes neighborhoods and parks. Large scale is the metro area and transportation systems.

As a result of the demographic shift, Dr. Frumkin said, the 55+ group will comprise a third of the nation's

population by 2050 compared with less than 10 percent in 1900. Heart disease, stroke and unintended injuries are leading causes



of death among the elderly today, he said, but older people also suffer from ailments such as arthritis, hearing and vision impairments and social isolation.

These ailments create a design challenge. We must design places to provide physical activity, clean air, easy travel and social interaction to help combat chronic diseases and conditions, he said. If we design good habitats for the aging, we essentially build good habitats for all. Good habitats include healthy housing, parks and green spaces and smart neighborhood design.

Parks and green spaces can be critical to elder longevity; those with access to green spaces tend to live longer than those without.

Low density communities means longer travel distances and more travel infrastructure, both of which impact our health. To encourage more walking, communities need good trails and sidewalks, nearby destinations, greenery, a perception of safety and complete streets that allow other modes of transportation besides the automobile.

The “third places,” that Frumkin referred to are not home and work, but where people congregate and socialize. Places such as plazas, parks and sidewalk cafes. However with characteristics of most suburban development, “third places” are not available. Starbucks, he said, filled a niche in suburbs that had no “third places.”

Addressing these design challenges now is crucial to the health of our communities, Dr. Frumkin said prior to attendees breaking into small discussion groups.

Summary of workshop discussions

Participants discussed which elements are missing and ideas/solutions to make our community healthy and livable for people of all ages. The following were identified as gaps:

1. Mix of uses (restaurants, retail, coffee shops, and entertainment) in residential areas.
2. Access and connectivity for walking, biking and public transit.
3. Lack of “third places.”
4. Access to healthful food (community gardens, farmers markets, grocery stores) within/close to residential areas.

5. Access to neighborhood-size parks within or close to residential areas.



Subcommittee Overview

The healthy community subcommittee’s charge was to develop specific recommendations for the Aging Readiness Task Force that would serve as blueprints for short-term (0-3 years), medium-term (4-6 years) and long-term (7+ years) actions. The recommendations would identify specific strategies and, where possible, implementation actions that would enable all Clark County residents to remain integral members of the community throughout their lives.

Workshop Questions

1. In a livable community, there is convenient, safe and pedestrian-oriented access to places people need to go and services people need daily, such as transit, shopping, quality food, nutritional information, schools, parks, fitness and social activities for all ages. Our speaker discussed how a livable community enhances our quality of life and well-being while providing opportunities for healthy aging.
 - What characteristics within a community are MOST important for healthy aging? Please rank your list (maximum of 10 characteristics), with number 1 being the most important.
2. Thinking about where you live, what characteristics are missing or need improvement within about 1 mile from your home?
3. Thinking about your responses to question 2 and given our current economic environment, what ideas/solutions do you have for what needs to improve in your community?

CHALLENGES & STRATEGIES

Community design is approached in two ways: one that promotes physical activity and one that does not. A community that incorporates healthy design elements provides opportunities for physical activity, has cleaner air, stays connected, and promotes longer, healthier lives.

Features of a community either contribute to or decrease one's ability to live independently, safely and comfortably. Well-planned communities offer plenty of housing choices and nearby services so we, relatives and friends do not have to leave behind the people and places we know and love as we age and our circumstances change.

With the research, community response from the workshop and an online survey, the healthy communities subcommittee identified four major challenges and strategies to address them. The challenges are:

Complete Neighborhoods
Access to Parks, Recreation and Open Space
Healthful Food
Information



CHALLENGE 1: COMPLETE NEIGHBORHOODS

Few neighborhoods in Clark County provide a range of daily goods and services within walking distance of residents' homes.

While some neighborhoods have a cluster of local goods and services, most residents must drive to basic amenities such as medical clinics and grocery stores.

The county and its cities need to develop and promote complete neighborhoods where residents find a mix of uses, local services and public amenities at key locations within a half-mile of their homes. Residential neighborhoods with small scale activity areas encourage walking, promote small business development, reduce reliance on automobiles, and increase social interaction and safety.

Strategy 1a (short-term) - Develop a neighborhood asset inventory. Walkable neighborhoods are one of the simplest and best solutions for the environment, our health and our economy. Clark County should develop a neighborhood asset inventory that would show where healthy community indicators are within a half-mile walking distance of home. It would pinpoint parks, trails, bike lanes, grocery stores, restaurants, community gardens, farmers' markets, coffee shops, faith centers, schools, medical services, libraries and transit services.

Strategy 1b (medium-term) - Improve the sense of physical safety and security of neighborhoods, especially at night. Encourage neighborhood associations to complete surveys noting possible improvements that would promote a sense of safety. For example, make note of shrubs that should be pruned, lighting that should be fixed or graffiti that should be removed.

Strategy 1c (long-term) - Develop neighborhood revitalization plans. Consider developing revitalization plans for county and city neighborhoods. Collaborate with community leaders and organizations, the private sector and neighborhood associations to develop them. Identify needed improvements, such as pedestrian safety concerns, particularly near bus stops. Identify possible land-use or zoning changes, funding mechanisms and a phasing plan. Using national evaluation tools such as WalkScore.com, Clark County and its cities could determine neighborhoods' "walk scores," which could assist in planning for current and future needs.

Strategy 1d (long-term) - Promote higher-density and mixed-use development of under-used properties. Supporting mixed-use development in residential areas means having needed services and amenities close to where people live and work.

Strategy 1e (long-term) - Support existence of "third places." The term refers to social environments outside of home and the workplace. In neighborhoods that lack these gathering places, promote the use of existing facilities to fill the gap. Non-profits, private

entities or neighborhood organizations could pursue joint-use agreements with schools, churches, fire stations and others. "Third places" can be used to share information, receive local medical services, or participate in recreational activities.

Strategy 1f (long-term) - Concentrate new housing near employment, shopping, healthcare, transportation and other services.

Land-use jurisdictions should consider a blend of zoning to create healthier communities.





CHALLENGE 2: ACCESS TO PARKS, RECREATION AND OPEN SPACE

Access to greenspace is associated with lower levels of self-reported stress and a lower risk of obesity (Nielsen & Hansen, Healthy & Place, 2007). Staying active and socially engaged also has positive effects on our health. Parks, recreation and open spaces can be “third places” where people exercise and interact with one another. Clark County and its cities need to look at ways to improve access to a variety of high-quality parks and recreational opportunities. Resources should be close to neighborhoods and programming should support a range of activities.

Strategy 2a (short-term) - Expand the use of volunteers. Public parks and recreation providers should expand the use of volunteers to develop and support recreation and enrichment programs and maintain and care for parks, sport fields, facilities, trails and natural areas. (Blue Ribbon Committee recommendation)

Strategy 2b (short-term) - Collaborate with other organizations to maximize use of facilities.

Vancouver-Clark Parks and Recreation could pursue joint-use agreements with school districts, colleges, universities, public agencies, private entities or nonprofit organizations that own and operate facilities to maximize their use for recreational activities. (Blue Ribbon Committee recommendation)

Strategy 2c (short-term) - Expand the park facility category to include urban parks and provide an incentive for development of urban plazas, public open spaces and trails. As

communities create mixed-use and higher density developments, a variety of safe, attractive open spaces that promote pedestrian activities becomes increasingly important. These “third places” are designed to encourage a range of activities and be a focal point for a wide variety of user groups.



Strategy 2d (medium-term) - Parks as meeting spaces. Develop creative ways to use parks as meeting places for community groups or neighborhood associations by installing shelters, gazebos and low lighting for evening gathers.

The groups could help maintain the park.

Strategy 2e (medium-term) - Expand the Urban Forestry Program within the unincorporated Vancouver Urban Growth Area and encourage development of similar programs in smaller cities. Urban forestry plays a critical role restoring older parks, expanding the tree canopy and assisting with planning for street trees, well-landscaped urban environments, green streets and trails. Vancouver's Urban Forestry Program is housed in Vancouver-Clark Parks and Recreation, but has potential to operate throughout the unincorporated urban areas and smaller cities.

Strategy 2f (medium-term) - Construct interpretive heritage trails. The health benefits of walking are well established and extremely important in addressing not only health but social equity issues for seniors, in particular. Clark County is rich in local and regional history, but many residents are not familiar with it. Development of heritage trails would encourage walking and other activity while giving residents an innovative way to learn about the area. Existing or new trails, sidewalks and pathways could have exhibits and/or art interpreting the area's history.



Strategy 2g (medium-term) - Provide safe, accessible public facilities such as commons, parks, community gardens and other gathering spaces, especially near a concentration of older adults' homes.

Develop neighborhood surveys to determine where improvements need to be made. Coordinate with volunteers to monitor areas and assist older adults.



Strategy 2h (long-term) - Expand programs to encourage development of more neighborhood pocket parks and community gardens. Smaller, flexible, close-to-home parks could include informal natural play areas, community gardens, restored creeks and landscaping with trees, shrubs and flowers. Surveying current park and garden users would help establish priorities, amenities and the locations of future facilities.



CHALLENGE 3: LACK OF HEALTHFUL FOOD AND NUTRITION CHOICES

Certain areas of Clark County lack adequate healthful food outlets and full-service grocery stores in close proximity to homes. Many county residents have better access to fast food than grocery stores. A major component of a healthy community is the readily available, affordable and abundant selection of healthy eating options, such as conveniently located fresh produce markets, grocery stores, farmers' markets or community gardens.

Strategy 3a (short-term) - Encourage Sustainable Urban Agriculture. Explore the possibility of creating and sustaining local urban agriculture, including community gardens, orchards and farmers' markets. A volunteer, nonprofit or supportive organization could work with Vancouver-Clark parks staff and park departments in smaller cities to improve, advocate for and expand local community gardening and farmers' markets. Efforts could be concentrated on fundraising, securing land and organizing educational activities and events. (Model: Friends of Portland Community Gardens)

Strategy 3b (short-term) - Prioritize grocery store development in underserved areas. Access to affordable, healthful foods and beverages is a basic necessity and an essential component of a livable neighborhood. County and city policy makers should encourage locating full-service grocery stores in underserved areas as a top priority in neighborhood planning and development. This would be part of Strategy 1c, Developing Neighborhood Revitalization Plans.

Strategy 3c (medium-term) - Develop a Healthful Food Store Incentives Program. Develop a program to encourage existing liquor stores, convenience stores and ethnic markets to stock fresh produce and other healthful foods. Identify stores willing to participate. Collaborate with community organizations such as Community Choices and Clark County Public Health to develop and implement the program. The program should target key neighborhoods that have high concentrations of liquor and convenience stores and lack fresh and healthful food options.



CHALLENGE 4: INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION

Access to information and programs is critical for the aging population, their families and caregivers to be able to find needed services and opportunities.

Strategy 4a (short-term) - Create new marketing initiatives for existing programs and services.

Develop marketing programs to educate people about available community resources such as Southwest Washington Agency on Aging and Disabilities' senior health and wellness programs, Loaves & Fishes' nutrition programs, community garden opportunities and local farmers' markets.

Strategy 4b (short-term) - Encourage neighborhood residents and groups to participate in land-use issues. Clark County and the cities should encourage and assist neighborhood groups and residents to be better informed about and active regarding proposals that complement or contradict complete neighborhoods.

Strategy 4c (long-term) - Survey Clark County residents about what they want in neighborhoods. Clark County, in partnership with local cities and Community Choices, should work with local residents to create the neighborhood they want and need.

Healthy Communities Internet Resources

Vancouver-Clark Parks and Recreation:

<http://www.cityofvancouver.us/parks-recreation>

Clark County Department of Public Health:

<http://www.clark.wa.gov/public-health>

Clark County Community Choices:

<http://clarkcommunitychoices.org>

Smart Growth:

<http://www.smartgrowth.org>

New Urbanism:

<http://www.newurbanism.org/>

Building Healthy Communities for Active Aging:

<http://www.epa.gov/aging/bhc/>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention - Healthy Aging:

<http://www.cdc.gov/chronicdisease/resources/publications/aag/aging.htm>