

**San Diego County
Childhood Obesity
Initiative
Leadership Council**



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RE: County of San Diego Draft General Plan Update

Dear Bob,

Thank you for the informative presentation you provided to the City & County Government Domain (Government Domain) of the San Diego County Childhood Obesity Initiative (Initiative). The Initiative is a public/private partnership whose mission is to reduce and prevent childhood obesity in San Diego County by creating healthy environments for all children and families through advocacy, education, policy development, and environmental change. As such, the Initiative oversees implementation of the San Diego County Childhood Obesity Action Plan. The purpose of the Initiative is to create, support and mobilize partnerships among multiple domains; provide leadership and vision; and coordinate countywide efforts to prevent and reduce childhood obesity. The Initiative has established active workgroups in multiple domains including government, healthcare, schools/after-schools, early childhood, community-based and faith organizations, media/marketing, and businesses to act as a forum for the development, replication, and leverage of best practices and resources. The Government Domain furthers these efforts through strategies that include: increasing walkable and bikeable communities; improving access to affordable, healthy food choices; increasing the quantity, quality and accessibility of park and natural spaces; and modifying general plans to enhance opportunities for physical activity.

We appreciate your invitation to comment on the draft General Plan Update. The Government Domain supports the draft General Plan's shift towards sustainable growth and multi-modal transportation. The movement of growth in unincorporated communities to "villages" and "rural villages" with existing infrastructure and facilities promises to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, maintain San Diego County's unique beauty, and promote community health. The emphasis on multi-modal transportation recognizes bicycling and walking as vital transportation options. It also establishes a clear commitment to the provision of safe and adequate streets and roadways for all road users. The Initiative strongly applauds these and several other guiding principles of the General Plan including:

- Maintain environmentally sustainable communities and reduce greenhouse gas emissions that contribute to climate change
- Preserve agriculture as an integral component of the region's economy, character, and open space network
- Recognize community and stakeholder interests while striving for consensus

The County draft General Plan lays a good foundation for improving the community's health in San Diego County. The built environment can be linked positively or negatively to obesity, asthma, diabetes, and pedestrian fatality and injury rates; depending on whether communities plan for and provide compact, mixed-use development, multi-modal transportation, safe streets, sidewalks and paths, and



parks and open-space. Research indicates that communities less dependent on automobiles suffer fewer traffic accidents.¹ Increasing evidence supports the idea that compact, mixed-use development and proximity to basic retail and services influences individuals' transportation choices. Thus, zoning can promote or discourage physical activity. A 2001 study published in the *Journal of American Medical Association* revealed that providing more transportation choices and other traffic control measures in the 1996 Atlantic Olympic Games reduced asthma attacks by as much as 44 percent.² Zoning can also limit or support individuals' healthy food choices. A recent report from the California Center for Public Health Advocacy states that Californians are surrounded by four times the number of fast food outlets as produce retailers.³ Ultimately, these factors all play a role in the physical health of our community and today's staggering obesity and diabetes rates.

A General Plan that places community health at its cornerstone is of vital importance in San Diego County, whereas:

- 31 percent of students in grades 5, 7, and 9 in San Diego County are overweight.⁴
- Overweight, obesity & physical inactivity cost California \$28 billion in 2005.⁵
- Pedestrian fatality rate due to vehicular collisions in San Diego County is the third highest in the nation.⁶

The Ideal "Healthy Community/Region"

Research indicates the healthiest possible community includes the following features:

- Compact, mixed-use neighborhoods are linked to each other by frequent, convenient transit services.
- Residences are within easy walking distance of parks, schools, shopping, employment, and transit stops that meet the diverse needs of local residents.
- The walking environment is safe and accessible for seniors, children, and persons with disabilities.
- To maximize personal safety, the principles of Crime Prevention through Environmental Design are evident, providing "eyes on the street."
- Most neighborhood streets are designed for low speed (20-30 mph).

¹ Cryer, Stacey, & Helland, Linda. (2008, November 18). Mendocino County General Plan Update [Letter to County of Mendocino Planning Team]. Accessed at

<http://www.co.mendocino.ca.us/planningteam/pdf/cty%20of%20hhsa.pdf>

² Friedman, M., Powell, K. E., & Hutwagner, L., Graham L. M., Teague W. G. (2007, January). Impact of Changes in Transportation and Commuting Behaviors during the 1996 Summer Olympic Games in Atlanta on Air Quality and Childhood Asthma. *JAMA*.

³ California Center for Public Health Advocacy. (2007, January). Searching for Healthy Food: The Food Landscape in California Cities and Counties.

⁴ Community Health Improvement Partners. (2007). Overweight, Obesity, Physical Activity and Nutrition. San Diego County Health Needs Assessment. Accessed at

http://www.sdchip.org/publications/needs_assessment/pdfs/5k-Overweight-and-obesity-profile.pdf

⁵ California Department of Health Services, & Public Health Institute. (2005, April). The Economic Cost of Physical Inactivity, Obesity, and Overweight in California Adults: Health Care, Worker' Compensation, and Lost Productivity. Accessed at:

<http://www.cdph.ca.gov/HealthInfo/healthyliving/nutrition/Documents/CostofObesityToplineReport.pdf>

⁶ Surface Transportation Policy Project. (2004). Mean Streets. Retrieved at

<http://www.transact.org/report.asp?id=235>



- Communities have adequate street tree coverage and green space.
- Residents have ready access to healthy food choices (farmers' markets, community gardens, full service grocery stores).

Suggested changes

To bring the County of San Diego even closer to this ideal of a healthy community and region, the San Diego County Childhood Obesity Initiative would like to suggest the following language changes and policy inclusions in the draft General Plan:

Implementation

- Establish a standing committee of health and other key stakeholders to advise and assist the County with implementing the General Plan vision and policies around safe, healthy and multi-modal communities.

Vision

- Vision- Incorporate and define a comprehensive description of "liveable communities"

The American Institute of Architects states that liveable communities have eight essential components--many of which are core principles of the draft General Plan, including: a sense of place, mixed-use development, density, effective planning for regional transportation, street-savvy design, physical health and community design, public safety / personal safety, and sustainable development.⁷

- How We Get Around- Modify "Our streets and highways are connected, complete, and maintained to support use by our automobiles and trucks" to "...support use by all road users—cars, trucks, transit, bicyclists, and pedestrians".

Changing this makes the Plan consistent with other sections of the document, including the stated vision for healthy and safe physical environments.

- Guiding Principle 2- Change to "Promote health and sustainability by locating new development near existing infrastructure, services, and jobs".

Research published in the American Journal of Public Health indicates that individuals in more compact, walkable San Diego communities are more fit and get more physical activity than individuals in less walkable neighborhoods.⁸

Land Use Element

- Include "health and well-being" as a concept promoted by locating new development near existing infrastructure, services, and jobs.

⁷ The American Institute of Architects. What Makes a Community Liveable? Livability 101. Retrieved at http://www.aia.org/SiteObjects/files/Liv_F_AIALivability101_streetsavvydesign.pdf

⁸ Saelens B. E., Sallis J. F., Black, J. B., et al. (2003) Neighborhood-based differences in physical activity: an environmental scale evaluation. American Journal of Public Health. 93, 1552-8.



- LU- 17- Include a new policy to “Promote joint-use projects and programs including afterschool programs, public libraries, physical activity facilities, and farmers’ markets in partnership with school districts”.
- LU- 17- Include a new policy to “Seek funds for and promote safe routes to school through school district and community partnerships”.
- LU- 17- Include a new policy to “Promote community and student garden space on school facility grounds”.
- Include a new goal “Supporting Healthy Food Environments: Apply land use strategies that assure all residents have access to healthy, affordable foods and reduce hunger and obesity through the consumption of locally grown fruits and vegetables”.

This could also be included as part of a new “Community Health and Wellness” element that defines and maps the community vision for promoting community health through land use and development. This framework should include: recreation and open space, food access and nutrition, medical services, public transportation, equitability, affordable housing, economic opportunity, completeness of neighborhoods, safe neighborhoods, and environmental quality.⁹ Several of these aspects are already covered in the General Plan, but specific language would strengthen understanding of policies and goals relating to community health and healthy community development.

- Include the following associated policies:
 - Support, as relevant with the use of planning tools, the integration in food production and distribution of sustainability principles and practices which promote clean air, water, healthy soils and healthy habitats and ecosystems.
 - Support comprehensive food planning processes at the community and regional levels.
 - Develop land use and transportation plans and help prepare economic incentive programs to provide accessible and well-serviced sites and other development assistance for year-round public markets, farmers’ markets, small-scale processing facilities and distribution centers for food produced in the region.
 - Promote--through the application of relevant planning tools-- grocery stores, healthy corner stores, farm stands, farmers’ markets, and community-supported agriculture drop off sites in areas deficient in healthy food options.
 - Identify grocery, healthy corner stores, farm stands, and farmers’ markets as a priority for economic development.
 - Encourage convenience stores, liquor stores and ethnic food markets to carry fresh produce.

⁹ City of Richmond. (2007). Richmond General Plan Update: Community Health and Wellness.



Working Together to Shape a Healthy Future

- Encourage new food retail development to accept cash, Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT), and WIC.
 - Encourage farmers' markets to accept credit and EBT cards; Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) benefits; and Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program coupons.
 - Support agricultural practices and land use that affirmatively and proactively address worker health and safety.
 - Support the development of food systems that preserve and sustain the diverse traditional food cultures of Native American and other ethnic minority communities.
 - Assist in assessing the region's potential food needs during emergencies of different kinds (such as major earthquake, fires, terrorist attack, etc.) and the capacity of current food sources and distribution systems.
 - Support and promote urban agriculture on publicly owned, non-contaminated vacant land in "villages" and "rural villages".
- Include an "Encourage healthy eating habits and healthy eating messages through environments that support healthy living" objective.¹⁰
 - Incentivize healthy outdoor advertising zones in certain geographic areas (such as around schools).¹¹
 - Encourage restaurants to post nutrition information for menu items on menu boards and menus.¹²
 - Consider limiting food vending vehicles on a public street within 500 feet of any school, faith community, or park property boundary during high traffic hours.¹³
 - Offer incentives for restaurants that serve healthy food options, adopt menus consistent with dietary guidelines, and/or serve locally grown foods.¹⁴

Mobility Element

- Require Level of Service (LOS) standards to include measurement of bicycle, pedestrian, and transit functionality of the roadway.

Several communities throughout the country have begun to incorporate bicycle and pedestrian measurements as a means to more thoroughly assess the operation of a roadway. The inclusion of

⁹ Public Health Law & Policy, Raimi + Associates. (2008). How to Create Healthy General Plans.

¹¹ Public Health Law & Policy, Raimi + Associates. (2008). How to Create Healthy General Plans.

¹² Public Health Law & Policy, Raimi + Associates. (2008). How to Create Healthy General Plans.

¹³ Chula Vista, CA. Health and Sanitation Ordinance 2729 § 1 (1998)

¹⁴ Public Health Law & Policy, Raimi + Associates. (2008). How to Create Healthy General Plans.



these elements is of particular importance since so many traditional (i.e. motorists) LOS improvements negatively impact bicyclist and pedestrians. A 1993 Federal Highway Administration study reports that bicycling and walking improve health; reduce traffic congestion and noise and air pollution; and dependency on automobiles.¹⁵

- Include a new policy to “Provide an adequate portion of the transportation budget to pedestrian and cyclist amenities”.
- Include language that ensures operational improvements do not pose negative impacts on bicycle and pedestrian movement.
- Include language that ensures pedestrian routes and sidewalks are integrated into continuous networks.

Conservation and Open Space Element

- COS- 6.1- Include a new policy to “Support the development of regional infrastructure that can process and distribute locally grown produce for institutions such as hospitals, schools, and universities”.
- COS- 6.1- Include a new policy to “Support the creation of marketing network to bring together farmers, processors and purchasers of locally grown and produced foods”.
- COS- 6.5- Include a new policy to “Develop regional plans and policies that strengthen markets for the region’s food producers so as to reduce long distance transportation of agricultural products”.
- COS- 6.5 - Include a new policy to “Assess the impact of food waste and landscaping disposal on area landfills and explore possibilities for recycling through composting”.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the County of San Diego draft General Plan Update. Please contact me with any questions at 619.523.2001 or cmoder@hasdic.org.

Sincerely,

Cheryl Moder

Cheryl Moder
Director
San Diego County Childhood Obesity Initiative

¹⁵ (1993, January). The Environmental Benefits of Bicycling and Walking. *Federal Highway Administration Case Study*, 15.