

HEALTHY COMMUNITY DESIGN RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHITTENDEN COUNTY COMMUNITIES

Health starts where we live, learn, work, and play. Community design can build healthy options into the fabric of our daily lives. The recommendations below are action-oriented steps that communities can take to improve the health of their residents.

These recommendations originally appeared in the conclusion of the ECOS Public Health Analysis,¹ but have been updated here to include more detail examples. ECOS is the Chittenden County regional plan approved in 2012 and it was the county's first plan to include a healthy community as a goal. Rather than a checklist, think of these recommendations as a starting point for making change in your community. Not all ideas are appropriate for all communities, nor is this an exhaustive list of strategies.

1. Use Health Impact Assessment (HIA) at the regional, municipal, agency, and organizational level to assure that planning decisions maintain or improve the public health. As defined by the World Health Organization, HIA is a combination of procedures, methods, and tools by which a policy, program, or project may be judged as to its potential effects on the health of a population, and the distribution of those effects within the population.

- Consider the health impact before any decision is made regarding the purchase or disposition of public land and/or the relocation of public office space.²
- Require Health Impact Assessments for any development project that triggers Act 250 review by the Regional Planning Commission.³
 - Example: A Health Impact Assessment was conducted to complement a transportation corridor study examining options to make North Avenue a more "complete street" with multi-modal facilities.

2. Support residents in choosing to live tobacco-free through the following actions:

Work with local partners in multiple sectors to reinforce tobacco-free community norms:

- Designate outdoor community events as tobacco-free (Event Organizers).⁴
- Designate public parks, beaches, and other open-air places as tobacco-free (Parks and Recreation).⁴
- Designate campuses of secondary education institutions and health care organizations as tobacco-free (Administrators, staff, faculty, and students).⁴
- Designate business campuses as tobacco-free (Business leaders, local officials).⁴
- Designate new multiunit apartment/condominium buildings as smoke-free. In the case of complexes, designate half of the multiunit structures as smoke-free (Proprietors, developers).⁵
- Create a policy or ordinance to reinforce these norms. Model policies are available through the Center for Public Health and Tobacco Policy.⁶

Create municipal policy to:

- Restrict retail store tobacco placement so that tobacco products are kept out of consumer view.
- Restrict retail store tobacco advertising.
 - Example: Ordinances requiring retailers to limit tobacco advertising to 15% of window area can reduce youth exposure to tobacco advertising. Model ordinances are available through Change Lab Solutions.⁷
- Restrict the location or type of tobacco retail outlets in a community.

- Example: Ordinances may restrict new tobacco retailers that are located within a certain distance of a school or retailers that sell exclusively tobacco and tobacco paraphernalia.⁷ Model ordinances are available through the Center for Public Health and Tobacco Policy.⁶

3. Support residents in choosing to achieve national recommendations for physical activity and nutrition through the following actions:

Enhance mixed use development to improve opportunity and access to physical activity and healthy food. Municipalities should regularly and periodically conduct an assessment to identify policies or infrastructure that limit mixed use development. Assessment results should be used to revise policy and develop plans to address infrastructure barriers.

- Evaluate additional opportunities in the zoning and subdivision bylaws for mixed-use development allowances in the Village and the denser areas of the Town.²
- Incentivize infill mixed-use development and additional density in downtown.²

Create policies and environmental supports for pedestrian and bicycle friendly communities.

- Create a pedestrian and bicycle master plan oriented toward transportation and connectivity, not just recreation.
 - Example: Essex Junction completed a bicycle safety audit to determine the community's priorities for achieving a safer multi-modal transportation environment.⁸
- Ensure that adequate and appropriate lighting exists for streets, parks, recreation facilities, sidewalks and bike paths to promote their use in the winter.²
- Plan for the routine maintenance of municipally designated bike lanes/routes.²
- Make areas where people are or could be physically active safer and more enjoyable by using traffic-calming measures.
 - Examples: right-sizing roadways, pedestrian refuge islands, speed bumps, street trees, landscaping, and lighting.
- Implement complete streets recommendations.
- Work collaboratively to implement and sustain Safe Routes to School to encourage active transportation, reduce vehicular traffic, and increase safety.

Create policies and environmental supports to improve access to parks, recreation facilities, and open space.

- Towns/municipalities should implement zoning, policies, or ordinances to promote shared use agreements that allow everyone to use public buildings for physical activity.³
 - Example, Colchester says this more explicitly in their town plan: "The Town should seek opportunities for mutually beneficial sharing of services, facilities and personnel with the School District. It is recommended that municipal and school resources be combined wherever legally possible to help minimize costs."⁹
- Management of town facilities to maximize recreation and socialization.³
- Offer inclusive recreational programs for residents of all ages, incomes, and abilities.

Create policies and environmental supports to increase access to healthy, local foods.

- Support multi-purpose senior centers that provide home-delivered meals and congregate meal programs that follow Older Americans Act nutrition guidelines, and that provide transportation, exercise opportunities, and other healthy aging programs.
- Encourage agricultural and forest-based product production from local resources.²
- Show support for agribusinesses and agricultural land-use.²
- Show support for farmers markets, farm stands and community gardens.²

Promote the civil right of mothers to breastfeed in places of public accommodation (schools, restaurants, stores, and other facilities serving the general public).

- Town buildings should post signage welcoming and promoting breastfeeding.
- As workplaces themselves, municipalities should, at a minimum, achieve bronze level recognition as Breastfeeding Friendly Employers, and develop a plan for achieving silver and then gold level recognition.

4. Support residents in choosing to be free from alcohol abuse and addiction through the following actions:

Work with local store owners to:

- Restrict alcohol advertising and product promotion. As with tobacco, limiting the amount of alcohol advertising at retailers may reduce youth and young adult exposure to alcohol promotion.
 - Example: Corner stores that participate in the Healthy Retailers program are encouraged to remove any alcohol advertisements that associate alcohol consumption with operating motor vehicles or hunting.

Work with local partners in multiple sectors to reinforce tobacco-free community norms:

- Prohibit or restrict the sale of alcohol in public places and at community events.
 - Example: The Milton Farmers' Market board decided to prohibit the sale of alcohol to promote a family-friendly and substance-free cultural norm.
- Restrict alcohol-industry sponsorship of community events.

Create a policy or ordinance to:

- Require that establishments seeking to renew an alcohol license are in compliance with taxes, do not have a record of alcohol-related violations, and have in place a written Alcohol Sales policy identifying steps that staff must take for every transaction.¹⁰
- Maintain or expand existing limits on hours of legal sale of alcohol.
- Restrict alcohol advertising and product promotion.

5. Support residents in choosing to live, work, go to school, and play in a healthy environment through the following actions:

- Encourage participation of the Town Health Officer in community planning efforts.
- Encourage homeowners and landlords whose buildings are supplied with water from private sources to have water tested in accordance with Vermont Department of Health recommendations.
- Fluoridate public water supplies.
- Ensure that Vermont's Lead Law is followed concerning lead-safe work practices or create a local ordinance to underscore lead-safe practices and promote lead safety.
- Encourage all residents to test their homes for radon and install a radon mitigation system if levels are over 4 pCi/L. Towns can help the health department distribute free testing kits to the public.
 - Example: During the Champlain Valley Fair, the health department was invited to table and gave away radon mitigation kits to all interested families.
- Incorporate radon resistant features in construction of new homes.
- Promote proper installation, use, maintenance, and replacement of smoke detectors and carbon monoxide detectors.
- Encourage schools to participate in the school environmental health program, Envision, which aims to improve environmental health and indoor air quality in schools.

6. Support residents in choosing to receive preventative health and mental health care through the following actions:

Co-locate medical and mental health facilities in areas with easy access via active transportation and public transit.

- Transportation planners should regularly consider access to medical and mental health facilities in their work.

Actively engage with advocacy and consumer groups to work to dispel stereotypes and stigma associated with mental health challenges.

- Towns can sponsor screenings, community forums, or speakers to raise awareness about mental health and substance abuse.
 - Example, towns across Vermont hosted screenings of “The Hungry Heart” in 2013, a documentary about opiate abuse.
- Towns who have a regular newsletter or local newspaper can dedicate a regular monthly column to mental health and wellbeing issues.

Consider how town social service support dollars can benefit community members with mental health challenges.

- Programs such as Neighbor Rides can help residents without transportation access critical health resources that allow them to remain independent.

Sources

¹ Vermont Department of Health, Burlington District Office. Final: Chittenden County Public Health and Community Design Data Analysis, 2012.

http://ecosproject.com/sites/default/files/documents/Data%20Analysis%20ECOS_Report%20Summer%202012%20Updated%2009.20.12%20FINAL%20FOR%20RPC.pdf

² Morristown, Town Wellness Plan, 2013.

³ East Central Vermont: Health as a Sustainable Outcome, 2013.

⁴ Vermont Department of Health. Combined Community Prevention Grants, 2014.

⁵ Change Lab Solutions. Model Ordinance: Smokefree Housing. <http://changelabsolutions.org/publications/model-ord-smokefree-housing>

⁶ Center for Public Health and Tobacco Policy: State of Vermont. <http://tobaccopolicycenter.org/state-of-vermont/>

⁷ Change Lab Solutions. Model Ordinance: Tobacco Retailer Licensing. <http://changelabsolutions.org/publications/model-TRL-Ordinance>

⁸ Essex Junction Community Walk-Bike Workshop. Prepared by Local Motion for the Village of Essex Junction, September 2012. http://www.localmotion.org/images/stories/advocacy/FINAL_REPORT_-_Essex_Junction_walk-bike_community_engagement_workshop.pdf

⁹ Town of Colchester, Town Plan, 2014 draft.

¹⁰ Brattleboro Area Prevention Coalition. “Town Policies on Liquor Licensing, Alcohol Outlet Density and Restriction at Community Events: One Coalition’s Experience,” 2014. Brattleboro addendum to state of Vermont liquor and tobacco license application.