Guide to Integrating Healthy Eating and Active Living into Colorado’s Suburban and Urban Communities
LiveWell Colorado is a nonprofit organization committed to preventing and reducing obesity in Colorado by promoting healthy eating and active living. Leading a comprehensive approach, LiveWell Colorado inspires and advances policy, environmental and lifestyle changes that aim to provide every Coloradan with access to healthy foods and opportunities for physical activity in the places they live, work, learn and play. LiveWell Colorado’s strategic partners and funders are The Colorado Health Foundation, Kaiser Permanente, the Kresge Foundation and the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment.

For more information about LiveWell Colorado, visit www.livewellcolorado.org.

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In 2009 and 2010 respectively, LiveWell Colorado published Food and Built Environment Policy Blueprints that assess current initiatives, recommend action strategies and provide overall direction for statewide efforts regarding specific policy topics. The *Integrating Healthy Eating and Active Living into the Built Environment* series builds on that work, with a focus on the realities of specific geographic contexts in Colorado. This Guide is focused on the unique challenges and opportunities of urban and suburban communities in Colorado. LiveWell Colorado has also developed a complimentary guide specific to rural communities and small towns - *Guide to Integrating Healthy Eating and Active Living into Colorado’s Rural and Small Town Communities* (www.livewellcolorado.org/ruralhealguide).

**Why We Created this Guide**

The built environment, which consists of all buildings, spaces and products that are created or modified by people, contributes substantially to obesity by enabling or impeding physical activity and access to healthy foods. In the fight against obesity, a recent area of focus is planning for the built environment such as through land use, transportation and urban design, in order to influence individual behavior and increase access to healthy food options and physical activity opportunities.

This report uses a very pragmatic definition of “urban and suburban”. Key informants for this report came primarily from Colorado’s most prominent metropolitan areas along the I-25 corridor – Denver, Colorado Springs, Fort Collins and the largest city on the western slope, Grand Junction*. Common across all of these communities is an older central city, surrounded by newer, less dense suburbs. The focus of this report is that Colorado metropolitan areas are largely defined by design, transportation and land use decisions that have engineered physical activity out of our lives and can make healthy food access a challenge. This report examines daily activity patterns (e.g., how people get to where they need to go on a daily basis) so that we may better understand how to help connect individuals’ behavior to the built environment and assess its impact on healthy eating and active living (HEAL). There is a pressing need to understand the causes, challenges and potential solutions behind geographic disparities in obesity and how we can work for the advancement of HEAL. However, it is also important to consider that within suburban and urban communities, the built environment’s relationship to rising obesity rates is a problem that is also influenced by geographic location, socioeconomic status, economics and return on investment, availability of resources, political climate, historical policies and cultural norms (see Section 2).

LiveWell Colorado developed this Guide to provide background context and recommendations for community and state-level actions to improve access to healthy foods and active environments in Colorado’s diverse suburban and urban communities. We hope that everyone who reads it will find some way in which they can engage in improving the health of these communities.

*While Pueblo County is designated as an “Urban” county, the City of Pueblo itself does not meet the definition used here of “urban and suburban” and most of the key informants for this report came from the other communities listed.*
Overview

How to Use this Guide

It is evident that although Colorado has many different types of suburban and urban communities, there are strong common themes impacting their ability and capacity to incorporate HEAL into the built environment. This Guide will provide context around HEAL, obesity and the built environment in these communities and will provide recommendations for action at the community level. Action strategies, resources and partners are provided around three categories: (1) healthy food access, (2) physical activity and (3) mobility. These recommendations are not intended to be prescriptive and each recommendation will not be relevant to every community; rather these recommendations should be adapted as appropriate for each unique community. Additional literature and resources for communities are provided throughout the document and in detail in Appendix B: References.

Support and leadership is needed at a variety of levels to make any of the recommendations mentioned in this Guide come to fruition and success. Therefore, State-Level Recommendations and Overarching Strategies are presented to guide LiveWell Colorado, its partners and the larger collective “we” to consider and address more systemic issues associated with HEAL and the built environment.

This Guide was developed as a menu – not a recipe - of strategies and actions to spark interest and action across the state to improve our built environment and, ultimately, the health of Coloradans. While this document can be read from beginning to end, it was designed so that each recommendation can stand alone and be pulled out to aid community-level planners, state organizations and agencies, policymakers and advocates at all levels in their work.

How this Guide was Developed

This Guide is grounded in the thoughts and observations of the range of stakeholders that shape the built environment in Colorado’s urban and suburban communities. The recommendations outlined in this report were developed from an analysis of stakeholder interviews conducted as part of the research, with common themes from these interviews measured against a growing knowledge base on how the built environment shapes household-level and individual activity patterns, and how this in turn shapes health outcomes. The specific methods used included:

- Individual and group interviews with key stakeholders, touching over 70 individuals representing all of the key stakeholder groups that shape the built environment in Colorado’s urban and suburban communities (see Figure 2.2 on page 6 for a snapshot of local actors and see Appendix A: Acknowledgements for specific individuals and groups who provided feedback throughout this process).
- Scan of existing activities across the state’s urban and suburban communities that address the connection between the built environment and successful HEAL outcomes.
- Review of research literature from across the world that explores the connection between human behavior, the built environment and health outcomes. This work draws from a number of academic sources, representing a mixture of thought between the fields of public health, human ecology, household behavior and urban planning.
- Review and refinement of emerging themes with various stakeholder groups involved in the research process.
- Development of recommendations that reflect at least one of the major findings of the analysis. For example, it was commonly noted that any level of community-action falls on a dedicated group of HEAL advocates that are often limited in time and resources. For this reason, the strategies outlined in Section 2 reflect the realities of the on-the-ground setting in which HEAL advocacy takes place.
Theoretical Framework: People and Their Environment

The recommendations of this report are grounded in the thought that human behavior is the product of complex interactions between people and the physical, social and cultural environments in which they live. Thus, recommendations in this report take into account and reflect how our individual makeup (our genetics, physical and mental state), the physical and social settings in which we live, the social and cultural norms that guide our behavior, and the broader organizations, institutions, legal frameworks and policy influences that frame our societies—all interact to shape our behavior and the quality of our wellbeing. Increasingly, public health interventions are taking this approach, a “socio-ecological” perspective, of effecting change.

The Built Environment

Among the many facets of this socio-ecological perspective is a growing interest among urban planning and public health professionals on the potential role of the built environment in shaping levels of physical activity and access to healthy foods, as explored in LiveWell Colorado’s Food and Built Environment Policy Blueprints, both available at www.livewellcolorado.org. Broadly construed, the built environment constitutes the human made and/or modified surroundings in which we all live, purposely constructed over many generations, to support the activities and needs of our communities. More tightly defined, the built environment consists of three distinct features:

1. The form and design of the physical elements that we build. Homes, schools, businesses, parks, sidewalks, trails, recreation facilities, libraries, gardens, and streets are just a few examples of what is built that defines communities, and ultimately provides the backdrop for choices people make that impact their health, both directly or indirectly.

2. How we distribute these elements across the landscape.

3. The type of connections we construct to support our movements between these elements.

It is important to recognize the impact of the built environment and the roles played by community, local and regional agencies and organizations in providing access to healthy foods and public and green spaces (such as playgrounds, walking paths, etc.) that shape our choices for how much we move and what we eat. For example, the absence of a sidewalk or a lack of parks and trails can have a direct impact on an individual’s choice to engage in physical activity. Additionally, the fact that a community may have too many fast food outlets and too few grocery stores that stock fresh fruits and vegetables may strongly influence the decision to eat healthy foods.

Daily Activity Patterns

Understanding the interaction between people and the built environment draws the focus down to the level of the household and the daily routines that individuals follow in going about their busy lives. This report integrates these “daily activity patterns” in order to examine how household-level behavior relates to the built environment in which they exist. In this light, daily activity patterns are, in some measure, an individual’s response to the physical and social environments in which they exist.

Small changes in one particular activity pattern (e.g., how children get to school or the mode of transport adults use to run their lunch-time errands), and understanding how a specific activity pattern is determined by the built environment (why can’t our kids walk to school?), could lead to real behavior change that has a positive health benefit to individuals.
Defining Urban and Suburban Communities

This Guide uses a very pragmatic definition of “urban and suburban”, drawing most of its input and guidance from the state’s metropolitan areas – primarily Denver, Colorado Springs, Fort Collins and Grand Junction. Common across all is an older central city, surrounded by newer (mostly post World War II) suburbs. All of these metro areas have distinct differences in design, layout, and land use density in their suburban communities, relative to their central cities. Colorado’s suburbs, like those across the country, emerged as a result of the increase in households that owned cars. In contrast to the central cities, which all predate the automobile, these suburban communities are characteristically “auto-centric” and scaled in ways that make “destinations” most conveniently accessible by car.

Thus, while this report examines both urban and suburban communities, it is expected that lower-density communities (often referred to as “suburban sprawl”) will apply recommendations, differently than their higher-density neighboring communities. While lower-density communities may have different resources to implement these recommendations (e.g., sprawling infrastructure that make changes in the built environment more challenging, but perhaps a higher tax base), the underlying commonality across all urban and suburban communities is the existing built environment – these are all communities with established infrastructure and well-defined habits of design, transportation and land use decisions.

Why a Focus on Urban and Suburban Communities?

Urban and suburban communities face unique issues in regard to accessing fresh, healthy foods and places to be active. These have a well-defined built environment and entrenched habits of developing that built environment. Thus, tools and strategies to affect change in these communities will be different than those used in less-developed communities. Additionally, primary health issues are different in urban and suburban communities than in more rural communities and should be addressed with unique strategies tailored to the physical, cultural and social characteristics of urbanized (both urban and suburban) communities.

According to the most recent statistics collected by the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE) through the Colorado Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance Survey, Colorado’s urbanized counties fall near the middle of obesity, diabetes and physical inactivity rates for the state (for a detailed overview of obesity, physical inactivity, and other health indicators across Colorado, please refer to http://www.cdphe.state.co.us/pp/COPAN/obesityreport.pdf). There are large discrepancies in obesity rates amongst Colorado’s urbanized counties (as defined by the Colorado Rural Health Centers), ranging from 13% adult obesity prevalence in Boulder County to 26% in Pueblo County. Discrepancies in the prevalence of adult physical inactivity are also just as wide in Colorado’s urbanized counties– ranging from 10% in Boulder County to 21% in Denver County and 22% in Adams and Weld Counties. Such varied discrepancies amongst urbanized communities suggests that having a well-established built environment does not always correlate to lower obesity and physical inactivity rates, and further examination and culture change strategies, as promoted in this Guide, are needed to strengthen access to healthy foods and active living opportunities for residents of all urbanized areas.

Figure 2.1: Prevalence of Adult Obesity by Region (2005-2007)
There are also well-documented inconsistencies between the prevalence of obesity and related diseases, as well as the root causes of obesity such as healthy food access and opportunities for physical activity across racial and ethnic groups. Populations that experience the greatest health disparities, such as Black adults and Non-White Hispanic adults, live in greater numbers in Colorado’s urbanized communities. For a more in-depth examination of such disparities, see CDPHE’s most recent report, *The Weight of the State: 2009 Report on Overweight and Obesity in Colorado* available at [http://www.cdphe.state.co.us/pp/COPAN/obesityreport.pdf](http://www.cdphe.state.co.us/pp/COPAN/obesityreport.pdf).

In the following sections, we briefly discuss some unique issues in urban and suburban communities that relate to this report’s focus on access to healthy foods, physical activity and mobility.

**Access to Healthy Foods**

Several studies have demonstrated a link between access to fast food restaurants and areas known as “food swamps” (abundant choices of fast food and convenience stores) with obesity rates and lower consumption of fruits and vegetables. These food outlets are much more concentrated in urban and suburban communities than elsewhere. Additionally, several key issues highlighted by PolicyLink in their 2011 report, *Healthy Food, Healthy Communities: Promising Strategies to Improve Access to Fresh, Healthy Food and Transform Communities* ([http://www.policylink.org/att/cf/%7B97c6d565-bb43-406d-a6d5-eca3bbf35a0%7D/HFHC_SHORT_FINAL.PDF](http://www.policylink.org/att/cf/%7B97c6d565-bb43-406d-a6d5-eca3bbf35a0%7D/HFHC_SHORT_FINAL.PDF)), focus on uniquely urban issues and solutions, such as discrepancies in how much the poor pay for healthy food, limited transportation to food sources in urban communities, and strategies such as promoting urban agriculture, farmers’ markets, small corner store improvements and attracting more grocery stores.

**Physical Activity**

As early as 10 years ago, the US Department of Health and Human Services began reporting that in urban and suburban areas, the built environment can create multiple obstacles to being physically active. The Department points out that in urban areas, several challenges exist including lack of space for outdoor recreation that prevents kids from having protected places to play, and safety concerns such as the existence or perception of neighborhood crime, unattended dogs, a lack of street lighting, as well as busy traffic that dissuade adults and children from walking or biking to work or as a means of daily exercise.

**Mobility**

Increasingly, researchers are recognizing the role that access to public transportation in urban areas can play in facilitating physical activity through biking and walking to transit stops and stations. Current research is focusing on the considerable potential of urban and suburban communities to make small changes that will increase active modes of transport – mainly walking and biking – to get where we need to go. With close proximity to work, school and transit options, some changes in design and transportation policy can quickly create more opportunities for active, human-powered transportation.
Snapshot of Actors in Urban and Suburban Communities

Colorado's urban and suburban communities exist as they do because of the actions of a constellation of actors with an interest and influence over what gets built and where. The actors with the most immediate role in shaping our communities at the very local level are presented in Figure 2.2.

Regional Actors Affecting the Built Environment

We recognize that there are additional actors operating at broader geographic scales (e.g., regional, state, federal, international) that play important roles in shaping local outcomes. For example, these actors may provide funding for local projects, offer strategic coordination around a regional vision, create or move jobs out of the local economy.

However, this Guide focuses on the activities and actions of local actors and their influence over Colorado’s urban and suburban communities. Land use regulation and control in Colorado is largely controlled through local decision-making processes and thus is the focus for effective HEAL advocacy.

Focus on Zoning as a Tool for Creating Healthy Environments

The built environments in which we all live are a complex product of the regulatory framework, including various laws, rulings, ordinances, plans, guidance documents and manuals, that affects how developed environment features (e.g., design, transportation, land use) are built, where and by whom. In recent history, the central tenet of this framework within Colorado (and across the nation), has been a belief that the general health, safety and welfare of our communities

Figure 2.2: Local Actors Affecting Urban and Suburban Built Environments
are advanced through a segregation of incompatible land uses. Currently, Colorado’s various land use codes look to separate incompatible land uses to either create or preserve their specific community-defining character. Zoning codes are now widespread across the state’s urban and suburban communities, but this is not to say that any conversation about changes in zoning will be easy. Such attempts typically trigger public controversy. For example, Denver’s shift from a traditional “Euclidian” (segregation of land uses) approach to zoning to a form-based code took over five years to complete, largely because of the public dialogue around the new approach.

The application of zoning now is increasingly thought to produce a number of unintended consequences. Segregating our homes from our places of work and school, for example, has greatly extended the distance between daily activities and thus limited the practical means by which we can make these trips. Current figures for the Denver metro area suggest the average work trip is close to 11 miles long (one way), with roughly 80% of those trips taken by the lone driver of an automobile. The millions of vehicle trips required to get us around the metro area on any given day add harmful pollutants to the air we breathe, increase our risk of injury or death in a vehicle accidents, take money out of our household budget (the second largest household expense according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics) and decrease the time and opportunities we have over the course the day for the physical activity required to maintain a healthy lifestyle.

Any conversation about improving HEAL in the context of the built environment is therefore part of the broader conversation about the reconfiguration of land use in our communities, and thus the regulatory framework that determines this. For this reason, this Guide narrows in on zoning as a key aspect of the built environment on which to target local community action. The strategies that follow specifically target local land use regulations and controls and how these impact HEAL outcomes in a community. All seek to improve the configuration and layout of land use patterns in ways that provide households with options in their daily activity patterns that promote more active and healthier lifestyles.
Recurrent Themes and Trends Across Colorado’s Urban and Suburban Communities

Urban and suburban communities throughout the state are advancing HEAL through a broad range of strategies and having varying levels of success. Based on interviews with dozens of stakeholders and a review of multiple community reports, it would not be accurate to say that communities are trending any one way in terms of initiative types or outcomes. However, many communities are encountering similar obstacles and opportunities. While no two communities are the same, the following themes highlight common ground that most are confronting and help set the stage for the recommendations that follow. Thinking about these themes may help communities prioritize the recommendations that follow in Section 3.

Staff and Budget Limitations – In today’s economic climate, most urban and suburban communities are heavily constrained in terms of fiscal and human resources. When communities can specifically devote staff to advancing HEAL, that responsibility often falls on one person who is juggling other competing priorities. In addition, funds typically used to pay for active living improvements, such as Capital Improvement Program funds, are shrinking and being stretched across a growing number of projects. As such, communities are contending with limitations on some of the critical resources necessary to shape, implement and sustain the types of recommendations in this Guide.

Return on Investment – Almost all communities have experienced flat or declining revenues over the last four years. Many jurisdictions are functioning on minimal staff and are only able to address day-to-day operations and maintenance. In such instances, decision making bodies aim to clearly understand, and ideally quantify, return on investment before committing financial resources. How one expenditure stacks up against a community’s bottom line is often the leading consideration. As such, communities seek to better understand and demonstrate how HEAL-related projects and improvements can translate to positive economic benefits. One of the primary constraints is a shortage of uniform metrics: What should be measured? How should it be measured? What is the framework for an ‘apples to apples’ fiscal comparison that will best inform decisions?

Supply vs. Demand – In terms of active living, the majority of communities seem to be pursuing a supply-side versus demand-side approach; increasing the amount of and access to infrastructure supporting active living (e.g., improved sidewalks, fitness stations, new multi-use paths, bike racks) versus increasing community-based demand for it (e.g., promotion, education and awareness). Fortunately, in many of these communities, policies and regulations supportive of active living are already on the books and the local demand for it is already considered, better positioning these communities to more aggressively pursue implementation.

In relation to healthy eating, community strategies reveal a more balanced pursuit of enhancing supply and demand. Whereas some efforts are heavily focused on increasing demand for healthy food choices at schools for example, others are more heavily oriented to the supply-side of local food systems, such as Farm to School programs.
Going Local – The majority of communities advancing HEAL are doing so at the local versus the regional or state level. In most instances, working within the local context is simply more manageable, closer to the target population and results in faster, more positive and tangible outcomes. However, this localized approach often translates to duplication of efforts among jurisdictions and advocacy groups seeking to achieve the same or similar ends.

Nonetheless, many communities believe that advancing HEAL requires a “place-based” focus that has to occur at the local level due to the many complexities and nuances unique to a given jurisdiction. Furthermore, many communities feel that statewide policy-based interventions are of marginal benefit or influence when contextualizing local initiatives. As such, many local jurisdictions express that state-level partners carefully consider how and what they do to support local level “activation.”

Equity – In many communities, where you live, your income level, your ethnicity and your age have been shown to affect access to HEAL and key health outcomes.

Often times, members of a community who have the least access to opportunities for healthy eating and active living also may lack the knowledge and experience to participate in local decision-making processes that are often overwhelming, confusing and may be perceived as closed processes - unless you know all the right terminology to use, or know someone “on the inside.” However, for good or bad, local planning and public health decisions can greatly affect access to HEAL opportunities. Many communities today are working in partnership with their residents to grow local leadership, build skills and confidence and integrate more residents’ voices in local planning, so that HEAL opportunities reflect the needs and opportunities for all residents.

Prescribed Approaches to Complex Problems – Advancing HEAL often involves complex problems or issues requiring unique solutions. For example, the integration of a 10-acre farm into a single-family zone district is a complex endeavor and requires a tailored approach to make it happen and achieve stakeholder buy-in. In many communities, a prescribed approach can often obstruct projects requiring an outside the box tactic. In this instance, a restrictive zoning code and rigid interpretation could be an obstacle to mixed use, infill development. In another instance, perhaps a fixed perspective on the purpose of public roads as facilities to exclusively serve vehicles could be the constraint. Regardless, many communities encounter that prescribed processes often work against innovative, local change.

Advancing HEAL in Urban and Suburban Communities - Keys to Success

This Guide offers a dissection of the role the built environment plays in shaping access to healthy foods and active lifestyles in Colorado’s urban and suburban communities. Section 3 identifies strategies that take into account and reflect the key themes previously discussed, and that are specifically tailored to realistic, tangible community-level action. These strategies continually emphasize three themes critical to understanding what is possible at the local level and how to succeed in fostering change at this level:

1. **Knowledge is key:** Policies and regulations shape land use options. Understanding how local policies can be modified to promote HEAL outcomes is key to understanding the realm of the possible and is the first step needed to move toward that goal.

2. **Messaging is critical:** Conversations about land use and zoning policies can often be contentious. Understanding how to frame and carry the appropriate message to the various actors involved in land use decisions is critical to successfully instigating change.

3. **Partnering is essential:** Land use issues are typically too broad for any one party to pursue on their own. Because of the multitude of actors involved in land use decision making, it is essential that HEAL advocates recognize the need for partnerships in getting the message out and moving to advance HEAL outcomes. Local advocates need partners and advocates at the local, state, and federal level.
The recommendations in this Guide present a series of ideas on integrating access to healthy foods and active lifestyles into the built form of Colorado’s urban and suburban communities. These recommendations are presented at two distinct geographic scales and targeted to two different, but closely related, sets of actors. Section 3 outlines strategies and resources targeted toward the local community scale and the various community advocates, city staff, elected officials, residents and other key stakeholders that shape decision outcomes at the local level. Section 4 - State-level Recommendations identifies strategies directed toward LiveWell Colorado and other HEAL advocates that operate at a statewide level. The key differentiator across the geographic scales is availability of resources (personnel, time and money), or more often the lack there of. The local strategies presented here intend to impact a single community and tend to be pragmatically-focused, seeking changes that are accessible within the time and budget constraints that HEAL advocates operate. In contrast, the statewide recommendations, while still resource-constrained, tend to be more expansive in their goals and are meant to have a broader impact.

The following community-level recommendations reflect recurrent themes and ideas from stakeholder interviews are further informed by state and national literature, as well as conversations with state agencies and organizations. The recommendations are presented under the categories of Healthy Food Access, Physical Activity and Mobility, recognizing that many have overlapping influence on one another. It is also important to note that these recommendations should be viewed as a menu of options and not a distinct recipe for success. Communities will need to evaluate each recommendation relative to their own context and tailor the core idea of the recommendation to fit their unique circumstances.
Local-Level Strategies

Healthy Food Access

Background

A growing body of evidence from across Colorado – and the world – suggests that there is a strong relationship between what options a person has in terms of food (what they can access and consume) and their health. While it is impossible to determine one factor alone that determines someone’s health, an increasing body of evidence suggests that proximity to less healthy choices impacts health negatively, while having healthier options closer to home can strengthen health outcomes.14

The particular role of the built environment in shaping food access is multifaceted and only partially understood. At its core, the built environment’s primary influence appears to be an unintended consequence of the spatial separation of land uses brought about by the widespread use of zoning. The philosophical underpinnings of zoning – keeping our homes separate from the places we work, shop and play – appear to have produced the unintended outcome of shaping food access for communities across Colorado. Healthy food options are disproportionately distributed across the state’s urban and suburban communities, negatively impacting poorer and minority communities at higher rates than the rest of the state’s population.15 Our food environment is therefore littered with inconsistencies and inequitable access to fresh, healthy foods. We have created challenges to growing food close to home, while encouraging the clustering of healthy food retail in certain neighborhoods, and a clustering of unhealthy food retail (e.g., fast food, convenience stores, liquor stores) in other neighborhoods.

Decline of Food Production Close to Urban Communities

The urbanization of Colorado since the Second World War has been due largely to the demand for housing a growing population. Like other metropolitan areas across the country, Colorado’s cities expanded rapidly around an older urban core, converting agricultural lands into suburban housing developments. Additionally, in Colorado, this has often led to converting agricultural water rights to municipal uses. This pattern is evident in most of the state’s suburban and urban communities where a centrally located cluster of historic development, often built prior to World War II and in some cases well preserved, is surrounded by more recent development, constructed in the last 40 years. A corresponding expansion in the geographic footprint of the production and distribution networks of food ensured that local land use decisions rarely had to consider the impact of suburbanization on the availability of locally and regionally produced foods.

As a new generation of urban dwellers in Colorado increases their awareness of the health, food safety, lifestyle and other benefits of locally-produced food, urban and suburban communities across the state are recognizing the role existing zoning laws have in limiting residents’ choices to locally-produced foods. In the push to create a particular character and amenity for a community’s residential land uses, many of Colorado’s zoning codes have either implicitly or explicitly zoned out food production (of any scale) within residential neighborhoods. Clearly, many of these regulations have emerged as a response to resident desires and concerns (e.g., concerns regarding pesticide use, machinery, insects, application of compost, etc.) that could be associated with farming, and those concerns must also be addressed while proposing regulatory changes.

However, the overall effect has resulted in a regulatory environment that, through a number of different mechanisms and processes, makes it harder for local food producers to establish farm plots within city boundaries; increases the costs and regulatory compliance issues associated with food production inside a city; and, constrains the types and quantities of foods that local producers can produce. Local food advocates in Colorado suggest that these factors combined make local foods at least 50% more expensive than mass produced foods available to restaurants and food retailers within a community.16

These additional expenses can pose a significant challenge to improving access to fresh, healthy foods in all neighborhoods. Local and regional producers in Colorado are increasingly focusing on growing specialty crops, such as fruits and vegetables, for local consumption. Not only are we not maximizing the potential production and distribution of fresh produce, but research consistently shows that seeing and knowing where one’s food comes from increases consumption of those foods year-round. Students who are taught where their salad bar items came from select those foods more often, and community gardeners report consuming more produce year-round, even if not local or seasonal. A regulatory environment that encourages more food production close to home can contribute greatly in efforts to increase the availability and consumption of fresh produce.
Clustering of Food Retail

This same regulatory environment also appears to have a distorting influence on the economics of retail site selection and food retail. By design, zoning schemes promote the clustering of like land uses (e.g., houses or commercial space), often to the exclusion of other land uses that support the daily activity patterns of the residents of our communities (e.g., grocery shopping). An essential prerequisite of food retail however is close proximity to the people likely to consume their product, or to the paths these people take going about their daily activities. By segregating the origins of these activities from the destinations we seek, zoning regimes have shaped the economics of food retail to create a rent premium for close access to “rooftops” or to high-vehicle traffic corridors. Such premiums tend to disadvantage local, small-scale food retailers and advantage large, corporate food enterprises. Corporations make very deliberate calculations about return on investment from their site selection decisions and have well-established business models for the types of food retail they place where. They also have well-established supply chains with strong purchasing power, defined price-points for capturing sales and, in the restaurant business, often well-established formulas for their menu offerings. Due to these factors, neighborhood food choice is often the product of a corporate calculus driven by factors like average household income and the ability of any one site to capture a set portion of a household’s income.

Opportunity

Rising community-level awareness of the health and lifestyle benefits of fresh, local food production and smaller-scale, more dispersed healthy food retail creates an important opening for local HEAL advocates to begin to frame a community’s conversation about impediments in existing land use regulations and fresh food production, and how to address these impediments to move the community forward.

Local-level Action Strategies

Three strategies to address the unintended consequences of land use segregation on healthy food access are:

1. Review regulatory impediments to urban agriculture
2. Use zoning to mitigate unhealthy food retail
3. Strengthen support for backyard gardens

Strategy 1: Review Regulatory Impediments to Urban Agriculture

Food production in an urban context is often difficult, and thus more expensive, because of the numerous local regulations that are typically designed to bolster the appeal of a neighborhood for residential purposes alone. Therefore, communities looking to promote local agriculture should complete a comprehensive review of their existing regulatory framework to identify and highlight laws, ordinances and policies that implicitly or explicitly impede or promote community-level food production. This will involve:

- Work with city staff, elected officials and community leaders to establish and maintain a community steering or advisory committee to oversee a complete review of the regulatory impediments and support factors to the production, processing and distribution of community-grown foods.
- Work with city staff and other relevant subject matter experts to review existing zoning ordinances, health regulations and other local regulations (e.g., right of way laws) to identify those that currently limit or promote viable local agriculture within city limits.
- Complete a similar review of local policies and ordinances to identify barriers, opportunities and gaps in local regulations that affect a local food producers’ ability to process and distribute fresh food within a community. Such a code scrub could identify what is allowed, unclear or missing from current regulation. Example issues that could be clarified include: allowances for signage and accessory uses on a farm or garden; ability to sell food from a communal garden on site; ability to establish one or multiple producer produce stands on public or private property; and allowances for mobile vending.
- Evaluate the findings of these reviews and develop achievable action steps that address these findings in ways that match the interests and capacities of the community. Some action steps could include clarifying what current regulations allow through marketing and communications or actively advocating city council for amendments around accessory uses of a community garden to better allow for food storage or sales.
- Report these findings and action steps back to a steering committee.
• Work with the steering committee to clearly articulate an action plan to follow through on the findings. Success would include regulatory changes that specifically address the impediments. The action plan needs to address how to ultimately (and successfully) arrive at this point, given the political make up and direction of the community at large.

Since many in the community at large may not think about the relative pros and cons of local foods over many of the foods widely available in our supermarkets, a large part of this strategy needs to be educational - helping community leaders, residents, city/county staff and other local officials understand the existing and potential importance of local agriculture, as a well spring for fresh, healthy food options close to home. Therefore additional recommendations could include:

• Working with residents, community gardeners, backyard gardeners and others to develop compelling talking points to seed this conversation. Talking points should clearly connect locally produced foods to values and concerns that are already part of the broader community conversation. Denver Urban Gardens is one example of an organization that has examined and published considerable information about the social, physical and mental health benefits of gardening and engaging your community through food. Additionally, the City of Wheat Ridge, Colorado completed a process in 2010 that captures many of the points recommended under this strategy. See the related story box on this page for more details.

Food Access

City of Wheat Ridge revisions to zoning code in support of community-based agriculture

The City of Wheat Ridge, an inner-ring suburb of the Denver metro area with a population close to 31,000, has a proud history in agriculture, having produced wheat and a variety of fruits and vegetables to serve the Denver region and previously reigning as the world’s largest producer of carnations in the 1950s. Saluting this history, the Wheat Ridge City Council unanimously adopted Ordinance 1491 in May of 2011, revising and clarifying the City’s zoning code in support of community-based agriculture. The revisions allow for community gardens (under the category of “urban gardens”), farmers markets and produce stands in any of the City’s zone districts. The ordinance and the changes it seeks to inspire represent an important next step for the community in implementing Envision Wheat Ridge, Its Comprehensive Plan, and specifically the plan’s goal of promoting access to healthy foods (Policy SF 4.2 Accessible Healthy Foods). For more information, see http://www.ci.wheatridge.co.us/archives/85/Ordinance%201491.pdf

A video highlighting the code amendments and the multiple benefits of urban agriculture to the Wheat Ridge community is available at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sWFjGU8sKRG.
Strategy 2: Use zoning to mitigate unhealthy food retail. Communities across the country have successfully used the zoning process to correct imbalances in food retail, revising zoning ordinances to better manage the number and location of fast food outlets in their communities. Detroit, Michigan, as well as Arcata, Los Angeles, and Carmel, California, are examples of communities that have enacted ordinances, moratoriums and bans to restrict such uses. The approaches are varied: zoning out fast food altogether, zoning out drive-through services, banning formula restaurants (a business which is required by contractual to provide any of the following: identical named menu items, packaging, food preparation methods, employee uniforms, interior decor, signage, exterior design, or name as any other restaurant in any other location) and developing rules that regulate the number, density or location of fast food outlets. Another potential approach could be the dedication of existing community/economic development funds to offer incentives for the types of restaurants and food retail outlets a community wants in their community.

It is recommended that communities initiate this process at the local level through the following actions:

• Work with local residents, government staff, the local development community and elected officials to initiate a conversation on their desire to better manage fast food and formula outlets in their community.

• If the community so desires, work with local government to research relevant models that might work in the local political environment and then draft zoning code changes to better manage fast food retail based on existing models.

• Work with local government to secure community and internal support, particularly from economic development, to move zoning code changes through the review and approval process.

Strategy 3: Strengthen backyard garden networks. Many communities have strong and established community garden networks, but not necessarily the parallel support for backyard gardeners. Backyard gardens offer a number of advantages over community gardens. Space is more widely available as the majority of Colorado’s urban and suburban homes have space for some form of backyard food production. Backyard gardens allow gardeners more flexibility in how they use the garden space and in scheduling of gardening activities around other household activities. However, backyard gardeners also have the disadvantage of being more disconnected from the range of knowledge and resources that make community gardens more productive. To address these challenges and help bring fresh healthy foods to more low-income residents in neighborhoods of Denver, the “Refarm Denver” project of Revision International is one example of a local group working to support backyard gardeners (www.revisioninternational.org). Drawing from leading examples like this, and from recurrent themes from stakeholder interviews from across the state, local HEAL advocates can build on the growing interest in local food production by pursuing the following activities:

• Develop baseline information on the number and location of existing backyard gardens in the community. Provide this information to local decision makers as evidence of the community’s interest and ability in local food production.

• Survey gardeners on their specific needs and challenges.

• Evaluate existing zoning laws that challenge backyard gardening and food production. Examples could include restrictions on poultry or backyard livestock, or restrictions on building accessory uses. Identify potential corrections that address these specific constraints and advocate for changes with local decision makers.

• Work with local government staff, as well as local experts such as CSU Extension, to develop and make available basic information about gardening practices, seeds and rootstocks, tools and labor, compost and manure, and other resources that maximize productive yields for the backyard gardener. Such resources could be packaged as “garden kits” made available to residents through the municipality.

• Identify and map existing spaces within the community (e.g., school kitchens, church parking lots, community centers) that gardeners could use periodically at little or no expense for activities such as: exchanging produce and tools; conducting training sessions on topics like processing fresh fruit and vegetables; or storing equipment over the winter.
Community Resources and Partners

In following through on these strategies, local community advocates will need to leverage the support and resources of a number of important partners. Some of the key partners are listed in the following table.

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<tr>
<th>Organization/Agency</th>
<th>Funding</th>
<th>Implementation</th>
<th>Local Advocacy</th>
<th>Research</th>
<th>Technical Assistance</th>
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<td><strong>Colorado Department of Local Affairs</strong></td>
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<td>Offers number of small grant programs to fund planning, design and construction of public facilities.</td>
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<td><strong>Colorado Municipal League; Colorado Counties Inc.</strong></td>
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<td>Provides advocacy, information and training for communities on matters of joint interest to their memberships.</td>
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<td><strong>Professional Associations</strong></td>
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<td>Local chapters of organizations like Urban Land Institute (ULI) -<a href="http://www.uli.org/">http://www.uli.org/</a> and American Planning Association (APA) -<a href="http://www.planning.org/">http://www.planning.org/</a> and other like disciplines often provide pro bono service to local communities on projects of mutual interest.</td>
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<td><strong>Universities</strong></td>
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<td>University of Colorado at Denver has a well-regarded program in urban design and planning. Faculty often provide in-kind support to community groups grappling with technical issues around land use and zoning. The program can also provide a pool of student volunteers through class projects.</td>
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<td>The University of Denver Sturm College of Law houses the Rocky Mountain Land Use Institute (<a href="http://www.rmlui.org">www.rmlui.org</a>) which has provided student and faculty support from within the Law College in drafting a sustainable Community Development Code Framework on a range of land use and sustainability issues.</td>
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<td><strong>Urban agriculture advocacy groups</strong></td>
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<td>Provide expert knowledge and experience in all matters relating to food production in urban context. Examples include Denver Urban Gardens (<a href="http://www.dug.org">www.dug.org</a>) and Revision International <a href="http://www.revisioninternational.org">www.revisioninternational.org</a>.</td>
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<td><strong>LiveWell Colorado HEAL Library</strong></td>
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<td>The HEAL Library is a searchable, online collection of codes, ordinances, resolutions, policies and other tools to help communities create environments that support access to healthy eating and active living. The HEAL Library provides model language for policy and regulatory action at the local or regional level, with a primary focus on Colorado communities and secondarily on similar states and other leading national examples.</td>
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<td><a href="http://about.livewellcolorado.org/heallibrary">http://about.livewellcolorado.org/heallibrary</a>.</td>
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Physical Activity

Background

Being physically active is one of the most important steps that people of all ages can take to improve their health. Physical activity is defined as intentional movement that enhances health. Where and how much physical activity we get in a day is to some extent a product of the built environment in which we live. The expansion of suburban communities over the past 50 years, and the broad effect of zoning codes on separating residential land uses from all others have combined to limit the opportunities we have to incorporate more physical activity into our daily routines. Communities designed around the convenience of getting to places by car have had the effect of making recreational infrastructure, such as gyms, pools, parks, trails, playgrounds and playing fields, more distant and detached from our neighborhoods. As the convenience of getting to these places diminishes and thus the time and cost of accessing them increases, our likelihood of using them does too.

It is also important to consider the financial accessibility of opportunities for physical activity. For example, recreational expenditures tend to rise with income levels. Wealthier households spend more on recreation, exercise, health and wellness activities. Despite the fact that many government agencies have invested heavily in facilities to provide affordable recreation, these facilities are expensive to build and operate. Therefore, when pricing for activities, it needs to be considered that lower income residents have less disposable income to spend on these activities. However, according to the Property and Environment Research Center, while costs do affect many low-income families’ decisions not to spend time at parks and public recreation facilities, it is the cost of travel and the purchase of goods, rather than fees, that have the strongest impact. Both physical and financial accessibility are important considerations in the development and provision of public recreation facilities.

Opportunity

The challenge then is to find ways to re-integrate physical activity into both existing and new communities, and then hopefully into our daily routines, the places, design elements and infrastructure that make these opportunities convenient and accessible to all (e.g., these places are both nearby as well as affordable forms of recreation, rather than a distant and expensive pool, gym or club). Recognizing that our daily activity patterns are a response to the environment in which we live provides an important opportunity on this front: envisioning communities that maximize the opportunity for
people to be physically active, by making these opportunities an easy and affordable choice. Axum Park in the Park Hill neighborhood of Denver is an excellent example of a facility providing such opportunity. The demand for picnic space at Axum Park is quite a contrast to just a few years ago, when the overgrown, poorly lit park was a hangout for young men drinking instead of barbequing. The lack of upkeep made the park feel unsafe, tree roots were bursting through the concrete basketball court, and a small and neglected playground was not inviting to the families and children from nearby neighborhoods.

Several forces converged to make renovations possible. The Park Hill Thriving Communities Photovoice project helped spark local interest in improving the park, which still had a lot of potential because it was so conveniently located within walking distance of several neighborhoods bordering the park. Also, while the park’s playground was on the Denver Parks and Recreation’s list for future bond-funded improvements, it was the community’s expression of interest in the park that leveraged the enhanced funding, resulting in extensive park upgrades. Parks and Recreation also helped by clearing out tree limbs that had obscured views into and through the park, making it feel more open and safe. The local police agreed to patrol more frequently, addressing the safety concerns that had kept many people away. And a City Council member, the late Carla Madison, championed the park.

Today, young men are still hanging out in the park — but now they are joined by children running about on the playground and adults walking their dogs. In just 2 years, park usage has grown by five-fold, with the greatest increases by women and children. The safe, accessible park has given families and children a place to play, to be more active outside, to gather and connect. Rebuilding a park has rebuilt a sense of community, along with paths and playgrounds.

Research from around the world shows a strong correlation between the ability of people to be physically active in their community and their health. Although the results vary by age, gender and ethnicity and it is not completely clear which aspects of the built environment produce the greatest impact, the mounting body of evidence suggests that the following factors all foster greater physical activity within communities:

• Bringing recreational opportunities closer home (e.g., within easy walking or recreational bicycling distance)
• Offering a diverse mix of recreational opportunities
• Providing safe and aesthetically interesting connections between these destinations

**Community-Level Action Strategies**

Two locally-actionable strategies that flow from these three factors that maximize the opportunity for integrating physical activity into our daily routines are:

1. Create the conditions that bring recreational opportunities closer to home (e.g., where recreational opportunities will be found)
2. Create more recreational opportunities through shared-use facilities (e.g., what recreational opportunities will be provided)

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**Physical Activity**

**South Lincoln Redevelopment and the Healthy Development Measurement Tool**

Recognizing the relationship between the built environment and opportunities for physical activity, more communities are looking to actively incorporate health-outcomes into the planning process. The South Lincoln Redevelopment is a great example. South Lincoln is an ongoing project of the Denver Housing Authority (DHA), remaking their 15.1 acre South Lincoln Homes community in Denver’s La Alma/Lincoln Park neighborhood. The proposed mixed-income, mixed-use redevelopment (adjacent to the 10th and Osage light rail station) represents a significant opportunity for a positive impact to the residents of South Lincoln Homes as well as the surrounding neighborhood. DHA conducted a rapid Health Impact Assessment (HIA) as part of the master planning process to assess the current health status and needs of residents and the surrounding community. DHA elected to use a customized version of the Healthy Development Measurement Tool (HDMT) developed by the San Francisco Department of Public Health. The HDMT allows DHA to build on the HIA, creating a baseline and setting targets to guide further development of the master plan, as well as the actual implementation. For more information, see [http://www.denverhousing.org/development/SouthLincoln/Pages/default.aspx](http://www.denverhousing.org/development/SouthLincoln/Pages/default.aspx)
Strategy 1: Create the conditions that bring recreational opportunities closer to home. Convenience and accessibility of recreational opportunities close to home are key to getting more people to be more physically active. Neighborhood-based opportunities for physical activity including clean and well-maintained sidewalks, trails, parks and public recreation and sports facilities make being active the easy, convenient choice. They also contribute to the value of a community. Two factors that influence this accessibility are: the flexibility of existing zoning codes to allow a mix of land uses close to residences and the willingness of developers to build recreational infrastructure into their projects (e.g., facilities that the developer builds for the neighborhood, but which are not sold directly). Specific action steps for HEAL advocates in addressing these points could include:

- Engage community members through a wide variety of forums to design their vision for physical activity opportunities, infrastructure and programs within their community.

- Work with residents, community leaders and city staff to explore and adopt mixed use zoning principles into their existing zoning code. This will require a clear and well-crafted message that articulates the advantages to residents of mixing recreational infrastructure into their neighborhoods.

- Identify developers who may be open to discussing healthy community development. Develop a strategy on how best to approach, engage and communicate with local developers.

  » Facilitate a two-way conversation between the community and developers in order to help both sides understand the others’ aspirations and facilitates a shared sense of what is feasible from a business point of view and what fits with the residents’ vision of their community.

  » Establish community-developer partnerships to develop presentations to share this vision for change in the built environment with planning commissions, city councils, neighborhood organizations, banks and other lending institutions that finance development.25

Accessible Destinations – Building Physical Activity into a Community

While causal relationships are still to be established, a growing body of evidence suggests that certain changes in community design increase the opportunities for physical activity for those who want them. Residents are more likely to use parks and open spaces that are easily accessible to their homes, and to walk or bike if the destinations are close. Many new (or redesigned) communities across the state have embraced these design principles and are actively marketing them as selling features of the community. Two examples are Stapleton in Denver (http://www.stapletondenver.com/community/whats-here/parks-open-space) and Ridgegate in Lone Tree (http://www.ridgegatecolorado.com/parks.php)
Strategy 2: Create more recreational opportunities through shared-use facilities. Surveying existing resources in their communities, many local HEAL advocates express frustration over the apparent lack of capacity for organizations to share facilities. School districts often have sports fields, gyms and sometimes pools that sit idle outside of school hours. Park districts may own former farmland or water districts own irrigation canals, that are close to neighborhoods devoid of running and walking trails, which could inspire residents to exercise. A growing number of communities now recognize the value of these shared assets and research repeatedly demonstrates how trails, parks and recreation facilities allow and encourage residents to be more physically active.

Providing more of such facilities through shared community uses broadens the use of facilities that are already part of the fabric of the neighborhood and maximizes the opportunities for physical activity of residents.

The Master Joint Use Agreement between the Cherry Creek School District and Arapahoe Park and Recreation District (in the Denver metro area) is a good example of how shared-use opportunities are being leveraged (http://www.aprd.org/html/parks.html). This joint use agreement is founded on a school-park concept through which pre-planning occurs to create dual-purpose facilities meeting the community’s educational and varied recreational needs. Another example comes from Denver Public Schools, which has built fitness centers at 8 high schools that are open to the community after school hours (http://curriculum.dpsk12.org/physical_education/fitness_centers/index.shtml).

In order to broaden the use of these facilities, it is recommended that local HEAL advocates:

• Inventory all spaces in the community that have the potential for use for indoor physical activity. This survey should look beyond obvious choices like schools and church halls to also include vacant retail or commercial space close to residences that could be converted to a recreational use for little or no cost.

• Inventory all existing open space within the community and identify the ownership of such lands. Approach the owners to evaluate their willingness and/or concern about allowing broader public access to such areas. Develop joint use agreements with willing owners.

• Work with community institutions that have large grounds open to the public to build, maintain and publicize facilities on their grounds that enable physical activity, such as playgrounds, trails and gardens.

• Explore the use of existing financing mechanisms (such as Historic Preservation Tax Credits, local economic development funds) and the use of zoning overlay districts to encourage the redevelopment of existing properties that could support physical activity programs, following some measure of rehabilitation.

Physical Activity

Sharing Community Resources

Joint use agreements establish a relationship between two or more entities to open up community spaces such as playgrounds, athletic fields, pools and gymnasiums to the community when not in their normal use, often at a reduced cost or for free. Opening these community assets to a broader range of uses (and users) offers residents’ greater opportunity for physical activity. The Loveland City Council, for example, voted in 2009 to support the renovation of the Loveland High School pool through a joint partnership with the Thompson Valley School District and private fundraisers. As the City Council noted in supporting the plan, Loveland citizens have a significant interest in swimming and existing facilities do not adequately meet demand; thus the Council viewed the pool’s renovation as an opportunity to enhance both students’ and residents’ opportunities for physical activity. For more information on joint use agreements, see http://www.jointuse.org/resources/joint-use-101/
Community Resources and Partners

The broad consideration underlying this recommendation is the goal of re-integrating into existing urban and suburban communities the services and recreational opportunities residents need or desire on a daily basis. Some of the partners are listed in the following table.

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<th>Organization/Agency</th>
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<th>Implementation</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Colorado Department of Local Affairs – Community Development Office</strong>&lt;br&gt;DOLA's Community Development Office empowers Colorado local governments by providing various technical and financial resources related to land use planning, economic development and sustainable community development.&lt;br&gt;<a href="http://www.colorado.gov/cs/Satellite/DOLA-Main/1251594456054">http://www.colorado.gov/cs/Satellite/DOLA-Main/1251594456054</a></td>
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<td><strong>Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment – Healthy Living Branch</strong>&lt;br&gt;CDPHE provides technical assistance to communities, conducts research on best practices in state and local contexts, provides data on a range of obesity preventing topics, convenes stakeholder groups around key issues.&lt;br&gt;www.coprevent.org</td>
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<td><strong>Developers and their professional associations</strong>&lt;br&gt;The development community has a number of professional bodies that work with local communities on development-oriented topics, policies and projects. The Urban Land Institute has an active chapter in Colorado.&lt;br&gt;<a href="http://colorado.uli.org/">http://colorado.uli.org/</a></td>
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<td><strong>PolicyLink's Center for Health and Place</strong>&lt;br&gt;The Center for Health and Place supports community advocates by providing technical assistance, strategies for shaping policy, communications training and other resources.</td>
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<td><strong>Professional Land Use/Planning Organizations</strong>&lt;br&gt;The nation’s leading professional organizations in the built environment realm often provide pro bono and reduced cost support to communities grappling with growth and development issues. There are many national organizations that have active chapters in Colorado, such as:&lt;br&gt;The Urban Land Institute (ULI) – <a href="http://www.uli.org/">http://www.uli.org/</a> .&lt;br&gt;American Planning Association (APA) – <a href="http://www.planning.org/">http://www.planning.org/</a> .&lt;br&gt;American Institute of Architects (AIA) - <a href="http://www.aia.org/">http://www.aia.org/</a> .&lt;br&gt;American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA) - <a href="http://www.asla.org/">http://www.asla.org/</a> .</td>
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Public Health Law & Policy
PHLP’s Planning for Healthy Places team has extensive experience researching best practices, providing guidance, and developing policies for using land use plans to support community health and well-being in a diverse range of communities. http://www.phlpnet.org/healthy-planning

Rocky Mountain Land Use Institute
RMLUI seeks to foster the development of law, policy and practices in support of sustainable and prosperous communities across the Rocky Mountain West. Based in the Sturm College of Law at the University of Denver, the Institute is able to provide communities with access to law students and faculty in the development and evaluation of local land use laws. http://www.law.du.edu/rmlui

Universities
Planning academics both within Colorado and across the country offer a valuable resource in the “state of the art” in suburban retrofits. Programs, such as those provided through the University of Colorado’s College of Architecture and Planning (http://www.ucdenver.edu/academics/colleges/architectureplanning/Pages/default.aspx) provide technical support and often student/faculty assistance to “on the ground” built environment projects.

US EPA Office of Sustainable Communities
This office offers a number of grants and technical assistance opportunities in support of communities looking to create healthier, more active communities. http://www.epa.gov/dced/

The Colorado Health Foundation
The Foundation works with partners — nonprofits, businesses, health care leaders, policymakers and educators — to build healthier Colorado communities through access to healthy and affordable foods, safe options for physical activity, teaching individuals how to manage their chronic disease, and engaging parents in raising healthy kids. http://www.coloradohealth.org

Colorado Parks and Recreation Association
A non-profit education and advocacy organization whose members are dedicated to maintaining and improving our quality of life through parks, recreation and leisure opportunities. http://www.cpra-web.org
Mobility

Background

Getting around in our communities is one of the most important activities we perform in the course of our day. Getting kids to school, going to work, shopping, eating out and running errands are critical parts of our household routines. Moreover, our economies count on the ability to move goods from warehouses to stores; get shoppers to these stores and employees to their worksites; get parts and materials from suppliers to factories; and move people from their home city to distant locations to exchange ideas, reconnect with others or take in new experiences. Mobility is a means to an end -- we leave home to go places. Apart from the small part of our daily activity oriented around mobility for pleasure or exercise, the trips we make are to gain access to something (e.g., a job, food, entertainment, etc.).

How we get around is tightly intertwined with the built environment of our communities. The scale and types of corridors that we have created over the past 200 years reflect the rise and fall of the various technologies we have used to get around over this time period: our feet, horses, animal-drawn wagons, street cars, interurban railcars, and most recently, the automobile. Automobiles and current urban design have, in essence, engineered human-powered mobility and physical activity out of our lifestyles, creating land use patterns that move these places further from our homes. For example, drive-thru banks, drycleaners and restaurants eliminate the need for even a few steps during our daily activities.

Automobile Landscapes

No other technology has so singularly defined our mobility over the past five decades as has the deep integration of the automobile into our daily routines. As household incomes rose in the period following the Second World War and assets like houses and cars became more attainable to a wider segment of the population, metropolitan areas expanded rapidly away from their traditional urban core. Families with cars could move to the suburbs and yet still travel with relative ease to their (increasingly distant) worksites. Trips to neighborhood stores that took 20-30 minutes walking, covering a distance of perhaps no more than a mile, gave way to driving trips of about the same duration to the emerging malls and other auto-oriented shopping centers that clustered together a larger number of stores into one space. Parking, which is usually free, become a ubiquitous requirement of these new landscapes; the dimensions and required number of parking places eventually codified into zoning laws. Businesses recognized the accessibility advantage of locating along high-traffic corridors, creating price premiums for land around intersections and highway on-ramps.

The net consequence of this on Colorado’s metropolitan areas is a built environment predicated on our need to get around via the automobile. The configuration of our land uses with the subsequent clustering of “origins” separate from (increasingly distant) “destinations” creates an environment where getting around for any type of household activity – “mandatory” trips such as going to work; “maintenance” trips such as going to the grocery store; or, “discretionary” trips such as going to a movie – is increasingly difficult without the use of a car. Day-time trip making activities like running errands at lunchtime or stopping at the grocery store on the way home are much more likely to be via car, if that is the mode we used to get to work in the first place. Free parking at these destinations makes the decision over mode choice that much easier. Businesses recognize the competitive disadvantage they face if they are unable to provide potential customers easy and convenient parking for them to squeeze in all the various activities households undertake during the course of their day.

The Challenge of Maintaining These Landscapes

Our increasing reliance on automobiles for our mobility, and the subsequent landscapes that have come to dominate our communities has the cascading effect of inclining governments across the state – city, county and regional – to invest more heavily in infrastructure that supports vehicular travel over more active, non-motorized modes such as walking and biking. Trends of the past two decades have seen a steady increase in the costs to local governments of roads and their associated infrastructure (e.g., ramps, bridges, rail crossings and viaducts, merge lanes, crosswalks, curb cuts) at a time when rates of growth in auto usage have expanded faster than the rate of population growth (the result of increasingly dispersed land use patterns). Therefore, these trends have resulted in increasing maintenance and replacement costs for such infrastructure at a time when the state and federal share of these expenditures has continued to decline. As community budgets further contract and maintenance costs increase, funding for non-motorized infrastructure often becomes an even smaller slice of an increasingly smaller pie.

Opportunity

Communities across the state are now openly evaluating the financial and lifestyle impacts of a built environment predicated
on the automobile. Many have come to recognize that congestion on our roadways has reached the point beyond which communities can build their way out of it, forcing them to reexamine how they invest scarce and declining funds on transportation infrastructure and whether they can achieve better outcomes for the whole community through more targeted mobility investments.

Many are also re-examining the place and role of streets in their communities, spawned by the emergence of a more holistic, less-singularly-focused perspective of the role that streets play in our communities. However, probably the greatest single driver appears to be an increasing market preference for more walkable, mixed-use communities that offer greater choice to residents in how they get around. Many urban and suburban communities across the state are actively examining how to re-integrate such design principles into their land use plans and are finding support from a wide range of community advocates, professional organizations, state and federal agencies and from the development community. The Denver Living Streets Initiative brings this opportunity to life. Through this Initiative, a multi-disciplinary partnership is designing and promoting multi-purpose streets to accommodate a variety of user groups (e.g., motorists, pedestrians, transit patrons) and serve multiple interests including transportation, economic development, public health, place making and sustainability.

**Local-level Action Strategies**

The two strategies presented below focus on making the built environment more accessibility to a wider array of purposes and offering people a real choice in how they get where they are going: walking, biking, driving or riding mass transit.

**Strategy 1: Promote the adoption of mixed-use zoning.**

Mixed-use zoning creates the potential for communities to better integrate the origins and destinations that shape our travel patterns. Fort Collins, Longmont, Colorado Springs, Boulder and Lakewood are some of the Colorado communities that have successfully adopted mixed-use zoning in an effort to attract more integrated forms of development into their built environments. HEAL advocates in communities without mixed-use zoning codes could be the catalyst to a community wide dialogue around the potential for mixed use zoning to increase levels of accessibility and thus choice across the community. Key touch points for this conversation will include articulating how mixed-use zoning promotes a greater array of destinations closer to home to support the daily requirements of households in the community, and thus orients development around a wider array of mobility choices. Key tasks in this endeavor include:

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**Mobility**

**Mixed-Use Zoning and Managed Parking**

One of the most distortive, yet unstudied and unacknowledged, consequences of most zoning is the impact it has on parking. Zoning and development restrictions require a minimum number of parking spaces, usually based on a collective guess at the right number of spaces for different types of development. Such restrictions essentially make the cost of providing off street parking part of the cost of development, passing this cost off onto developers and ultimately down to consumers, who pay higher prices for housing and goods in order to cover the cost of “free” parking. “Off street parking requirements are a fertility drug for cars,” says Professor Shoup, spawning the conventional retail and commercial landscapes we see today – isolated businesses surrounded by parking and accessible only by car. Parking expert Jeffrey Tumlin recently noted that this model of development wastes money ($20,000 per space), wastes land (3 spaces per 1000 sq ft of building means more parking than building) and makes housing more expensive (15-30% per space). Mixing land uses and thinking holistically about parking, Tumlin also notes, makes destinations accessible via means other than driving, producing significantly less vehicle traffic as a result and more physical activity.

A number of communities in Colorado have started to actively manage parking in ways that couple land use and parking in a much more connected fashion. The City of Boulder is recognized as a national leader in connecting urban design, transportation and parking decisions together in ways that maximize the efficiency of their parking supply. Downtown employees, for example, receive bus passes funded through Boulder’s parking program as a strategy to manage vehicle traffic and parking demand downtown while maximizing the business-friendly foot traffic (see http://www.bouldercolorado.gov/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1238&Itemid=436). The City of Lakewood’s redevelopment of Belmar integrates parking into the mixed-use format of the neighborhood following a “park once” approach that reduces vehicle traffic, maximizes (retail friendly) foot traffic and frees up land for Belmar’s communal spaces (see http://www.belmarcolorado.com/).
• Work with key partners within the planning and public works departments of the local community to identify and articulate the specific components of the existing zoning code that segregate land uses in ways that have the effect of limiting household trip making mode choice to the automobile.

• Develop talking points around these examples that help to clearly explain the unintended consequences of these laws.

• Initiate an informed dialogue about the high cost to the community of parking requirements codified in existing zoning ordinances. This could include:
  » Introduce stakeholders to the concepts of “managed parking” and getting these stakeholders talking about it.
  » Inventory and document examples from within the community of the prescribed application of parking requirements.

• Develop a local marketing campaign focused on getting people to rethink the role of streets in their community, with the goal of helping to promote streets as very local venues and public spaces that can accommodate more physical activity. Examples include: car-free zones like Portland, Oregon’s Sunday Parkways program (http://www.portlandsundayparkways.org/); play streets like LiveWell Colorado’s Viva Streets program (http://about.livewellcolorado.org/vivastreets); Seattle’s Neighborhood Block Parties (http://www.seattle.gov/transportation/stuse_blockparty.htm), street fairs like the Cherry Creek Arts Festival (http://www.cherryarts.org/), summertime First Friday events (http://www.artdistrictsantafe.com/events/firstfriday), etc.)
Strategy 2: Refocus community perspectives of the role of streets. This strategy identifies a role for HEAL advocates in precipitating a community conversation on the role and place of neighborhood streets. The overall goal of the initiative would be to foster greater understanding and appreciation of the value of streets to the community, beyond serving solely as conduits for vehicles. Golden and Thornton, are two Colorado communities taking steps to repurpose some of their streets. Through the adoption of Complete Street resolutions in 2010 and 2011, respectively, Golden and Thornton will better accommodate multiple modes of travel, not just the automobile, in tandem with roadway improvement projects on select corridors.

Appropriate activities in this conversation would include:

- Develop talking points for interested elected officials so they can carry a clear, consistent message to their peers and constituencies.

- Plan for the safety of people using streets. A current example includes the need to support the implementation of HB10-1147, the “Helmet Bill,” which would enable law enforcement officers to issue an informational traffic citation to minors aged 2-18 who are riding bikes on public streets without a helmet. The Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) is in the process of developing standards to implement this bill and the agency could benefit from allies both at the state and local level to keep bicycle issues at the forefront.

- Organize community street-based events (e.g., street fairs, closed street days, community food events, etc.) that highlight the community and social value of streets. The Viva Streets event held the summer of 2011 is a winning example of a community event that helped promote increased awareness and public will building for the use of streets for active transportation (see sidebar for a detailed description).
Viva Streets Brings New Life to Denver’s Streets

Viva Streets is a one-day celebration that was made possible when a major Denver street was returned to the people. On August 14, 2010 LiveWell Colorado and Bike Denver transformed 23rd Avenue between City Park at Colorado Boulevard and Fred Thomas Park in Stapleton into a car-free parkway for all Denverites to enjoy. Viva Streets welcomed over 7,500 walkers, bikers, runners, strollers, hula-hoopers, dancers, paraders, musicians, healthy food purveyors and anyone wanting to play in the streets for the day. It was a tribute to the power of the City’s streets to get people moving; to bring neighbors together; and to strengthen Colorado’s healthy, active culture.

This type of event is traditionally called a “ciclovia,” a Spanish term meaning “bike parkway.” It has been adopted recently by cities across the world to describe one-day street closure events to foster physical activity and civic pride. The objectives of Viva Street was to provide a unique car-free venue for Denver families, businesses and community members to be physically active, while experiencing the neighborhood in a friendly, personal, entertaining environment; showcase the importance of complete streets and active transportation as an important feature of a great city; and introduce people to Denver’s bike routes and active transportation options in and around the Viva Streets event. Additional information about this event can be found at: http://about.livewellcolorado.org/vivastreet.
## Community Resources and Partners

Increasing opportunities for increasing human powered mobility through improving our urban and suburban built environment will require coordination and cooperation with a range of partners focused on this issue. Some of the key partners are listed in the following table.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization/Agency</th>
<th>Funding</th>
<th>Implementation</th>
<th>Local Advocacy</th>
<th>Research</th>
<th>Technical Assistance</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Colorado Department of Local Affairs – Community Development Office</strong> &lt;br&gt; DOLA’s Community Development Office empowers Colorado local governments by providing various technical and financial resources related to land use planning, economic development, and sustainable community development. &lt;br&gt; <a href="http://www.colorado.gov/cs/Satellite/DOLA-Main/CBON/1251594456054">http://www.colorado.gov/cs/Satellite/DOLA-Main/CBON/1251594456054</a></td>
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<td><strong>Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment – Healthy Living Branch</strong> &lt;br&gt; Provides technical assistance to communities, conducts research on best practices in state and local contexts, provides data on a range of obesity preventing topics and convenes stakeholder groups around key issues. &lt;br&gt; <a href="http://www.coprevent.org/">http://www.coprevent.org/</a></td>
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<td><strong>Colorado Department of Transportation – Bike and Pedestrian Division</strong> &lt;br&gt; CDOT’s Bike and Pedestrian Division provides policy, regulatory and development guidance for integrating bicycles and pedestrians into community and regional transportation plans. &lt;br&gt; <a href="http://www.coloradodot.info/programs/bikeped">http://www.coloradodot.info/programs/bikeped</a></td>
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<td><strong>Metropolitan Planning Organizations</strong> &lt;br&gt; All of Colorado’s metropolitan areas have an established and functional MPO, MPO (e.g., Denver Regional Council of Governments (DRCOG), Grand Valley MPO (GVMPO), North Front Range MPO (NFRMPO), Pikes Peak Area Council of Governments (PPACG), and the Pueblo Area Council of Governments (PACOG)), whose key responsibility is the programming of federal transportation funds for improvements to a region’s transportation system. &lt;br&gt; <a href="http://www.coloradodot.info/programs/statewide-planning/mpo-rural-planning.html">http://www.coloradodot.info/programs/statewide-planning/mpo-rural-planning.html</a></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Non-motorized transportation advocates</strong> &lt;br&gt; Various non-profit organizations exist across Colorado that advocate for the interests of cyclists and pedestrians. &lt;br&gt; <a href="http://bicyclecolo.org/">http://bicyclecolo.org/</a> &lt;br&gt; <a href="http://www.walkdenver.org/">http://www.walkdenver.org/</a></td>
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### Universities
Planning academics both within Colorado and across the country offer a valuable resource in the "state of the art" of mixed use zoning ordinances. Colorado’s planning programs also provide technical support and often student/faculty assistance to “on the ground” built environment projects.

### US EPA Office of Sustainable Communities
This office offers a number of grants and technical assistance opportunities in support of communities looking to create healthier, more active communities. [http://www.epa.gov/dced/](http://www.epa.gov/dced/)

### Advocates for multi-modal streets
LiveWell Colorado [http://about.livewellcolorado.org/vivastreet](http://about.livewellcolorado.org/vivastreet)
Colorado’s budding conversation about the role of the built environment in shaping health outcomes requires a concerted effort at both the local and statewide levels. The strategies outlined in Section 3 provide a framework for action at the local level; however, a large portion of the success of these strategies depends on strong coordination among groups like LiveWell Colorado and its partners that operate at a statewide scale. In the broadest sweep, statewide coordination will require such groups to be continuously attuned to the efforts of local HEAL advocacy and have a clear, yet flexible strategy aimed at supporting these efforts. These statewide groups will play a central role in framing and focusing the HEAL conversation across the state, and in defining a consistent and appropriately-tailored message for different stakeholders on the importance of coordinated action in addressing the known health impacts of the built environment.

The level of resources and expertise needed in this role are beyond the reach of any single organization, so one or more of these groups will need to stand up and champion a statewide coordination effort. This will involve bringing together like-minded and peer agencies from across the state to marshal their collective energy and resources in support of local community-level action. The range of partners with a role in this process include state agencies like the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE), Colorado Department of Local Affairs (DOLA) and the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT); regional agencies like the state’s various Councils of Governments and Metropolitan Planning Organizations, and some of the state’s larger transit agencies; and the array of professional and advocacy groups with an interest in Colorado’s urban and suburban communities (Colorado Municipal League, Colorado Counties Inc., Metro Mayors Caucus, Club 20, Progressive 15, Colorado American Planning Association, etc.).

Beyond an organizing and facilitation role, these statewide champion(s) will need to lead a number of largely technical and logistical activities focused on two key outcomes: 1) supporting community-level action with the information and resources needed to follow through on the recommendations outlined in Section 3; and 2) helping to improve and grow the collective HEAL advocacy knowledge base by coordinating the collection and dissemination of information between communities across the state.
Some of the more specific action steps around the three core principles of HEAL advocacy would include:

### Healthy Food Access

- Compile and disseminate case studies, model ordinances and codes and other relevant materials that address how other communities have successfully (re) integrated food production, distribution and processing into an urban/suburban context. The newly developed HEAL Library (http://livewellcolorado.org/HEALlibrary) offers an example of a cost-effective approach for information sharing in this vein.

- Compile case studies, model ordinances or other relevant materials from communities around the country that are successfully managing the number and/or location of unhealthy food retail within their communities through techniques like bans on formula restaurants, location-specific bans, quotas, etc. This research should also investigate examples of communities that have used community and economic development funds to incentivize healthy food retail.

- Investigate potential models for organized support for backyard gardeners. Identify case studies that address how to provide the supporting infrastructure needed to allow for the exchange of tools, labor, produce and knowledge that make backyard gardening more attainable to a wider cross section of the community. Disseminate findings to local community advocates.

- Initiate a dialogue with Colorado’s largest food retailers on the possibilities of franchising their name, supply chain and distribution capabilities to establish produce sections into existing neighborhood stores, recreational facilities, schools, after-school care facilities, or other such locations that tend to be part of the daily “trip chaining” of many households. Based on the outcome of this dialogue, form a steering committee of relevant stakeholders (e.g., food retailers, local economic development experts, HEAL advocates, community representatives) to oversee a feasibility study for a pilot of this concept in one targeted community in Colorado.

### Physical Activity

- Compile and disseminate case studies, model ordinances and codes, design manuals, etc. that address how other communities across the country have successfully broached the topic of mixed-use zoning and have ultimately seen this idea through to reality in the forms of code revisions and/or mixed-use projects.

- Build on CDPHE’s recent efforts to develop community guides for recreation-based shared use of public school facilities by contracting with legal experts to draft model joint use agreements for a variety of urban institutions and disseminate to local HEAL advocates.

- Organize a half-day workshop between the state’s key health advocates and partners with the Colorado Chapter of the Urban Land Institute (ULI). The purpose of the workshop would be for both sides to better understand the work of each other, with the ultimate goal of identifying areas of mutual interest that both sides could leverage to advance their individual (and ultimately collective) missions.

- Working with ULI Colorado, the development community and other like entities, identify and develop a range of materials that articulate the challenges and opportunities confronting urban and suburban developers wishing to build active, quality of life infrastructure into their projects.
  - Gather information on how best to approach, engage and communicate with developers. Develop tips and tools and talking points for local communities wishing to work with developers.
  - Identify and maintain a register of HEAL advocates that, at the request of developers, are willing to provide expert testimony in support of development projects with strong HEAL elements as these projects move through the local approvals process.
  - Develop collective talking points and case studies that represent both the local and development communities to illustrate a shared vision and common ground for building healthy communities.
State-Level Recommendations

• Work with CDPHE and the Built Environment Strategic Collaborative to promote the economic return on investment of incorporating HEAL and quality of life infrastructure into Colorado communities.

Mobility

• Support the implementation of HB10-1147, the “Helmet Bill” which would enable law enforcement officers to issue an “informational traffic citation” to minors aged 2-18 who are riding bikes on public streets without a helmet. CDOT is in the process of developing standards to implement this bill and the agency could benefit from allies both at the state and local level to keep bicycle issues at the forefront.

• Compile and disseminate case studies, model ordinances and codes, design manuals, etc. that address how other communities across the country have successfully reconfigured elements of their built environment to provide greater mobility choice to the community.
  » Identify model language for mixed use zoning that would address these consequences.
  » Document the steps these communities went through to arrive at their current endpoint to provide guidance on the similar set of steps for your community.

• Compile and disseminate information from communities across the country that address how these communities have shifted the conversation around transportation planning away from the concept of mobility and its inherent focus on HOW we move, to the concept of accessibility with its inherent focus on WHY we move. Accessibility-oriented planning draws out the true interconnection between where we are going and how we get there, focusing more directly on the needs of PEOPLE – the travelers – rather than the needs of the technology we use for travelling.

• Building on existing programs like the Citizens Academy run by the Transit Alliance or the PLACE training offered by CDPHE, develop training and educational programs for local community advocates to raise community awareness of how the built environment is shaping their mode choice decisions and how changes in the built environment and zoning laws have the potential to offer a wider range of mode choices. These could be developed as specific modules that would integrate into the other existing programs.

• Identify and summarize case studies from around the state and country that address the challenges and opportunities for managed parking. Develop a cohesive set of talking points about why managed parking is an idea worth pursuing and what it would take for a community to get there.
  » Work to compile best practice examples that demonstrate how managed parking has had positive impacts on the cost of establishing and maintaining businesses, without pushing away their customers.
  » Outline the health related advantages of walking and biking as legitimate modes of access in order to help make the broader business case for managed parking.
The path to success on any of the ideas presented in the previous sections requires a parallel effort to address a broader set of issues that, while not directly tied to the built environment per se, have direct bearing on the outcomes that these other strategies seek. As was mentioned previously, Colorado’s urban and suburban built environments are the product of a series of multi-faceted processes intersecting in time and space to produce the communities in which we live. These environments shape our behavior and our behavior in turn, sometimes taking long periods of time, changes the environment.

It is important to recognize that the built environment can be influenced through a limited number of strategies, but through multi-sector convergence, groups can be working toward different goals in order to accomplish the same objectives (e.g., both HEAL and environmental advocates want to get people out of their cars – the first to increase physical activity and active transportation and the second to reduce motor vehicle emissions). Any proactive campaign directed at purposely shifting our patterned response, or the environment that shapes this behavior toward HEAL-oriented outcomes will require deliberate attention to the following list of issues, which are clustered into two groups: 1) Policy and Process Strategies and 2) Educational and Informational Strategies.

### Policy and Process Strategies

#### 1. Better coordinate ongoing efforts

The growing awareness of the role of the built environment in shaping health outcomes has spawned an array of responses from public and private sector bodies, ranging from educational campaigns at the grass roots level, design guidelines and regulatory changes by governmental entities, through to statewide initiatives. While all are well-intentioned, most tend to be geographically or issue-specific; thus, producing programs and activities that may overlap. On the ground, this creates confusion over roles, duplicates calls on scarce resources and often dilutes the message that HEAL advocates from all sectors are trying to carry.

Better coordination of these efforts is critical going forward. Apart from the obvious information sharing benefits of such coordination, a stronger coordinated presence at the state or even regional level will also help HEAL advocates capitalize on potential funding opportunities – putting forward a united front and demonstrating to potential funders how the benefits of coordination will increase the likelihood of success of funding requests. Coordination will require an identified champion, or set of champions, that is prepared to spend the time and energy to survey and understand the array of existing programs found across the state and to bring the parties running these programs together in some form of dialogue around how best to leverage each other’s skills and resources. The ultimate goal of this coordination is to create a framework in which the multitude of players now working in this field have a forum, real or virtual, in which to get to know their peers, know what these peers are working on, learn from their successes and failures and, over time, to find ways to combine their talents and collaborate on future efforts.

#### 2. Recognize and respect local control

A universal constant across all of Colorado’s communities, not just its metro areas, is the strong, heartfelt belief in local self-determination. Each and every one of Colorado’s cities and towns operates under a different set of circumstances – socially, economically and politically – which collectively define the unique nature and character of that community. Statewide initiatives that fail to recognize the significance of Colorado’s communities’ role in identifying locally-appropriate responses to emerging trends and issues will almost certainly marginalize even the most well-intentioned of efforts right from the outset. HEAL advocates looking to follow through on the strategies outlined in this report need to understand how to translate the broader intent of these strategies, the HEAL-related outcomes, into a form and scale that fits with the desires and aspirations of local communities.
3. Inspire change in the built environment by working with the development community

Of all the actors involved in shaping the built environment in Colorado’s urban and suburban communities, no other group has such an immediate and lasting impact over the resultant form and function than the development community. Frequently, and sometimes deservedly, developers are characterized negatively for the built environments they create. HEAL advocates need to establish better and more productive relationships with the development community to align what is desirable with what is possible in the form and function of our built environment. At the statewide level, this could mean developing a close working relationship with organizations like the Colorado chapter of the Urban Land Institute (ULI), Colorado Association of Home Builders and other developer associations to tap into the expertise of their membership. At the community-level, HEAL advocates can plan a facilitating role by identifying local or regional developers successful in integrating HEAL-related features into their products and bringing developers into their communities for a conversation with key decision makers and stakeholders.

Part of this broader initiative needs to be a critical focus by HEAL advocates on how best to achieve the outcomes they desire, rather than jumping to regulate what is not allowed. The development community, operates most efficiently when rules are clear and expectations well-defined. Integration of HEAL principles into the built environment will require innovation from the development community, working closely with HEAL experts. Efforts to stop or minimize parts or aspects of the development process (well intentioned though they may be and city planners may simply be doing their job) often tend to shift rules and cloud expectations, stifling innovation and pushing developers back toward the lowest risk, tried and true forms of development. HEAL advocates at all levels should work closely with local planners, as well as elected officials; to be more involved in the development review process; to help identify the types of healthy built environment outcomes that a community seeks; and, then look to incentivize those parts of the development process that foster the innovation needed to make these outcomes a reality.

4. Engage in state and regional transportation funding processes

The growing awareness by HEAL advocates of the relationship between how people get around in their communities and the associated health outcomes necessitates their greater engagement in the long-range planning processes that shape how and where transportation funds are spent across Colorado. The State of Colorado budgets around $1 billion annually for the construction, maintenance and operations of the state's transportation system. Many of these programming decisions are made through the Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) around the state, which coordinate local funding requests through a Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) and the corresponding financial plan called a Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). Communities seeking improvements to the transportation system cannot leverage these funds until such improvements are programmed into the RTP and subsequently the TIP.

To date, HEAL advocates and HEAL issues have been largely absent from these processes. Any desire by HEAL advocates to leverage state and federal funds flowing to local communities for HEAL-oriented improvements to the transportation system (e.g., the elevation of more physically-active modes of transportation) necessitate their engagement in this RTP process. As discussed under “Mobility” in Section 2 of this report, there are natural connections here as well; it has been shown that living close to and using mass transit increases walking and biking on a regular basis. However, given the considerable commitment required for such an effort, HEAL advocates should consider pooling their resources, partnering with other like-minded advocates, and possibly more importantly, training and bringing more advocates into the mix. City and transportation planners, as well as community residents, might be ripe for additional training in how to engage in transportation funding processes. In order to grow their allies, existing advocates (e.g.,
Bicycle Colorado, LiveWell Colorado, CDOT) could initiate a “Transportation Funding Process 101” curriculum to arm more community advocates. The outcome of these stronger alliances would be to fund a dedicated effort to participate in the various MPO planning processes.

Educational and Informational Strategies

1. Initiate an educational campaign on the role of zoning in shaping health outcomes

The future success of HEAL advocacy in the built environment realm will be predicated to a large extent on the ability of statewide and community-based HEAL advocates to engage a broad range of stakeholders in a dialogue about changes to the way we lay out and build our communities. Human behavior is very much a product of the environments in which we live, so it is not unreasonable to assume that we can manipulate our urban surroundings in ways that mitigate the negative influences of the existing built environment, while fostering influences that would make healthier eating and active lifestyles the norm, rather than the exception.

As has been discussed throughout this Guide however, any dialogue on land use ultimately pivots on a strong understanding of the role of the various laws, rulings, ordinances, plans, guidance documents and manuals in prescribing what gets built where and how. HEAL advocacy on the built environment front must likewise pivot around helping the broadest cross section of the community to fully understand how zoning codes shape our suburban and urban communities in ways that limit our HEAL choices, as well as how these same laws can promote healthy choices. Such training would cover a range of “Zoning 101” topics such as: what zoning is and is not; who writes zoning laws; and, when and how these laws are written. These trainings should be developed in a way that appeals to busy residents who may not be interested in zoning trainings but may get engaged in meetings, workshops and conversations to discuss key issues in their neighborhoods that would, ultimately, bring in zoning. It must also address what points in the process community level advocates can influence the form and intent of zoning law changes.

A parallel component of this educational process needs to include training for HEAL advocates on the political volatility of zoning and how to effectively communicate potential changes in land use configuration with different types of community stakeholders, without them taking an adversarial position. Certain jurisdictions in Colorado, such as Lakewood and Wheat Ridge, offer free Citizen Planning Academies to orient residents on a range of planning topics, including zoning and land use law. These forums offer participants an overview of key principles and processes within the local context, which can be leveraged to advance HEAL efforts.

Immersing oneself in zoning code updates or periodic revisions to affect meaningful change is not an insignificant undertaking, nor is it a simple process to get involved in. Conversations about zoning laws and their application are nuanced, highly technical, and often politically charged. Getting any measure of engagement from the community at large will require thoughtful messaging and an appropriately-defined and staged outreach strategy to help stakeholders understand why they should care. HEAL advocates will need to engage a range of technical experts to help craft this message, without losing the HEAL message in the process. Fortunately, HEAL advocates have a number of partner organizations around the state (e.g., the Colorado Chapter of the American Planning Association and Colorado Department of Local Affairs) that have expertise on this front. A coordinated and well-planned educational campaign working with these partners will offer some economies of scale, as well as help tightly integrate their respective messages.

2. Initiate an educational program on meaningful community engagement

A simultaneous educational effort would include identifying and developing more effective community engagement processes - an issue which stakeholders repeatedly requested additional guidance and partnerships for throughout the development of this Guide. The types of deep, systemic change required to get people to want to change their communities in healthier ways requires a correspondingly deep engagement by HEAL advocates of community members in decision making processes and by the community members themselves. Effective and truly engaging public involvement – that keeps community members invested in the process and gives them ownership of its outcomes – needs to be a continuous feature of the decision making process with a very clear link between community input and resultant decisions.

Unfortunately, most public decision making processes, especially those around land use and planning related decisions, tend to adopt a step-wise approach, with community engagement just one step in the sequence. Community members are typically brought in mid-stream, asked to offer input on ideas that they may not understand or agree with and then left to wonder how their input may or may not be used in the final decision.
Therefore, the advancement of HEAL advocacy requires a concerted and coordinated effort by a number of HEAL-related partners to define and develop a meaningful public engagement process — where those who are affected by a decision are actively engaged in the decision making process and those that make the final decision pledge to use the public’s input in shaping their decision — and then to help train community-level advocates how to conduct this process.

3. Investigate the creation of a “Healthy Built Environment Fund”

One of the greatest challenges confronting HEAL advocates is the fundamental inertia of the existing development process and the associated cost premiums attached to making change. Land development rests on the ability of developers to effectively bring a product to market at a rate of return that fulfills their, or their stockholders, expectations. The process is often guided by well-established business models and expectations about the costs of development. Developers look to balance the costs of producing their product (e.g., houses, retail space, commercial buildings, etc.) against reasonable assumptions of their level of profit in selling the product.

Developers lower their risk in this process by repeating styles of development that have proven themselves successful in the marketplace. Introducing elements of change into the equation, especially new elements with no market history, can be a daunting challenge for many developers if they are unable to fully articulate their likelihood of success. Likewise, their lenders’ calculations of risk and the corresponding cost of money they charge to fund development projects may rise for projects that deviate beyond the established business models. So while there are many developers that share a passionate interest in building the types of communities that HEAL advocates champion, they are often hesitant to do so if they have to assume all or the majority of the risk.

A model that some community advocacy groups have followed is to become an investor in the development process, directly contributing to development projects in return for particular social and community outcomes. Having partners with skin in the game shares the risks associated with new forms of development, making it more palatable to developers, while helping the community advocates achieve real, concrete outcomes.

Obviously, this strategy requires an injection of funds that no one organization can likely meet during this economic time, so the recommendation is to take the initial step of exploring whether there is any interest in pursuing this approach amongst the broader HEAL community, as well as through multi-sector convergence. If it turns out that there is, then the next logical step would be to analyze existing success stories like Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) and Denver’s Transit Oriented Development (TOD) fund to better understand the costs and effort needed to create such a fund; explore options for capitalizing such a fund; and explore the level at which such a fund could operate (e.g., local or statewide).

4. Coordinate information distribution of existing HEAL activities through an online forum

In line with the need to better coordinate the growing number of programs and activities relating to HEAL and the built environment across the state, there is the parallel need to compile and distribute information about these varied efforts. Much of the ongoing success of HEAL advocacy, in all arenas, depends on the ability of local advocates to learn from the experience of others, implement this knowledge in ways appropriate to their community and then to share their outcomes back with the broader HEAL community. Existing social media platforms provide a great foundation for this type of information sharing, ranging from establishing a group on Facebook, creating a closed or open site on a customizable social networking platform, or developing some other custom solution. The only real requirement of such a system would be the ability for it to stimulate and support an active two-way interaction around the ideas, opinions and data of all participating stakeholders.

Critical to the success of such a resource, will be a commitment from one organization to facilitate the online dialogue, and thus maintain the momentum behind the broader goal. Just like any other form of meaningful dialogue, online conversations quickly wither without routine (re) stimulation and proactive facilitation. This obviously requires a dedicated champion, time and resources.

5. Develop comparative cost information to help advocate for HEAL-related community investments

Since most public sector decisions hinge on a community’s ability to make the best use of its finite and often scarce resources, HEAL advocates need to have the ability to articulate the case for HEAL-related expenditures in the same terms as others making a pitch for these resources. A common approach is to make this case through appeals to community health and wellness outcomes, or even to the
underlying moral imperatives of improved public health. The unfortunately reality, however, is that in most jurisdictions, this line of argument can only carry the case so far. The fiscal picture in most of Colorado’s urban and suburban communities is such that local decision making processes must frequently weigh broader, often intangible, community benefits against the hard truths of the community’s finances. Not surprisingly, decisions in this context are often reduced down to the common denominator of the most bang for the buck.

For HEAL champions to advocate successfully in this realm, they have to be able to make a compelling case for HEAL-related expenditures as a calculus of the likely return on investment (ROI) to the community. To do so properly, costs have to be offset against likely revenue gains. Long-term payoff horizons have to be amortized back to the lifespan of current political and budget cycles. Additionally, intangible benefits need to accounted for.

This type of fiscal analysis is probably too specialized to expect any one organization to shoulder the burden of compiling. It is however useful to all manner of HEAL advocacy efforts and thus, something well worth pursuing as a collective endeavor. Initial numbers will probably be somewhat gross and viewed with some wariness. For example, isolating specific cost savings from built environment changes will be extremely problematic, because of limited statistically-valid data on the cause and effect relationships between the built environment and health outcomes. This is not atypical of other major public health campaigns of the past 40 years, where well-conceived, technically sound and transparent ROI analyses provided significant insight, particularly in terms of trade-offs, to policy and decision making processes. A strong, well-developed dissection of the ROI from HEAL-related expenditures could provide HEAL advocates with much improved standing in local land use and built-environment related decision processes.
Appendix A: Acknowledgements

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- Rachel Cleaves, Coordinator, LiveWell Westwood
- Hill Grimmett, Executive Director, Be Local Northern Colorado
- Molly Hanson, Coordinator, LiveWell Wheat Ridge
- Kristin Kirkpatrick, Coordinator, LiveWell Fort Collins
- Mina Liebert, Coordinator, LiveWell Colorado Springs
- Mondi Mason, Coordinator, LiveWell Commerce City
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- Environmental Health Professionals Land Use Group (June 24, 2011)
- LiveWell Westwood meeting (July 13, 2011)
- LiveWell Coordinators quarterly meeting (Oct 20, 2011)
Appendix B: Recommended Readings


Heath, G. W., Brownson, R. C., Kruger, J., Miles, R., Powell, K. E., Ramsey, L. T., & others. (2006). The effectiveness of urban design and land use and transport policies and practices to increase physical activity: a systematic review. Journal of Physical Activity & Health, 3, 55.


7. Endnotes

For full bibliographies, see the Recommended Readings Appendix.


5. For an overview of the connections between health and the built environment across all types of communities, please see LiveWell Colorado’s Built Environment Blueprint; for an in-depth look at health and built environment issues, and recommendations for action, in rural communities and small towns, please see LiveWell Colorado’s Guide to Integrating Healthy Eating and Active Living Into Colorado’s Rural and Small Town Communities. Both reports are available at www.livewellcolorado.org.


10. So called after the landmark case heard before the US Supreme Court in 1926 that established the right of communities to create zoning ordinances. See Krueckeberg, 1983 or http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Village_of_Euclid_v._Ambler_Realty_Co. for more information.

11. Form based zoning codes shift away from separating land uses to managing the physical form of buildings. See http://www.formbasedcodes.org/what-are-form-based-codes for more information.


13. See http://www.bls.gov/news.release/cesan.nr0.htm


17. While incentivizing healthy food retail is also an option to be explored, this recommendation draws specifically from successful examples of first zoning to mitigate “unhealthy” retail.


19. Definitions of formula restaurants vary. The following from the City of Calistoga, CA is fairly typical of efforts to protect the unique character of a community: “Formula Business” shall mean a business that is required by contractual or other arrangement to maintain any of the following: standardized services, decor, uniforms, architecture, signs or other similar features.


22. See http://www.perc.org/articles/article145.php


25. New forms of development like mixed-use development often confront lending institutions with concepts that they have not previously considered. Being willing and able to help developers pitch their ideas to these groups could facilitate the shared desired outcomes of the community and the developer.
27. Or more importantly, the financial institutions that fund the construction of commercial and retail buildings --- their risk calculations factor in a standardized amount of parking and lenders will often charge more for developments that want to include less parking.
28. Innovative strategies that move beyond the traditional reliance on formulaic, and frequently imprecise, parking requirements codified through zoning codes (strategies like shared parking, parking maxima, parking cash outs etc.). See for example, Brown and Fields (2009).
29. This information was culled from an unpublished draft of community guides from the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment on the topics of community use of public school kitchen and recreation facilities.
30. See http://www.transitalliance.org/Academy/index.htm
31. See http://rihel.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=65&Itemid=126
32. See http://www.colorado.gov/cs/Satellite/OSP/GOVR/1251609781176
33. See the Urban Land Conservancy’s investment in the Denver TOD fund to create affordable housing around transit: http://www.urbanlandc.org/tod
34. Created by Colorado voters in 1992, Great Outdoors Colorado uses a portion of Lottery dollars to help preserve, protect, enhance and manage Colorado’s wildlife, park, river, trail and open space.
35. The TOD Fund was initiated by a significant grant from the MacArthur Foundation to support public sector initiatives to create and preserve over 1,000 affordable housing units through strategic property acquisition in current and future transit corridors.