

BETTER BUSINESS AND BETTER HEALTH DOWN ON MAIN STREET

Community development and health agencies identify mutual goals and work together

Public Health Problem

- Community design influences the public's health and well being.
- Good community design incorporates features that make it possible for residents to be physically active and to buy and eat healthy food, two important public health steps for preventing obesity. For example, aesthetically pleasing environments have been shown to increase walking for exercise.
- Considering health as part of community design in existing community development initiatives multiplies the good results for community residents.

Program

- The West Virginia Bureau for Public Health's Office of Epidemiology and Health Promotion invited Main Street West Virginia, a community development initiative with a successful track record, to partner on a pilot program with the Office of Healthy Lifestyles.
- The Main Street initiative promotes local empowerment and the rebuilding of traditional commercial districts based on assets such as pedestrian-friendly environments and a sense of community.
- Office of Healthy Lifestyles grants to four participating communities enabled them to hire staff to focus attention on the mutually compatible goals of good health & good development.

Impact

- The partnership generated greater resident engagement in reaching the goals of the Office of Healthy Lifestyles, increased awareness of the health benefits of good development, and provided an additional source of funds for West Virginia communities.
- A few of the many, health-promoting community changes resulting from Main Street actions:
 - Major streetscape redesign, including lighting, benches, signage, handicap access, and improved drainage making areas safer and more pleasant for pedestrians
 - New town policies making healthy refreshments part of town celebrations & 4-H camp
 - Leveraging of additional funds from the Claude Worthington Benedum Foundation and from Safe Routes to School
 - Maintenance of a city herb garden and educational seminars for school children
 - Creation of a community walking/nutrition program and "cooking healthy" program
 - Worksite changes including offering more comprehensive health benefits, allowing physical activity breaks
 - Renovations to create a circuit training program; skateboard facility and recreation center
 - Donated local newspaper space used to promote walking

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