

The picture of health

Promoting wellness is central to Williamsburg's culture

WITH ITS THEME of “Building Healthy Communities,” it is fitting that the 2017 VML annual conference is taking place in Williamsburg. The City has been a member of the Health Eating Active Living (HEAL) Cities and Towns Campaign since 2013 and has attained the Campaign’s highest level of achievement for its work to create a healthy community by promoting healthy eating and active living.

The campaign, a project of the Institute for Public Health Innovation funded by Kaiser Permanente, offers technical assistance to local government leaders who want to implement local policies and practices that encourage residents and municipal employees to eat healthier and move more.

As a Platinum-level HEAL City, Williamsburg has implemented a variety of policies, practices, programs, and environmental changes that have increased access to healthy food and provided more opportunities to be physically active. In fact, the City has acted upon all eighteen of the initiatives included

in its HEAL resolution. A HEAL resolution, the first step in becoming a member of the Campaign, documents a city’s/town’s commitment to healthy eating and active living and lists those HEAL strategies it will work to implement.

The City kicked off its HEAL work by creating an interde-

“The HEAL resolution has been a catalyst in our organization and in our community for a wide spectrum of activities, programs, and education all designed to improve community health.”

Williamsburg Mayor Paul Freiling

partmental Health and Wellness Committee within its government. Department heads and employees who are members of the Committee are responsible for developing strategies and implementing them to achieve the City’s HEAL resolution goals. The Committee meets regularly, monitoring progress and developing new initiatives. From the start, HEAL has had support from across city government and from city employees, the city manager’s office, and the community as well.

Promoting active living with land use goals

Many of Williamsburg’s HEAL initiatives focus on creating a built environment that promotes active living. Using land use and land regulation goals that promote mixed-use, transit-oriented development, the City is creating an environment that makes it safer and more convenient and accessible to walk and bicycle. Mixed-use transit-oriented development typically includes a mixture of housing, office, retail and/or other amenities that are integrated into a walkable and bikeable neighborhood and located within walking distance of public transportation.

The City has included these land use and land regulation goals in its Comprehensive Plan and has provided funding in its Capital Improvement Plan (CIP), over several years, for implementation. The City uses a unique budgeting strategy centered on the development of goals, initiatives, and outcomes (GIOs) each biennium. These GIOs are the result of significant public engagement and are coupled with performance measures to insure the work is completed.

During the 2015-2016 biennium, for example, the GIOs included nine projects aimed at developing a healthier built environment. Six of the projects have been completed and the remaining three are planned for FY18, with a total expense of over \$2 million.

“Typically, a city’s CIP is largely influenced by the



The children’s basketball league is a very popular program offered by the City of Williamsburg and utilizes school system resources.



One of the most popular sports offered by the City's Parks and Recreation Department is Pickle Ball.

Access to healthy food

The City has a long-standing commitment to its Farmers' Market which is in its fifteenth year of operation. The Market has 40 vendors as well as live music, nursery plants, baked goods, and a wide selection of prepared foods. Since its inception, the City has provided funding to the Market through its annual budget process. The need for the City's support has decreased over time as local business support and private donations have increased.

One of the Farmers' Market's objectives is to "provide healthy regionally-produced food to all economic levels of the Williamsburg community." A strategy included in the City's HEAL resolution has helped to meet that objective.

The HEAL resolution committed the City to implementing the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) at the Market. In 2013, the City and the Market instituted the SNAP program that allows Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) card holders to use an EBT machine onsite to purchase tokens

need for public safety and quality education. While those issues are very important, our City Council gives equal weight to sidewalks and bike paths because they affect the quality of life of our residents and visitors," explains Assistant City Manager Andrew Trivette.

Building on Williamsburg's historic assets, the City's "Great City Walks" initiative has also served to promote walking among residents and visitors. The "Great City Walks" Guide includes seven trails for urban hiking that highlight interesting and historic sites in the City. The Guide is an example of how HEAL initiatives are often an interdepartmental government effort. It reflects the work of the City Manager's office, the Parks and Recreation Department, Planning and Codes Compliance, Public Works, and the City's Geographic Information System (GIS) staff. It also benefits from the co-sponsorship and support of the Williamsburg Farmers' Market, the Williamsburg Regional Library, and the Greater Williamsburg Chamber and Tourism Alliance.

The City also made a commitment in its HEAL resolution to invest in parks and recreation and increase its open space to provide places to be physically active. Over the last several years, it has purchased thousands of acres of land surrounding the Waller Mill Watershed. This has served the City's combined interest of protecting the water supply and providing more trails and ample park space for the region.

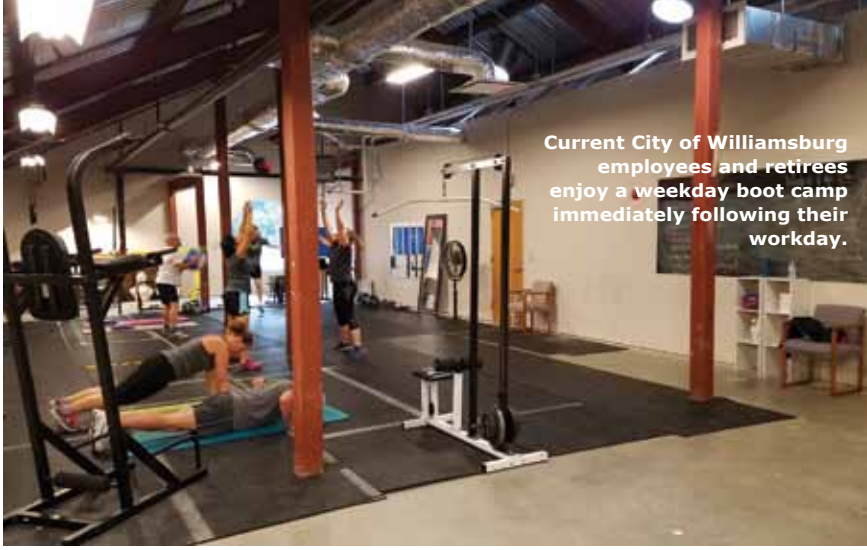
With limited resources, the City's Parks and Recreation Department has also been able to provide robust recreational programming. In addition, the City has a joint use agreement with area schools to expand its recreational offerings. Under that agreement, the Parks and Recreation Department assists in reserving school facilities in Williamsburg, James City County, and York County for use by citizens (school system functions and sports are given priority).



Community members participate in a sand volleyball tournament held at the City of Williamsburg's Quarterpath Recreation Center.



Just another Saturday morning at Williamsburg's top 5 Farmers' Market.



Current City of Williamsburg employees and retirees enjoy a weekday boot camp immediately following their workday.

tion routes for their efficiency as well as for the existence of shelters and benches – all characteristics that affect the feasibility of using public transportation to access healthy food.

Workplace wellness

Williamsburg has taken advantage of existing assets among its own employees to build a robust workplace wellness program, another aspect of its HEAL activities. For example, a Williamsburg employee runs a “boot camp” for employees, one of the City’s

most popular wellness programs. Another employee, who is a certified yogi, runs a yoga class for employees who asked for a less strenuous fitness alternative to the boot camp.

The City also has workout facilities for employee use and promotes water consumption in the workplace to discourage employees from drinking sugary drinks. Water is purchased by City departments and made available to employees throughout the day, even those out in the field. Water is also provided at all major City meetings.



City employees lead a community National Walk Day event through Colonial Williamsburg.

redeemable for fresh market foods. The program includes a 2:1 return for SNAP purchases so that a customer receives \$2 in tokens for every \$1 EBT credit exchanged. Williamsburg’s Human Services Department encourages the use of the Market among its clients and makes newly-enrolled SNAP clients aware of the program at the Market.

Another HEAL initiative that has been implemented is the construction of a giving garden, also made possible by the City’s partnerships. The garden was installed by the City’s De-

To accommodate employees who are breastfeeding upon their return to work after giving birth, the City provides two large family restrooms within City Hall.

As a member of the HEAL Cities and Towns Campaign, Williamsburg is building a healthy community by creating an environment for citizens, visitors, and government employees that encourages healthy eating and active living.

It’s an initiative that can have wide-ranging benefits for the City.

“Promoting a healthy community is at the core of what local government is all about,” said Nichole Furey, assistant to the chief at the Williamsburg Fire Department and member of the Health and Wellness Committee. “For the City of Williamsburg, it’s important for us to create an environment that encourages healthy behaviors and choices for employees and citizens alike.

Good health (emotional, physical, financial, etc.) yields happiness and resilience, which in turn cultivates engagement and innovation.”

The City has most recently embarked on a new initiative to ensure that older adults and other residents with limited income have access to fresh, healthy food.

partment of Parks and Recreation Department with assistance from Virginia Dominion Energy which also provided grant funding. Water for the garden is provided through a rain barrel collection system that was designed and installed through an Eagle Scout project.

The City has most recently embarked on a new initiative to ensure that older adults and other residents with limited income have access to fresh, healthy food. The City established a committee that will study how to improve access to the Farmers’ Market, food pantries, and grocery stores through public transportation. The committee will examine public transporta-

About the author: Susan DeFrancesco is the program manager at the Institute for Public Health Innovation. For more information about the HEAL Cities and Towns campaign, visit <http://www.healcitiesmidatlantic.org/heal-and-economic-development> or contact HEAL staff at 202-747-3455.