

# BUILDING HEALTHY AND EQUITABLE CITIES AND TOWNS

## RESOURCES FOR MUNICIPAL LEADERS

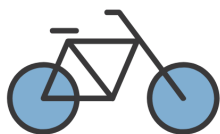
In cities and towns throughout the county, residents are actively seeking environments that help foster a healthier lifestyle.<sup>1</sup> Cities and towns can leverage this interest through policies and practices that enhance the built environment to include pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure and healthy food enterprise, such as local grocery stores, community agriculture, and farmers markets. These amenities can transform streets, neighborhoods, or even entire cities, by encouraging increased tourism, higher property values, and new employment opportunities.<sup>2 3</sup> As cities and towns experience economic changes, municipal leaders are uniquely positioned to help encourage *equitable* economic development that promotes a thriving city/town for *all* residents. **This resource sheet provides tools for municipal leaders to advance healthy eating and active living policies while promoting equity, economic inclusion, and sustainable growth.**

### *What is equitable economic development?*

“*Equitable* economic development unlocks the full potential of the local economy by dismantling barriers and expanding opportunities for low-income people and communities of color. Through accountable public action and investment, it grows quality jobs and increases entrepreneurship, ownership, and wealth. The result is a stronger, more competitive city.”

-- Policy Link <sup>4</sup>

## BUILDING EQUITABLE ENVIRONMENTS FOR EXERCISE AND ACTIVE TRANSIT:



Demand for more active, compact, and connected communities has encouraged city planners and developers to design more walkable and bikeable communities in close proximity to public transportation. One of the most popular approaches is known as “transit oriented development” (TOD), a form of compact, mixed-use, pedestrian-oriented design where residents experience more active, sustainable, and connected lives<sup>4</sup> and municipalities experience economic growth through increased property values and tax revenue and decreased expenditure on public services.<sup>5</sup> As cities and towns experience economic changes, policy makers and transportation planners play an important role in helping create environments where all residents can access safe, reliable, and active transportation options. Municipal leaders should work with local community members to implement active transportation infrastructure and sustainable, compact mixed-use development that benefits all residents.

### ***Transit Oriented Development***

- Provide local incentives and tax abatements for projects that include dense, affordable housing and community benefits.<sup>4</sup>
- Set up land/housing purchase funds for the purpose of building/preserving affordable housing within a development district.<sup>4</sup>
- Ensure that affordable housing is written into zoning for transportation plans.<sup>4</sup>
- Encourage financial incentives for homeownership and work with local organizations to provide ownership resources.<sup>4</sup>
- Encourage the use of form-based codes to encourage opportunities for small developers in development and transit districts.
- Require a community benefit agreement for new TOD developments.

### ***Parks and Green Space***

- Apply a “just green enough approach” that facilitates and encourages the development of parks and green space while reducing the potential impacts of speculative development, rapid growth, and displacement: A) Incorporate urban agriculture and community gardens in existing or developing parks to further serve local concerns about healthy food access and job creation. B) Scatter green space interventions to provide greater access to more residents instead of concentrating development in one urban area.<sup>6</sup>
- Target communities experiencing health disparities for park improvements; implement upgrades in collaboration with long-standing community groups.

### ***Complete Streets and Bike and Pedestrian Plans***

- Include equity-related principles in a Complete Streets policies or Bike and Pedestrian Plans by developing frameworks that address issues of access in your municipality.<sup>7</sup>
- Include social equity strategies in municipal bike share programs to ensure station sitting is equitably distributed, messaging tools are geared towards all users, and payment plans are financially accessible.<sup>7</sup>
- Increase awareness about transportation options by offering bilingual information sessions, public signage, or bike training workshops.<sup>7</sup>



## How can municipalities incorporate social equity strategies?

**Resource:** *Advancing Equity and Inclusion: A Guide for Municipalities* (City for All Women Initiative, Ottawa). Access at: [http://www.cawi-ivtf.org/sites/default/files/publications/advancing-equity-inclusion-web\\_0.pdf](http://www.cawi-ivtf.org/sites/default/files/publications/advancing-equity-inclusion-web_0.pdf)

**Example:** The City of Philadelphia's Bike Share Strategic Business Plans includes a "Social Equity Strategy" that identifies plans for achieving social equity and equitable access to active-transportation options. Philadelphia's Bike Share Strategic Plan can be accessed at: [www.bikesharephiladelphia.org/philastudy/completenessplan.pdf](http://www.bikesharephiladelphia.org/philastudy/completenessplan.pdf)

### FURTHER ACTIONS FOR EQUITY AND INCLUSION:

As a municipal leader and decision maker, your actions can have unintended consequences. Remember to consider how policies can impact all residents and community members. Work with your residents, staff, and fellow municipal leaders to help prevent negative impacts and create more inclusive and equitable decision-making processes to enable all residents to participate fully in the in social, economic, and political life of your city or town.<sup>8</sup>

- Help elevate community input and voices by holding public and participatory city/town meetings. Host listening sessions in communities or in less formal venues like a weekly walk with the mayor.
- Conduct a health impact assessment to understand the impacts of policy/planning decisions.
- Integrate a health and equity framework into general and comprehensive plan updates.<sup>9</sup>

### TOOLS FOR POLICY CHANGE:

- Complete Streets in Delaware: A Guide for Local Governments. Delaware Department of Transportation. Access at: <https://cpb-us-w2.wpmucdn.com/sites.udel.edu/dist/a/390/files/2013/12/CompleteStreetsGuide-web-2h5fl32.pdf>
- Pursuing Equity in Pedestrian and Bicycle Planning, US Department of Transportation. Accessed at: [http://www.pedbikeinfo.org/cms/downloads/PBIC\\_WhitePaper\\_Equity.pdf](http://www.pedbikeinfo.org/cms/downloads/PBIC_WhitePaper_Equity.pdf)
- Healthy Development Without Displacement: Realizing the Vision of Healthy Communities for All, Prevention Institute. Access at: <https://www.preventioninstitute.org/publications/healthy-development-without-displacement-realizing-vision-healthy-communities-all>



### ABOUT US:

The HEAL (Healthy Eating Active Living) Cities and Towns Campaign of the Mid-Atlantic provides free technical assistance to local government leaders to help them create healthy, prosperous communities by adopting policies and practices that improve their communities' physical activity and food environments. HEAL is a project of the Institute for Public Health Innovation, in partnership with the Maryland and Virginia Municipal Leagues, and funded by Kaiser Permanente, founding partner. For more information, visit the HEAL website at [www.healcitiesmidatlantic.org](http://www.healcitiesmidatlantic.org) and contact HEAL Campaign Manager Sydney Daigle at [sdaigle@institutephi.org](mailto:sdaigle@institutephi.org)



### References:

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- <sup>5</sup> AARP Livable Communities *Economic Development: A Livability Fact Sheet*. Accessed at: <https://www.aarp.org/content/dam/aarp/livable-communities/livable-documents/documents-2014/Livability%20Fact%20Sheets/Economic-Development-Fact-Sheet.pdf>
- <sup>6</sup> Wolch, JR., Byrne, J., Newell, JP. *Urban green space, public health, and environmental justice: The challenge of making cities 'just green enough'*. *Landscape and Urban Planning*, 125. 2014. Accessed at: <https://cloudfront.escholarship.org/dist/prd/content/qt8pf8s47q/qt8pf8s47q.pdf>
- <sup>7</sup> US Department of Transportation. *Pursuing Equity in Pedestrian and Bicycle Planning*. 2016. Accessed at: [http://www.pedbikeinfo.org/cms/downloads/PBIC\\_WhitePaper\\_Equity.pdf](http://www.pedbikeinfo.org/cms/downloads/PBIC_WhitePaper_Equity.pdf)
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