

Community Redesign



Scientists have found that your town may affect your health. A group of scientists studied 200,000 people living in 448 counties and 83 cities in the United States. Where houses and businesses are close together, the scientists called these “compact neighborhoods.” Other neighborhoods were found to be more spread out. The picture below shows a compact neighborhood and a spread out neighborhood.



Many towns have taken action to promote healthy citizens by changing neighborhood design. Some of the ideas are adding new sidewalks and trails. Towns have hired crossing guards at dangerous intersections. Building overpasses and underpasses, bike lanes and wider street shoulders also have helped. Other ideas include trimming shrubs to help walkers look for cars driving on the street. Some towns have made “bicycle boulevards” and started traffic and safety education programs.

In Mill Valley, California, a group of parents, town leaders and school principals surveyed people in town about their concerns regarding town traffic. The survey found that 60 to 70 percent of all students were driven to school each day. This made up 26 percent of the town’s morning traffic. The survey results were shared at a town meeting.

People at the town meeting came up with ideas on how to make it safer and easier for kids to walk and bike to school. The ideas led to the design of crosswalks that are easier for drivers to see. They changed the traffic signals and put in new crosswalk signs. They made maps of safe routes for walking and biking to school. Children have “Walk and Bike” to school days, competitions and art contests for improving town design.

If you want to change your community, think about the following questions:

- Are sidewalks or paths non-stop along the routes or are there gaps?
- Are sidewalks or pathways in good condition (few bumps or cracks)?
- Are there signals and crosswalks to help people cross busy streets and intersections?
- Are drivers required to yield to walkers at crosswalks?
- Is secure and convenient bicycle parking available at school?

Article sources:

1. Health and Wellness Magazine. Page 12. November/December, 2003.
2. Fact Sheet by the California Office of Traffic Safety, Safe Routes to School Initiative, California Department of Health Services, and Local Government Commission (www.lgc.org/transportation/street.html)
3. MORE GRAPHICS can be found in the Fact Sheet named above—2 charts