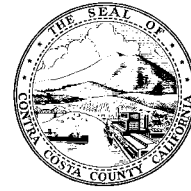


**TO: BOARD OF SUPERVISORS**  
**FROM: Mark DeSaulnier**  
**DATE: June 20, 2006**  
**SUBJECT: Built Environment**



**Contra  
Costa  
County**

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**SPECIFIC REQUEST(S) OR RECOMMENDATION(S) & BACKGROUND AND JUSTIFICATION**

**(1) RECOMMENDATION:** Receive and accept presentation from Dr. Richard Jackson, former Public Health Officer for the State of California and author of “Urban Sprawl and Public Health: Designing, Planning, and Building for Healthy Communities”.

**(2) RECOMMENDATION:** Direct the Ad Hoc Committee on Smart Growth to reconvene to consider the County’s approach to the “built environment”. Ask staff from the Community Development, Public Works, and Health Services Departments to participate to give input into the scope and substance of this effort.

**(3) RECOMMENDATION:** Direct the Ad Hoc Committee on Smart Growth to convene within 30 days from today. Ask the Community Development, Public Works, and Health Services Departments to work together to develop preliminary recommendations and report back to the Ad Hoc Committee on Smart Growth within 90 of the initial meeting.

**FISCAL IMPACT:** None to general fund.

**BACKGROUND:** Aspects of the environment that are human modified – from our homes, schools, communities and workplaces, to our parks, industrial areas, roads and highways – are more frequently being referred to as the “built environment”. There is increasing evidence that this built environment affects our health in significant ways. Many modern health problems including obesity, heart disease and stroke, cancer, asthma, stress, and traffic related injuries are impacted by how and where we build our communities.

Modifications to the built environment that incorporate a focus on public health could ultimately help decrease these health problems and improve both physical and mental health, learning, quality of life, and the more efficient movement of people, goods and services through our transportation system.

Obesity in the United States is a rapidly growing epidemic. Almost 30 percent of children in California are obese, more than the national average of 24 percent. In Contra Costa, 31 percent of all 5<sup>th</sup> graders are overweight, or about 11,764 children in this age group throughout the county. The CDC estimates that if current trends continue, one out of four African American and Hispanic children will develop diabetes in their lifetime. (See attached Board Order on Child Obesity, presented to the Board of Supervisors on January 24, 2006 for additional information).

A new study by UCLA shows that the number of California teens who do not get regular physical activity is on the rise. The Health Policy Research Brief, a publication of the UCLA Center for Health Policy Research, also reports that one in four California adults does not walk at all for transportation or leisure in an average week – 6.8 million adults in all – and half walk less than one hour each week, or about nine minutes each day.

Dispersed, lower density development results in greater travel distances to jobs, schools, shopping and entertainment. Increased driving leads to poor air quality and higher rates of vehicle collisions and injuries. The United States has one of the highest per capita automobile-related fatality rates of developed countries. California’s pedestrian fatality rate of 17 percent of all traffic fatalities is 6 percentage points higher than the national average. In 2003, the Surface Transportation Policy Project ranked Contra Costa 4<sup>th</sup> statewide in dangerous places for pedestrians. Latinos die more frequently than other Contra Costans from unintentional injuries such as these.

Physical activity can sharply reduce the incidence and severity of all chronic diseases and is strongly influenced by the built environment. Walking is a moderate-intensity physical activity that can provide significant health benefits, as can bicycling. Both of these forms of activity are inexpensive and could be available to most residents if the environment is built to foster these activities. A rapidly increasing body of literature supports the idea that modifications to the built environment – such as streets that better accommodate pedestrians and bicyclists – not only decrease injuries, but increase physical activity. Increased walking and bicycling will not only improve health and safety, but decrease use of vehicles; thereby reducing traffic and improving air quality.

Access to parks and other spaces where people can gather increases social cohesion, safety, and influences the level physical activity. More than one out of four California adolescents – over 825,000 – have no access to a safe park, playground or open space for physical activity.

A University of Maryland research project looked at the health of 200,000 individuals living in US metropolitan areas. The researchers compared the degree of lower-density development (in which homes are relatively far from shops, restaurants and other destinations) to the health problems of the people living there. They found that as the degree of density decreased, the chances that residents would be obese or have high blood pressure also increased.

Changes to our built environment can help reverse such trends. Improving streets for pedestrian and cyclist safety and increasing access to open space and recreation facilities can create more everyday opportunities for physical activity. Adopting local transportation and land use policies that promote the establishment of grocery stores and farmers’ markets in more neighborhoods and that promote ease-of-use for bicycling and walking to reach such destinations are others.

Financial and staff resources for new initiatives are always an issue. The county’s Community Development, Public Works, and Health Services are already working on related issues with small amounts of federal, state, and local funding. Projects that may emerge from this partnership could be eligible for funding through the Metropolitan Transportation Commission’s (MTC’s) Transportation for Livable Communities (TLC) program, Cal Trans, or MTC’s Housing Incentive Program (HIP). If such grants were made to the County, this could position the County to receive other monies in turn.

Contra Costa is a growing, dynamic county of over one million people. We have always placed an emphasis on public health and the quality of life in our communities. To meet the challenges of future growth, our Departments must continue to work together to ensure a comprehensive approach to planning in our communities.

CONTINUED ON ATTACHMENT:\_\_\_\_\_YES

SIGNATURE:\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
RECOMMENDATION OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR RECOMMENDATION OF BOARD COMMITTEE  
\_\_\_\_\_  
APPROVE OTHER

SIGNATURE(S):\_\_\_\_\_

ACTION OF BOARD ON \_\_\_\_\_APPROVED AS RECOMMENDED \_\_\_\_\_ OTHER\_\_\_\_\_

**VOTE OF SUPERVISORS**

\_\_\_\_\_  
UNANIMOUS (ABSENT \_\_\_\_\_)  
AYES:\_\_\_\_\_NOES:\_\_\_\_\_  
ABSENT:\_\_\_\_\_ABSTAIN:\_\_\_\_\_

**I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS IS A TRUE  
AND CORRECT COPY OF AN ACTION TAKEN  
AND ENTERED ON THE MINUTES OF THE BOARD  
OF SUPERVISORS ON THE DATE SHOWN.**

**ATTESTED**\_\_\_\_\_

**JOHN CULLEN, CLERK OF THE BOARD OF  
SUPERVISORS AND COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR**

**Contact:**  
**cc: BOS**  
**CAO**

**BY \_\_\_\_\_, DEPUTY**