

Santa Clara General Plan - Public Draft
Health Policy Recommendations
April 2010

Introduction

The Santa Clara General Plan (Plan) update offers a significant opportunity for the community to chart out a set of land use policy strategies that will contribute to community health and well-being. Public Health Law & Policy (PHLP) has been asked to review the March 2010 Public Review Draft Plan in order to provide recommendations to the Great Community Collaborative (GCC) on policies that support health by:

- Overall vision of health
- Increasing physical activity, walkability/bikability, and connectivity
- Improving access to parks, trails, and open space;
- Encourage mode-shift to transit and active transportation; and
- Increasing access to healthy foods

In particular, GCC is interested in how such policies can identify opportunities to promote equity, including supporting access to health-supportive infrastructure by aging populations and children, and identifying opportunities to strengthen policies and tie them to implementation strategies.

Overall, the Plan includes a number of draft goals, policies and strategies on issues that positively impact community health, such as: land use and urban design; housing; strategic infill and dense development; transportation and consideration of multi-modal transportation options; and parks, greenways, and open space. Draft elements of the Plan reviewed by PHLP were:

- *A Community Guide to the General Plan*
- *Major Strategies*
- *Goals and Policies:*
 - *Prerequisites*
 - *Land Use*
 - *Mobility and Transportation*
 - *Public Facilities and Services*
 - *Sustainability*
- *Turning the General Plan Into Action*

PHLP has included in this memo both suggested policy language and general recommendations to strengthen the health promotion potential in the Plan. By far the most developed policies in the Plan are those related to active transportation and “complete streets” (termed “full-service streets” in this Plan’s terminology). The least developed areas of the Plan relate to crafting an over-all vision for healthy communities, and healthy food access. Our analysis has resulted three broad recommendations:

- 1. Raise the profile of health and reference the importance of built environment elements that are supportive of positive health outcomes** throughout the various elements of the Plan. Incorporating community health language reinforces the community’s commitment to considering and ultimately improving health outcomes in all decisions made. In addition, incorporate public participation and the role of the

Santa Clara County Health Department as an implementation partner, where appropriate.

2. **Include (or make reference to) relevant community health data**, such as: rates of chronic diseases like obesity, diabetes and asthma; pedestrian and bicycle injuries, rates of physical activity; consumption of fruits, vegetables, and fast food; and alcohol and tobacco use. Utilizing existing health data to craft goals, policies, and strategies sensitive to community needs can be successful in improving community health and well-being. The Santa Clara County Health Department and other local health groups could be partners in data-sharing and conducting new assessments. A broad list of questions for a baseline community health assessment is included in Section 2 of the toolkit *How to Create and Implement Healthy General Plans, “Assessing Existing Health Conditions”*.¹
3. **Strengthen goals, policies and strategies that explicitly address access to healthy food**. Currently, the Plan includes minimal policies regarding healthy food and sustainable food systems, which are an important component of a healthy community.

While it is beyond the scope of review and comment that GCC has asked us to consider here, we also raise one additional overarching concern: the plan’s approach is light on implementation strategies and named implementation partners. All the policies are stated as broad goals, and specific implementation strategies are not included. This may become a significant barrier to translating the Plan’s goals into on-the-ground change. In the policy language recommendations we include here, we make distinctions between “Goals,” “Policies,” and “Strategies,” which does not match the Plan’s current organization, but does provide specific ideas for implementation-oriented policy language. We also encourage the Great Communities Collaborative to push for the inclusion of implementation steps where appropriate, and to participate in those implementation steps laid out in the plan (such as developing pedestrian, bicycle, and transit Level of Service standards) that will be undertaken by Santa Clara over the coming years.

¹ Available at, http://www.phlpnet.org/healthy-planning/create_implement_gp

Overall vision of health

The Plan's introduction articulates a broad vision for future development including issues important to the community as a whole, such as the need to capture the potential of new growth and economic development in a way that improves the overall quality of life. The Plan's "Vision for the Future" and "Major Strategies" are ideal locations to articulate a strong, explicit commitment to public health.

One overall recommendation would be to use this section of the plan to set the stage for the consideration of health impacts in all land use decisions. We recommend two linked strategies for accomplishing this: 1) engaging residents and stakeholders in an on-going dialogue about the links between development decisions and health outcomes, and 2) employing new assessment and development review tools that link health indicators to planning and development priorities.

For example, the Plan could include policies that promote the use of tools that identify existing health hazards, vulnerable populations, and generally promote healthy behaviors, such as health impact assessments, community food assessments, walkability and bikeability audits, and the like.

The following are recommended policies that could be incorporated to strengthen an overall vision of health:

Goal: Foster residents' health and well-being.

Policy: Create, support, and empower a highly engaged community that understands the health impacts of planning decisions.

Strategy: Develop wellness metrics to measure community involvement and education.

Policy: Establish mechanisms to support a systemic approach to community health education.

Policy: Promote educational opportunities that illustrate how the built environment impacts health on an individual, community, and regional level.

Strategy: Utilize a variety of graphic and social networking tools to facilitate community awareness and understanding of the land use planning and decision-making process.

Goal: A collaborative vision for a healthy Santa Clara.

Policy: Work collaboratively with the community to develop and achieve a comprehensive vision for a healthy Santa Clara.

Strategy: Develop systemic approaches for soliciting and integrating community health concerns and priorities into the land use planning and decision-making process.

Strategy: Establish guidelines for engaging community members and stakeholders at strategic points of the private development process.

Policy: Develop regular channels of communication and collaboration between local health officials, planners, neighborhood associations, and community-based organizations through on-going feedback and input.

Policy: Consider health impacts when evaluating land use plans and development projects.

Strategy: Incorporate health impact assessments (HIA's) into the City's development review process for developments that have significant potential to impact health and quality of life.

Physical activity, walkability/bikability, and connectivity

Physical activity, walkability, and connectivity are issues that are addressed throughout the plan, with the majority of relevant policies in the *Land Use* and *Mobility and Transportation* sections. The Plan addresses many topics which are important components of active communities, such as compact urban form, promoting mixed-use development, and providing for “complete neighborhoods” where residents live within walking distance of daily needs. The Plan sets the stage for implementing land use and urban design strategies that can create healthy environments – for example, through density of development, the location and height of buildings in relation to the street, pedestrian access, and parking requirements.

As discussed in the overview, this section of the plan most strongly supports the health priority identified by GCC. One area of note is that the plan calls for updating the Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan and developing transit, bicycle, and pedestrian “Level of Service” (LOS) standards:

5.1.1-P14 Prior to 2015, implement level of service standards for transit, bicycle and pedestrian facilities that support the vehicular level of service standard.

5.1.1-P16: Prior to 2025, update the Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan to support the City’s vision for improving walkability and pedestrian safety, including identification of potential funding opportunities for implementation.

These implementation strategies offer clear opportunities for future partnership with the City, but additional advocacy will certainly be needed to ensure that both strategies include and prioritize health issues. Including the Santa Clara County Health Department and key community health stakeholders as named implementation partners would be one way to strengthen these policies and ensure a health voice is present in implementation.

We recommend the following strategy as a specific implementation step to accompany the goals already included in the draft Plan:

Strategy: Collaborate with community to identify and prioritize gaps in bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure (e.g., sidewalks and walking paths, bike lanes and paths, etc) as appropriate.

Improving access to parks, trails, and open space

Policies relevant to GCC's goal of improving access to parks, trails, and open space can be found in *5.9.1 Parks, Open Space, and Recreation Goals and Policies*. Importantly, this section of the plan does include language referencing the health benefit of access to parks, trails, and open space (although no specific community health baseline data is included). An additional item of note is that the plan specifically references the concept of equitable distribution of parks facilities within the community:

Ideally, parks should be located within a ten-minute walking distance from residential areas and be provided near employment centers. Additionally, while parks should be generally spread evenly throughout the City, in order to ensure equitable distribution, parks may need to be closer together in areas with higher-intensity and higher-density development to better serve the demand. (p. 5-106)

We recommend strengthening three policy areas within this section of the plan: 1) commit to developing a Parks Master Plan to promote a high level of service standard for park access, maintenance, and facilities, 2) recognize the important of universal design and ADA accessibility in parks, trails, and open space, and 3) strengthen policies related to joint use of facilities to improve community access.

There are currently no references to the development of a Parks Master Plan, which would greatly enhance the City's ability to assess existing and future gaps and needs, and identify potential funding and financing mechanisms to meet those needs.

While there is a policy that references joint use of school facilities (5.9.1-P11), this policy could be broadened to achieve maximum impact. Many park-deficient communities utilize joint use agreements as a way to maximize use of existing recreational facilities that can be found within schools to increase opportunities for physical activity.

The following are recommended policies that could be incorporated to strengthen the health benefits of parks, trails, and open space:

Goal: Maintain a desirable quantity, quality, and location of neighborhood and community parks that are equitably distributed throughout the community, and that meet the needs of residents.

Policy: Develop a Parks, Trails, and Open Space Master Plan to ensure a high level of service for access, maintenance, and facilities.

Strategy: Establish baseline conditions for neighborhood and community parks by collecting data regarding existing facilities, the areas served, and the demographics of those areas.

Strategy: Develop indicators that measure quantity, quality, and distribution of open spaces, including maintenance.

Strategy: Develop indicators that measure the extent and demographic characteristics of population served by parks from a quarter-mile and half-mile walking distance (a five-minute and 10-minute walk, respectively).

Goal: Ensure all residents can access parks, trails, and open space facilities.

Policy: Incorporate universal design features that support accessibility for all users, including older adults, children and people with disabilities.

Strategy: Require developers to build facilities for walkers, bicyclists, and wheelchairs in all new developments.

Strategy: Develop minimum publicly-accessible parkland development standards for new and infill development.

Strategy: Develop indicators related to recreational opportunities for sensitive populations such low-income families and the disabled and elderly.

Goal: Maximize community access to existing recreational facilities through partnerships with schools, community-based organizations, and other venues.

Policy: Establish partnerships between the City, schools districts, and/or not-for-profit organizations to encourage community access of recreational facilities.

Strategy: Determine which schools within park-deficient neighborhoods are located within a quarter-mile or half-mile walking distance (a five-minute and ten-minute walk, respectively).

Strategy: Develop and maintain joint use agreements with school districts in park-deficient neighborhoods.

Encourage mode-shift to transit and active transportation

The Plan provides a well thought-out approach to creating a multi-modal transportation network for Santa Clara. The Plan addresses mobility from four sides: the transportation system, travel behaviors, land use, and livability. Policies related to transit and active transportation can be found in section *5.8 Mobility and Transportation*.

An active transportation-oriented approach to planning supports existing goals of coordinated transportation and land use planning efforts. It also provides cross-cutting health, environmental, and economic benefits. Utilizing health-related assessments can provide understanding of the transportation-related needs of sensitive populations such as low-income residents, the elderly, and children.

We recommend the following additional policies to strengthen the link between transportation planning and health, and to provide concrete implementation strategies:

Goal: A transportation system that promotes and protects public health and serves the needs of all users.

Policy: Consider health impacts when evaluating transportation plans and projects.

Strategy: Utilize health impact assessments and/or pedestrian environmental quality indices to develop a broad understanding of transportation-related needs and priorities for all users.

Strategy: Develop indicators that measure public transportation use and populations served.

Strategy: Determine existing air pollution levels throughout the City and prioritize transit oriented development for areas with high levels of air pollution.

Strategy: Evaluate existing transportation policies and goals to ensure compatibility with active transportation users.

Policy: Review land use policies to ensure compatibility between development projects and an active transportation network. Adjacent land uses should support the transportation network, and vice versa.

Increase access to healthy food

The Plan offers a number of opportunities to increase access to healthy food and support a sustainable, local food system. Policies could be integrated into a number of elements, including: Land Use; Mobility and Transportation, and Community Facilities. Community food assessments could also be utilized to help establish baseline conditions and highlight priorities within Santa Clara. For example, the Plan would benefit from such indicators as a “Retail Food Environment Index,” the ratio of healthy -- e.g. grocery stores and farmers’ markets, and unhealthy retail -- e.g. fast food and liquor stores, and using this baseline to inform policy priorities.

Strategies to improve the food retail landscape include developing land use priorities, development standards, and zoning regulations that preserve regional agriculture, allow for urban agriculture and farmers’ markets, prioritizing food retail development in underserved neighborhoods, and ensuring transit connectivity to healthy food retail. In addition, economic development policies can be used to stimulate economic growth in the local food system and create living wage jobs, especially in the food processing, packing, and distribution sectors.

The Plan currently includes three policies that reference healthy food:

5.3.3-P10 Encourage new grocery stores near residential neighborhoods to provide Santa Clara residents with access to fresh and healthy food options.

5.9.1-P9 Support access to local food sources by providing opportunities for community gardening and farmers’ markets.

5.9.1-P10 Explore opportunities to partner with local private non-profits and public agencies, such as school districts, to provide community gardens and opportunities for community socialization in the City.

However, there is substantial room to strengthen and build on these policies, both through the inclusion of specific implementation steps as well as policies that promote equity and increased access for underserved or low-income populations. We recommend the following additions:

Goal: Provide safe and convenient access to healthy food for all residents.

Policy: Provide safe, convenient opportunities to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables by ensuring that sources of healthy foods are accessible in all neighborhoods

Strategy: Establish baseline conditions by collecting data regarding existing food retail outlets, including opportunities to buy healthy and unhealthy foods.

Policy: Ensure that every resident has access to fresh, healthy foods within ¼ mile of their residence.

Strategy: Identify barriers in development regulations to the siting of grocery stores, greenhouses, farmers markets, gardens and other opportunities for neighborhood access to healthy, nutritious foods.

Strategy: Update development regulations to ensure people have access to healthy, nutritious food within their neighborhoods.

Strategy: Review the development code to ensure community gardens, farmers' markets, and produce stands can operate by right in appropriate locations throughout the City.

Policy: Utilize economic development incentives to encourage grocery stores and corner stores to sell fresh, healthy food in underserved areas.

Strategy: Develop an incentive package (such as grants, loans, and fast-track permitting) for grocery stores to locate in underserved areas.

Policy: Ensure that healthy food retail outlets are accessible through a variety of transit options (e.g., pedestrian, bicycle, and public transit).

Strategy: Work with local transit agencies to ensure that bus routes provide service from underserved neighborhoods to healthy food retail outlets.

Policy: Avoid a concentration of unhealthy food providers within neighborhoods.

Strategy: Consider limiting the number or concentration of "formula" restaurants via zoning ordinance.

Strategy: Ban or limit drive-through food outlets, or those within certain geographic areas (e.g., *around schools*).

Strategy: Restrict approvals of new liquor stores or other retailers that sell alcohol for off-site consumption, in target areas (e.g., *high crime areas, near schools*).

Goal: Support a community and regional food system that is ecologically sustainable, economically viable, and socially equitable.

Policy: Work collaboratively with the community to develop and achieve a comprehensive vision for a healthy and robust food system.

Strategy: Develop systemic approaches for soliciting and integrating food system related community concerns and priorities into the land use planning and decision-making process

Policy: Link local food production to a local distribution network.

Strategy: Explore economic development opportunities related to the community's food system, such as community-supported agriculture

programs, packing and distribution facilities, farmers' markets, farm-to-institution programs, grocery stores, restaurants, etc.

Strategy: Assess and plan for local food processing, packing, wholesaling and distribution facilities to connect local agriculture to markets such as retailers, restaurants, schools, hospitals, and other institutions.

Policy: Protect existing and establish additional farmers' markets to increase access to healthy and affordable food, and to support local agriculture and economic development.

Strategy: Identify appropriate sites for farmers' markets (e.g., municipal parks, street closures) and drop-off sites for community-supported agriculture "shares" (direct marketing between farmers and consumers), and prioritize those uses in appropriate locations.

Policy: Encourage community gardening as a way to increase access to healthy food and opportunities for nutrition education, as well as provide opportunities for physical activity through gardening.

Strategy: Create an inventory of publicly owned parcels of land that could be utilized for farmers' markets, farm stands, and urban agriculture.

Strategy: Offer residents such classes as gardening or composting, or support a community-based organization to do so; prioritize classes in neighborhoods that lack access to healthy foods and/or green space.

Strategy: Update development regulations to allow the use of front and side yards for growing fruits and/or vegetables.

Goal: Adopt policies that promote increased consumption of healthy food.

Policy: Provide healthy food options at city buildings and city sponsored events.

Policy: Encourage restaurants to post nutrition information for menu items.

Strategy: Offer incentives/publicity for restaurants that adopt menus consistent with dietary guidelines and/or serve locally grown foods.

Policy: Encourage restaurants to participate in a voluntary ban on trans fats.

Policy: Encourage the use and acceptance of federal, state and local food assistance programs such as Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) cards and Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) benefits at all food retail outlets and farmers' markets.