

# Health in All Policies: Land Use and Community Development

## Current Practice and Future Opportunities

Health in All Policies recognizes that health is determined not only by genetics, health care, and individual behaviors but by a complex set of social, economic and environmental factors. This document highlights current action and potential future opportunities to integrate health and health equity into budgetary, programmatic, and policy decision-making in land use and community development.

### Why This Matters

Community planning is essential to creating places that support active living (walking, biking, recreation), expanding access to healthy and affordable foods, ensuring tobacco and substance free spaces, protecting people's safety, air and water quality, and equitably distributing environmental benefits and burdens – all of which are essential for good health. “Healthy community design” changes the physical environment, community infrastructure and local policies to create such an environment. It means planning and designing communities to make it easier for people to live healthy lives.

### Sector: Land Use and Community Development

The Agency of Commerce and Community Development encompasses three major state departments and many programs that serve the Vermont public by enhancing the Vermont business climate, marketing Vermont to tourists and others, and strengthening our communities in a wide variety of ways. The Agency's mission is to help Vermonters improve their quality of life and build strong communities.

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# Budget

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## Concentrated Mixed-Use Development and Smart Growth

### Current Practice

- ▶ Support downtowns, state designated centers, and neighborhoods through tax credits for history building rehabilitation, code improvements and other restoration enhancements.
- ▶ Through the Tax Increment Finance Program municipalities can fund infrastructure projects that support mixed-use development by redirecting future property tax revenues from development in the district to cover upfront costs.
- ▶ Programs like the Missing Middle Housing Grants, the Vermont Housing Improvement Program and the Manufactured Home Improvement and Repair program support the creation and improvements of housing throughout Vermont.

### Future Opportunities

- ▶ Continue to provide financial incentives for state-designated centers and enhance the role of the Community Investment Board to leverage and coordinate new funding, tools and resources to support compact, mixed-use, and smart growth development.
- ▶ Continue to prioritize state investments in public buildings, transportation, and other infrastructure improvements in state designated centers where it leverages the most benefit.
- ▶ Increase tax, financial, and permitting incentives for private development projects in state-designated areas to 'level the playing field' for new housing. Educate Vermonters about the interim Act 250 exemptions and the critical role communities play in shaping Vermont's new land-use framework.
- ▶ Allocate resources to the Department of Housing and Community Development and regional planning commissions to create model zoning that enables smart growth and increase housing opportunities through the Zoning for Great Neighborhoods and Homes for All programs.

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## Bicycle and Pedestrian Friendly Communities

### Current Practice

- ▶ Downtown revitalization tax credits and grants are available to communities who are pursuing downtown revitalization in areas like streetscape improvements and traffic pattern measures to improve safety for pedestrians and cyclists.
- ▶ The Better Connections Program, in collaboration with the Agency of Transportation, supports communities by integrating transportation and land use planning. The projects support walking and biking by enhancing trail connections, designing bike-friendly roadways, and improving access for community members.
- ▶ Support “complete streets” policy, the Vermont Outdoor Recreation Economic Collaborative, and partnerships with local and regional planning commissions to support broader goals.
- ▶ The Vermont Transportation Planning Initiative provides funding for planning for walking and cycling infrastructure.

### Future Opportunities

- ▶ Continue to provide funding opportunities and incentives for regional and municipal plans and projects that support and promote active transportation (walking and biking) for all users.
- ▶ Target, align, and prioritize funding in areas of Vermont that are in greatest need of increased biking and walking (areas where there are poor health outcomes and limited access to walking and biking).

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## Parks, Recreational Facilities, and Open Space

### Current Practice

- ▶ Help communities fund and make actionable decisions regarding placemaking efforts, which strengthen the connection between the places they share.
- ▶ Support the creation of vibrant outdoor, community invested spaces and enhance existing places and parks to make them more inclusive and welcoming.

### Future Opportunities

- ▶ Continue to identify and preserve open public spaces and make them available for recreation through local and regional planning processes.

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## Health Equity

### Current Practice

- ▶ Promote walkable and bikeable communities that are equitable and accessible.
- ▶ Through planning grants and technical assistance, the Agency supports the development and enhancement of parks, trails and open spaces to ensure that all residents, regardless of income or location, have access to green spaces, and recreational amenities.

### Future Opportunities

- ▶ Continue to provide incentives for community development projects in state designated areas that help to revitalize the economy and increase access to goods, services, and jobs, especially for low-income communities and communities of color.
- ▶ Fund projects that integrate land use, community development, and equitable transportation in areas that have worse health outcomes and health disparities.
- ▶ Continue to prioritize grant applications (evaluation criteria) for development distressed regions and low-income areas.

# Policy

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## Concentrated Mixed-Use Development and Smart Growth

### Current Practice

- ▶ Support state, regional, and local placemaking initiatives that activate under-utilized public spaces to improve public health, build social capital and community cohesion.
- ▶ Support Vermont's land use goals of compact centers surrounded by working lands (which also helps to decrease vehicle miles traveled and car emissions) through funding or other incentives.
- ▶ Participate in an interagency task force to work with the Agency of Natural Resources to address sewage solutions to encourage growth, business and community development potential for Vermont villages that lack wastewater treatment facilities.
- ▶ Collaborate across agencies to help meet Vermont's climate and energy goals, e.g., through concentrated development and decreasing vehicle miles traveled (and decreasing harmful emissions).

### Future Opportunities

- ▶ Provide guidance and support to the regional planning commissions regarding state health goals and smart growth principles and using these goals in developing regional plans.
- ▶ Support the regional planning commissions in providing technical assistance to municipalities regarding smart growth land use planning and development and including health in town plans.
- ▶ Offer financial, tax, permitting, and other incentives to the private sector for development decisions that result in smart growth and concentrated downtown, mixed use development in municipalities/towns.
- ▶ Work with the Department of Health to develop and offer health impact assessment training, tools, and guidance for use in regional and local land use and community development decisions.
- ▶ Create housing development targets, and measure progress at the town level to ensure state and local policies are effective and targeted.

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## Bicycle and Pedestrian Friendly Communities

### Current Practice

- ▶ Interagency work with the Department of Transportation and other relevant departments including the Department of Health to improve active transportation (walking and biking), especially in combination with land use and community design interventions (such as mixed land use, downtown and dense residential development, proximity to parks and recreation) to promote physical activity and improve access to goods and services, economic development, and the environment.

### Future Opportunities

- ▶ Fund local and regional bicycle and pedestrian master plans to identify and coordinate future investments and to maximize benefits to the community (before investments are made).

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## Parks, Recreational Facilities, and Open Spaces

### Current Practice

- ▶ Support municipal plans that aim to preserve undeveloped land in a community as open space for land conservation, protection, public access, and recreation.
- ▶ Support the use of schools and school grounds for community gatherings, events, and physical activity for the whole community.
- ▶ Support statewide and local placemaking efforts to foster social connection, community well-being and community resilience.

### Future Opportunities

- ▶ Develop trails and networks for recreation but also help increase access to services especially in low-income communities.

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## Fresh and Healthy Food

### Current Practice

- ▶ Support regional planning commissions in approving town plans that are consistent with state planning goals regarding agriculture and forest industries and encourage strategies to protect long-term viability of agricultural land and

forest lands, maintain low overall density, and target public investments to alleviate development pressure on agricultural and forest land.

## Future Opportunities

- ▶ Support access to healthy and local food by helping municipalities and regions develop robust food system plans.

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## Health Equity

### Current Practice

- ▶ Integrate health equity principles into current and future programs to foster inclusive, accessible, and vibrant communities. While the agency's primary mission is economic development, many of its policies indirectly or directly promote health equity by addressing social determinants of health, such as housing, transportation, and access to resources.

### Future Opportunities

- ▶ Engage the Department of Health in the development and review of regional plans to incorporate Healthy Vermonters 2030 goals and health disparities.
- ▶ Form an interagency collaboration (that includes the Department of Health) on collecting and analyzing health data related to land use patterns and transportation to better understand and map areas with the greatest health inequities within the state.

# Program

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## Concentrated Mixed-Use Development and Smart Growth

### Current Practice

- ▶ Collaborate with other Agencies and programs to use the state designation programs (Downtowns, Village Centers, New Town Centers, Growth Centers, and Neighborhood Development Areas) to provide incentives, align policies, and give communities the technical assistance needed to encourage new development and redevelopment in compact, designated areas for the public and private sector.
- ▶ Collaborate across agencies to provide support for public and private investment in designated areas that enables coordination among state, regional, and municipal planning.

### Future Opportunities

- ▶ Expand programs (training/marketing, funding, tax, and regulatory incentives) that support concentrated and mixed use downtown and village development (includes public services, business, retail, and housing).

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## Bicycle and Pedestrian Friendly Communities

### Current Practice

- ▶ Support programs that help municipalities create safe places to walk and bike for all users by: 1) focusing funding for designated areas (through grant eligibility or selection process) and creating and improving funding for special programs such as Downtown Transportation fund, Better Connections, and Bike/PedGrants; 2) supporting municipalities to identify projects and obtain funding (RPCs, technical assistance, helping to pay staff); and 3) modeling bylaws for municipalities to use in requiring bike and pedestrian-friendly development.

### Future Opportunities

- ▶ Coordinate state funding programs – such as Municipal Planning Grants, Bike/Ped program, Better Connections, Clean Water Fund, VCDP – to make best use of funding and assistance available for bike/ped improvements.



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## Parks, Recreational Facilities, and Open Space

### Current Practice

- ▶ Support state, regional, and local placemaking initiatives to activate under-utilized public spaces in communities to increase physical activity, build social capital, and reduce social isolation.

### Future Opportunities

- ▶ Secure appropriations to reestablish the Better Places program to revitalize or create public spaces to improve social connection, community well-being, and physical health in Vermont communities.

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## Fresh and Healthy Food

### Current Practice

- ▶ Support regional planning commissions in approving town plans that are consistent with state planning goals regarding agriculture and forest industries. Encourage strategies to protect long-term viability of agricultural land and forest lands, maintain low overall density, and target public investments to alleviate development pressure on agricultural and forest land.

### Future Opportunities

- ▶ Work with Farm to Plate, the Agency of Agriculture, and the Department of Health to help planners include food systems plans in their local or regional plans to support the local agricultural economy and access to nutritious food.

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## Health Equity

### Current Practice

- ▶ Collaborate with the Department of Health on Healthy Community Design work, building the Healthy Communities Pilot Technical Assistance initiative and the Small Towns, Healthy Places podcast.

### Future Opportunities

- ▶ Provide maps, audits, checklists, and other tools to help towns and residents assess how well land use and community development decisions support health, active living, and access to healthy food, especially for those most vulnerable.