

Advancing Healthy, Equitable, and Active Land Use in Los Angeles

What Health Brings to Land Use Decisions

Health is gaining momentum as an important touchstone in land use planning, policy, and project implementation in Los Angeles. The breadth, variety, and creativity of initiatives currently underway demonstrate a groundswell of energy to make LA a great city for residents, businesses, and tourists alike. Improving health and safety for all is a critical aspect of realizing this vision. Health has the potential to drive innovations in LA through a variety of channels:

A New Constituency. The health field is comprised of robust governmental, non-governmental, academic, and community-based stakeholders, who can advocate, fund, publish, and advise on the health and safety benefits of proposed land use projects and plans.

A Useful Frame. Health brings important dimensions to land use planning and decision-making, including credibility, additional indicators, and a unique perspective on the costs and benefits of a plan or project. Health can be a unifying principle and serve as a “big tent” idea to engage diverse partners in the pursuit of shared goals.

Value. Health is a value. The right to live and work in communities that support rather than diminish health is embodied in the language and actions of diverse players, from local businesses to homebuyers and renters to community clinics and major foundations.

Data. Health data can drive decision making. For instance, the *Health Atlas for the City of Los Angeles* provides a comprehensive snapshot of the geographic distribution of health and safety indicators, and has informed City Planning Department and Planning Commission efforts.

Funding. As links are increasingly made between today’s pressing health and safety issues and the built environment, funding from the health sector—including government and philanthropy—can support effective projects and processes.

Cost Savings. Health care costs—including private and taxpayer dollars to treat illnesses like type 2 diabetes and unintentional injuries—cause suffering and cost money. Large percentages of chronic conditions and injuries can be prevented through land use interventions that serve whole communities, such as safe streets, parks, gardens, and healthy food access.

Revenue. Businesses and financially mobile people will locate where they can access the infrastructure—built and natural—that supports and promotes health and safety. Health can be a lucrative asset in Los Angeles.

Capacities Needed to Promote Healthy, Equitable, Active Land Use in LA

Los Angeles is embracing a vision of a healthier future for all Angelenos. To achieve this, we need some new skills and capacities in our communities, government, and private sector, including:

Skills to Link Good Plans to Great Projects. City plans, such as the City of Los Angeles General Plan, 35 Community Plans, Bicycle Plan, and Citywide Safe Routes to School Plan, are filled with recommendations designed to promote the health and safety of Angelenos. The intent of these plans

will only translate into improved health and safety outcomes, however, if projects are implemented according to plan recommendations. To accomplish this, the City needs to prioritize plan implementation, require staff to proactively work across government agencies and with the private sector to realize key elements of these plans, elevate community stakeholders in the work of translating plans into projects, and create accountability at the city level for tracking progress on plans. In those instances where plans are unable to address specific health and safety threats, the City should embrace new policies to target risks such as the overconcentration of hazardous or nuisance land uses.

Capacity to Streamline Project Implementation that Supports Health and Safety Goals. Public and private land developers are designing and building high-quality, health and safety promoting projects throughout Los Angeles, including some in low-income communities that have historically lacked investment. These developers that are meeting health and safety aims—particularly in “cold markets” or blighted areas—would benefit from streamlined processes to facilitate project review and permitting, project-based incentives to reward their investments in community health, and access to local stakeholders with a constructive and unified vision for their community’s transformation.

Know-how to Engage Community Stakeholders to Enhance Effectiveness. Productive community engagement can facilitate project design and implementation or policy development. It can also lead to effective funding proposals for land use projects and create an indigenous support system for project oversight, community ownership, and long-term maintenance. The City needs to embrace and prioritize public engagement and have the mechanisms for robust and sustained participation; this includes the ability to contract with effective community-based organizations that possess the skills and capacity to garner and sustain community involvement in planning processes. Maintaining consistent two-way communication between city entities, residents, and community-based organizations is essential to retaining public confidence from the planning phase through project implementation. Community-based organizations and residents, in turn, require resources to sustain their engagement over the time period that planning and development typically occurs, clear expectations of city planning and development, effective advocacy skills, peer learning across the city, built-in mechanisms for involvement in government decision-making and project review, and greater awareness of innovative tools that could be applied to improve health and safety locally.

Ability to Incentivize Health and Safety Innovations in the Built Environment. Health and safety promoting interventions—like converting a blighted lot into a park or creating safe infrastructure for physically active transportation—create value in neighborhoods. To achieve change at a scale that will allow Angelenos to take notice and to make truly positive impacts in our lowest income neighborhoods, developers must make investments that result in greater social capital as well as economic growth. Areas that have historically been under-invested in can benefit from new development but are unlikely to attract any for-profit developers until conditions are more favorable from the developers’ vantage point. Government, land trusts, and affordable housing developers are essential players in the “warming” of these markets; such entities should receive economic, political, and social support to get these projects completed efficiently. Meanwhile, the City can use creative incentives to encourage all developers to contribute to Angelenos’ health and safety.

Cross-Cutting Priorities to Promote Healthy, Equitable, Active Land Use in LA

The Healthy, Equitable, Active Land Use Network has defined the following priority strategies to spur progress on policies across disciplines to advance healthy, safety, and equity throughout Los Angeles:

- 1. Invest Public Dollars in Land Use Policies and Projects in High-Need Communities First.** The *Health Atlas for the City of Los Angeles* and other analyses reveal significant health and economic disparities by zip code. Neighborhoods in East and South LA, for example, simultaneously bear the brunt of health inequities and land use deficiencies. Federal, state, and local investments can catalyze built environment improvements that support healthy behaviors and reduce unhealthy exposures at the same time. Sustainable Communities Investments, Proposition 84, and the Active Transportation Program are three examples of funding programs that define criteria for “disadvantaged communities” to prioritize investments where they are urgently needed and have historically been lacking. These programs can serve as models for directing public spending toward communities where disproportionately high rates of illness and injury can be reduced. Advocacy, administrative policy, and legislation can direct local spending, bond dollars, and grant funds to support health promoting land use interventions in priority communities; investments could include parks and open space, safe routes to school, bikeable streets, and affordable housing. Research and evaluation should support greater understanding of the processes and impacts of such targeted investments.
- 2. Increase Capacity in Government, the Private Sector and Community-Based Organizations for Robust Public Engagement in Land Use Planning, Policy, and Implementation.** Los Angeles is home to numerous high capacity organizations that specialize in organizing, community base-building, and local engagement on issues like affordable housing, mobility, parks and open space development, environmental protections, community benefits, and project labor agreements. Because of the long-term nature and technical complexity of most land use issues, community engagement requires intensive time, resources, and resident skill-building. Right now, this work is typically localized to a specific project or issue in one or more neighborhoods, but targeted funding and policies could elevate the scope and scale of effective community engagement. A local ordinance, for example, could set expectations of public agencies, lay out legal criteria for engagement, set aside funds for engagement, and facilitate citywide capacity building that transcends specific topics and projects.
- 3. Accelerate Land Use Innovations and Demonstration Projects in Low-Income Communities.** The City’s current capacity to permit and expedite projects could yield valuable benefits in low-income communities where health and safety indicators suggest severe challenges, and where investment has been absent, declining, or limited for decades. These places can showcase pilot projects at the site or corridor scale. Such demonstration projects—whether a brownfield converted to a park or a Gang Reduction Youth Development zone—should serve as examples of the kinds of policies or projects that could be implemented to foster effective replication; ideally they will also catalyze further local investments. Because of LA’s size, it is typically difficult for most Angelenos to experience the benefits of such projects firsthand. To ensure that future demonstration projects occur at a scale that people can see and at which significant impact is likely, a centralized hub for learning from successes and defining where replication could happen is critical.
- 4. Foster Inter-Departmental Collaboration to Embed Health and Equity in All Land Use Decisions.** The City Planning Department has taken the enormous step of embedding health and wellness in its General Plan through the development of the *Plan for a Healthy Los Angeles*. This citywide policy effort can only be translated “on the ground” through collaboration between diverse implementing departments across the city. Agencies concerned with planning, housing, community and economic development, environment and sustainability, public works, transportation, and street services all have a stake in producing healthy infrastructure. A citywide forum that convenes such a group to

assess policies, plans, and practices for their impacts—including health and safety impacts—would enhance a shared sense of responsibility for promoting the well-being of all Angelenos.

Strategic Activities of the Healthy, Equitable, Active Land Use Network

This is a time of transformation in Los Angeles. A strong voice for health, safety, and equity is emerging and helping to shape the direction of land use decisions and investments. The Healthy, Equitable, Active Land Use Network has the opportunity to augment the role of health in the land use sphere even further and help accelerate innovations across LA. The Network's Year 1 strategic activities are as follows:

- A. Training: A Central Training Hub for Land Use and Health 101.** The Network will work to increase community knowledge of the general purpose and function of land use planning as it relates to health through training, curriculum development, and public education. The Network will also facilitate connections to organizations that are already working to educate communities on technical areas of land use and clarify community expectations of land use decision-making entities.
 - Develop a presentation on healthy, equitable, active land use to educate Network members and the public.
- B. Capacity Building: A Speaker Series to Highlight Innovations in Land Use and Health.** Within and outside of LA, there are effective examples of land use planning, policy, and implementation that are creating health and safety benefits. The Network will host a speaker series designed to attract diverse stakeholders to learn from the experience of others who have implemented practices that could translate well in LA. Groups that have done community-driven planning, citywide brownfield transformation, or equity-focused transportation investments are just a few examples of speakers that could showcase successes and create a roadmap of possibility among LA's land use, health, and policy practitioners.
 - Bring in guest speakers from New York City (active design guidelines, Vision Zero safety initiative), Pennsylvania (brownfield redevelopment), and Seattle (healthy planning work).
- C. Convening: A Collaborative Space for Cross-Sector, Citywide Learning.** There are some excellent collaborative groups already hard at work addressing land use in LA. Some have a specific geographic focus while others work across the city or county to address specific topics like park equity, affordable housing, or safe routes to school. The Network will provide a space for fostering and accelerating knowledge sharing across topics, disciplines, and neighborhoods; this will help galvanize locally-rooted perspectives on promoting healthy land use, particularly among organizations that are both community-oriented and politically savvy. Although many of the entities working on land use issues in LA have some level of familiarity with one another, the existing network is loose at best. The Network will convene these entities under a unified "big tent" to facilitate connectivity and elevate health and equity across the work of all.
 - Host one advisory group meeting and two Network convenings.
- D. Agenda Development: A Shared Advocacy Agenda that Reinforces Cross-Sector Wins.** Organizations across the city are steeped in the day-to-day technical and practical realities of advancing their particular land use objectives. This work is often topic- and/or neighborhood-

specific, and requires time, focus, and organizational investments. The Network will add value to these existing efforts by exploring and addressing challenges and opportunities that are common among groups working across Los Angeles; this could include issues such as directed funding in low-income communities and structural opportunities to elevate health and community engagement in the land use arena.

- Vet and finalize the Network policy platform.

This is an exciting time to be at the intersection of health, safety, sustainability, and land use in Los Angeles. Many important changes are afoot. The land use decisions and investments we make now will shape Angelenos' quality of life for decades to come. The Healthy, Equitable, Active Land Use Network will accelerate the pace of progress and innovation, most importantly by fostering cross-sector learning and implementation aimed at creating healthy change in all of our city's communities.

People Interviewed Regarding the Healthy, Equitable, Active Land Use Network

The concepts and strategies described above reflect findings from interviews with 40 experts working on issues related to land use in Los Angeles. Each of the interviewees expressed some interest in being involved with the conceptualization or implementation of the Healthy, Equitable, Active Land Use Network. See *Appendix A: Interviewees* for a full list of individuals and organizations interviewed.

Appendix A: Interviewees

Organization	Interviewee Name	Title	Selected Relevant Areas of Work
Advancement Project	Jamecca Marshall	Policy Manager	Violence prevention, community safety, safe passages
Alliance for a Better Community	Vanessa Esparza	Associate Director	Community development and health, joint use, schools
ACT-LA	Albert Lowe	Campaign Director	Transit, equity
Cal Poly Pomona, College of Environmental Design	Michael Woo	Dean	Academia, former Planning Commissioner
Chatten-Brown & Carstens	Doug Carstens	Managing Attorney	Environmental law
Civic Enterprise Associates, LLC	Mott Smith	Principal	Private sector real estate development
Community Arts Resources / CicLAvia	Aaron Paley	President, Co-founder/ Executive Director	Arts, cultural events, CicLAvia
Community Health Councils	Malcolm Carson	General Counsel & Policy Director	Nutrition, physical activity, built environment, health equity
East LA Community Corporation	Maria Cabildo	President	Community organizing, affordable housing development, asset building
Former Los Angeles City Councilmember	Ed Reyes	Former City Councilman District 1	LA River, land development, former City Councilmember
Independent Consultant	Don Spivack	Former Deputy Chief of Operations & Policy, CRA/LA	Clean Up Green Up, Quimby reform, LA River, former CRA/LA
LA River Revitalization Corporation	Omar Brownson	Executive Director	LA River revitalization, LA River Greenway 2020, anti-displacement
LAANE	Allison Mannos	Communications Specialist	Community and economic development, equity, mobility
LAANE	Frank Alvarez	Senior Community Organizer	Community and economic development, equity
Leadership for Urban Renewal Network	Rudy Espinoza	Executive Director	Entrepreneurship, legalizing street vending, venture capital
Linear City Development, LLC	Yuval Bar-Zemer	Manager	Private sector real estate development, adaptive reuse
Los Angeles County Bicycle Coalition	Eric Bruins	Planning & Policy Director	Cycling, transportation finance
Los Angeles County Bicycle Coalition	Shannon Muir	Active Streets L.A. Initiative Coordinator	Cycling
Los Angeles Food Policy Council	Paula Daniels	Senior Advisor	Food, underutilized spaces
Los Angeles Neighborhood Land Trust	Alina Bokde	Executive Director	Neighborhood park/garden development, community organizing, operations and policy advocacy, Quimby policy
Los Angeles Walks	Deborah Murphy	Founder/ Executive Director	Walkability, pedestrian safety and advocacy

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Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority	Paul Edelman	Chief of Natural Resources and Planning	Open space conservation
Move LA	Beth Steckler	Deputy Director	Transit system expansion and financing, TOD and displacement, affordable housing, redevelopment
Occidental College	Regina Freer	Professor	Academia, former Planning Commissioner
Occidental College, Urban & Environmental Policy Institute	Mark Vallianatos	Adjunct Instructor/ Policy Director	Academia, zoning reform and land use, climate change, food, transportation, equity
Office of Supervisor Mark Ridley Thomas	Karly Katona	Assistant Senior Deputy for Environmental Sustainability	Built environment and health
PolicyLink	Enrique Velazquez	Program Associate	Affordable housing, transportation, economic development, jobs
RAC design build	Daveed Kapoor	Architect	Architecture, design
Raimi + Associates	Elizabeth Carvajal	Urban Planning and Public Health Specialist	General Plan Health & Wellness Element
Roschen Van Cleve Architects	Bill Roschen	Founding Principal	Architecture, former Planning Commissioner
Ryan Snyder Associates	Ryan Snyder	President	Transportation
Strategic Concepts in Organizing and Policy Education	Elsa Barboza	Campaign Director	Social and economic justice
The City Project	Ramya Sivasubramanian	Assistant Director and Counsel	Quimby reform, LA River, LAUSD physical education implementation, Health Impact Assessment, equity
The George Crenshaw Development Project	Dan Rosenfeld	President	TOD, community engagement, real estate development
The Trust for Public Land	Tori Kjer	Project Manager	Parks and open space development, green alleyways
TRUST South LA	Tafarai Bayne	Mobility & Recreation Program Director	Community and economic development in South LA, mobility
UCLA Fielding School of Public Health, Department of Environmental Health Sciences	Richard Jackson	Chair and Professor	Academia, built environment and health
UCLA Luskin School of Public Affairs, Department of Urban Planning	Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris	Associate Dean and Professor	Academia, public spaces, safety, complete streets
USC Program for Environmental and Regional Equity	Jennifer Ito	Project Manager	Transportation, equity, regional development, just growth
Urban Land Institute	Gail Goldberg	Executive Director	Real estate development, former City Planning Director