

San Jose General Plan - Public Draft
Health Policy Recommendations
November 2010

Introduction

The San Jose Draft General Plan (the Plan) offers an important opportunity to improve current and future residents' health by establishing within the plan health-related goals, objectives, and policies, and measurable implementation actions. Public Health Law & Policy (PHLP) has reviewed the draft plan and has compiled a set of key health recommendations (in particular, opportunities to strengthen policies and tie them to implementation strategies) for consideration in developing a final adopted plan, based on priorities developed by the Great Communities Collaborative (GCC). This memo is organized by these community health priorities, which are:

- Increasing walkability and bikeability and encouraging mode-shift to transit and active transportation
- Improving health through transit oriented development (TOD), with a special focus on the Berryessa and Diridon stations
- Improving access to parks, trails, and open space
- Increasing access to healthy foods

In particular, GCC is interested in how land use policies can promote healthy equity, including supporting access to health-supportive infrastructure by aging populations and children. Draft elements of the Plan reviewed by PHLP were:

- Chapter 1: Envision San Jose
- Chapter 2. Thriving Community
 - *Diverse and Innovative Economy*
- Chapter 4. Quality of Life
- Chapter 5. Land Use & Transportation

Overall, the Plan includes a number of draft goals, policies and strategies on issues that positively impact community health, such as: affordable housing; strategic infill and dense development; transportation and consideration of multi-modal transportation options; access to healthy foods; and access to parks, greenways, and open space. We commend San Jose for creating a vision of a healthy community that is well-integrated and reinforced throughout the plan. The draft Plan represents one of the strongest land use policy statements on healthy communities that we are aware of in California to-date, and we encourage San Jose's decisionmakers and key stakeholders to support the following core elements of the draft in the adopted plan:

1. **Commit to a broad perspective on health and healthy communities as a guiding principle** throughout the various elements of the Plan. Incorporating health language reinforces the community's commitment to considering and ultimately improving health outcomes in all decisions made.
2. **Ensure the plan's healthy community goals are supported by specific policies and implementation/action items.** Overall, the current draft does an excellent job of identifying clear and specific goals, policies, and objectives. Adopting a plan with such a clear and specific policy framework will go far to ensure that San Jose's vision for a healthy community becomes a reality.

PHLP has included in this memo both suggested policy language and general recommendations to strengthen the Plan's health promotion potential. We also encourage the GCC to participate in those implementation steps laid out in the plan (such as developing pedestrian, bicycle, and transit Level of Service standards, TR-1.14) that will be undertaken by San Jose over the coming years.

Increasing walkability and bikability, and encouraging a mode-shift to active transportation

Creating environments that encourage walking, bicycling, and transit use (all forms of active transportation) are key strategies to improve health. Increased physical activity reduces risk for many chronic diseases, such as obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, some cancers, and mental illnesses such as depression. By replacing automobile trips with walking, bicycling, and transit, noxious air pollutants and greenhouse gases produced by private automobile trips are reduced. Furthermore, relative to personal automobile ownership, walking, bicycling, and transit are more affordable travel modes, reserving more disposable income for other household needs, such as housing, healthy food and healthcare.

The Plan includes excellent policies that promote walking and bicycling, which should be maintained in the adopted San Jose General Plan:

- Acknowledging the important benefits of walkable neighborhoods, including improved health of residents, and improved safety with more “eyes on the street” (CD-5).
- Promoting walkability and bikeability in the downtown area, commercial corridors and villages (CD-6, CD-7)
- Establishing a connected network of bicycle and pedestrian facilities throughout the city, while simultaneously discouraging development patterns that reduce connectivity (such as cul de sacs and gated developments; CD-2, CD-3).
- Planning for dense, mixed use developments around transit stations, downtown, neighborhood villages and commercial areas, which promote walking and bicycling trips, and walking or bicycling to and from transit for longer trips (CD-2.10, CD-3, CD-6.1, CD-7.1).
- Encouraging neighborhood commercial services in order to improve non-motorized trips to services; and highlighting the importance of walkable access to services and retail for aging adults (H-1.3, H-1.4).
- Providing bicycle and pedestrian access to trails within a three mile radius of all homes, and improving bicycle and pedestrian connectivity to parks and open space (TN-2, PR-1.11).
- Requiring that new developments provide bicycle and pedestrian facilities and enhance access (TR-2.8).
- Promoting bicycle and pedestrian access to schools and transit in order to facilitate mode shift away from private automobiles (TN-2.10, VN-1.1, CD-3.2, CD-3.4, ES-1.6).
- Encouraging school siting located close to populations served, thus increasing the number of students that benefit from walking and bicycling to school (ES-1.3, VN-1.1).
- Requiring large employers and the City of San Jose to develop Transportation Demand Management (TDM) programs, including parking pricing and transit subsidies, which encourages employees to shift their commute from driving to bicycling, walking and transit (TR-7.1, TR-7.2, TR-7.3).

- Intelligent Transportation Systems strategies including bicycle friendly streets that prioritize signals for bicyclists and provide other services and technologies to facilitate bicycling on these streets (TR-12).
- Explicitly investing in transportation improvements that reduce vehicle travel (TR-1.4, TR-1.5, TR-2, TR-9.9).

In order to further support walking and bicycling, we recommend that the Plan include the following additional policies:

- Ensure that bicycle and pedestrian facilities are prioritized in low-income communities, which are less likely to have access to a private automobile, and thus more likely to be dependent on walking and bicycling for transportation.
- Adopting more specific and deliberate action items. Replace words like, “encourage,” “consider,” and “recommend” with words like “require,” in order to adopt enforceable policies (TN-2.6, 2.7, CD-2.1, CD-3.8, CD-3.11, CD-11.4, CD-8.2).
 - Specifically, use the term “require,” rather than “consider,” that parking requirements in downtown areas are reduced.
 - Similarly, remove “consider” allowing secondary units, such as granny flats, in residential areas, and simply “allow” granny flats in residential areas to ensure residential densities support transit service and increase demand for neighborhood services, which, along with bicycle and pedestrian facilities, result in more walkable and bikeable communities (CD-8.2).
- New commercial developments are required to provide safe access for bicyclists and pedestrians, as well as including design features that encourage physical activity *inside* the building (open, inviting, and unlocked stairwells, etc.). This requirement should extend to *all* commercial developments (LU-5.4).
- Specifically state the need to identify bicycle routes in hillside/rural preservation zones. Bicycle routes help direct bicyclists to safe roads (CD-9).
- Require bike lanes, or if not feasible, bike sharrows (a visual indicator on the pavement that signals to drivers that the road is shared with bicyclists), on scenic routes. The current language only refers to automobile traffic; however, scenic routes will likely attract bicyclists, and should protect their safety (CD-11).

Improving health through transit oriented development (TOD)

Transit oriented developments (TOD) improve health in numerous ways. The dense, mixed use development characteristic of TOD is one of the most important features of walkable and bikeable communities. TOD reduces the need for personal automobile ownership and associated negative health and environmental externalities (like pollution) since transit and services are readily available. As more trips are taken by foot, bicycle, or mass transit, the number of automobiles on the road is reduced, improving air quality and safety for non-motorized travelers. And, by reducing automobile ownership expenses, households have more disposable income to spend on health-promoting goods and services, such as housing, healthy food and healthcare.

The Plan supports TOD by:

- Planning for intensification of employment and residential uses around the future Berryessa BART station (LU-2.5).
- Directing new development near transit, including schools, parks, bicycle and pedestrian trails, commercial areas, and other services (IE-1.5, IE-1.6, CD-6.8, CD-8.3, H-3.2, PR-7.3, LU-1.5, LU-9.13, LU-10, TR-3).
- Explicitly recognizing the importance of density for transit ridership, and encouraging compact development in growth areas (CD-2.10).
- Planning for high density, residential and mixed-use development in growth areas that “maximizes transit usage” (H-3.2) and “reduce auto dependency” (H-4.2) while also considering access to other elements of healthy developments, such as access to open space, bicycle and pedestrian facilities, and retail services. The Plan also acknowledges the importance of integrating higher density development with the surrounding neighborhood (CD-7.1).
- Promoting public transit use through collaboration with transit agencies and other key agencies, and through land use decisions that support transit (CD-6.8, CD-8.3, H-3.2, LU-1.5, LU-10, TR-2.9, VN-3.2).

The Plan can further support TOD by including policies that:

- Explicitly encourage and incentivize (through density bonuses or other strategies) grocery stores that sell fresh produce in transit oriented developments.
- Implement parking demand management for development near transit in order to promote substantial transit ridership and ensure that transit users can walk or bike safely to transit hubs.
 - Rather than, “consider support for,” the City should support “reduced parking requirements, alternative parking arrangements, and Transportation Demand Management strategies...” (CD-2.1).
- Work with BART to reduce parking spaces around planned BART stations, and encourage ground level neighborhood-serving shops (such as a grocery store, dry cleaner, and other services) near parking structures to promote economic development of the area, and reduce the need for drivers to take additional automobile trips.

- Explicitly plan for the intensification of mixed-use developments around all planned BART stations, not only the Berryessa BART station (LU-2.5).
- Encourage higher density in residential areas in order to support transit ridership. Higher density, low-impact development, such as secondary units or “granny flats,” can complement, rather than disrupt, established neighborhood patterns (CD-8.2, CD-8.3).
- Prioritizing low-income areas for transit investments and growth. Low-income residents are less likely to have access to an automobile, and thus more likely to rely on transit. Reliable public transit can connect residents with employment and economic opportunities, while also fostering economic growth and opportunities at transit hubs within low-income areas.

Improving access to parks, trails, and open space

Parks, trails, and open spaces have multiple community benefits, including mental and physical health benefits of increased access to recreation, such as creating safe, attractive places for play and physical activity, improving social connections among neighbors and community residents, and providing commuters with bikeways and trails that are separated from traffic and associated noise, air pollution and hazards.

The Plan provides excellent goals, policies and actions that promote equitable access to parks, trails and open space. These include:

- Setting discrete acreage targets for parkland per capita (7.5 acres per 1000 population; PR-1.1, PR-1.2)
- Drawing specific attention to the potential of parks and urban spaces to be community focal points and places for interaction, such as festivals, events, and farmers' markets (PR-1.7).
- Acknowledging the potential for school grounds to provide recreation opportunities to the community through shared use or joint use agreements (PR-1.1, PR-8.10).
- Developing an interconnected system of parks, trails and bicycle paths that will increase access to parks for all residents (PR-6.6, PR-7).
- Acknowledging the importance of parks in creating a “healthy city,” including mental and physical health (PR-2.10), and more specifically, access to healthy food and exercise through community gardens (PR-2.1).
- Encouraging the use of underutilized right-of-way as parks, including land adjacent to creeks (CD-1.23).
- Designing parks to promote safety and crime prevention (PR-2.7).
- Prioritizes park and recreation resources in lower income and higher density areas (PR-3).

Opportunities for improving access to parks and open space could be improved by including the following policies:

- Unlocking private parks for all residents to enjoy.
- Adopt park “Level of Service” standards that address size, facilities, programming and maintenance as an enhancement to park and open space acreage targets.
- Ensure that Parkland Dedication and Park Impact Ordinances are not creating disparities in access to parks by requiring park development be public and encouraging mixed-income residential development (PR-2.4, PR-2.5).
 - As currently stated, funds generated through these ordinances must be used within $\frac{3}{4}$ miles of new residential development for “neighborhood serving elements” (playgrounds, basketball courts) and within 3-miles of the generating development for “community serving elements” (larger fields and parks). While such impact fees are important in ensuring that new development pays for needed parks and open space, these parks may be private, providing access only to residents of the new development. This policy contradicts other policies in the Plan that commit San Jose to provide equitable access to all recreation facilities.

- Before August 2010, developments in low-income communities were not subject to these fees, thus generating no supplemental park funding. In August 2010, City Council approved a 50% fee for development in low-income communities.¹ By requiring that the fees stay with a $\frac{3}{4}$ to 3-mile radius of development, low-income communities may remain permanently at a disadvantage in terms of equal access to parks and open space (PR-2.4, PR-2.5).
- Explicitly state the need to engage in joint-use agreement with schools in order to open school grounds and recreational facilities to the community after school hours. This will help meet the goal of providing “2.0 acres of recreational school grounds open to the public per 1,000 San Jose residents” (PR-1.1).
- Commit to an inventory of current park and open space acreage, locations, maintenance, and facilities in order to identify neighborhoods with low, moderate, and high access to parks and open space as well as prioritize new park needs.
- Substantially increase the number of community garden plots available to residents. PHLP’s recent *Santa Clara Healthy Food Resource Assessment* discovered that there are 737 San Jose residents on a waitlist for a community garden plot. For more information on access to community gardens in San Jose, see www.thehealthtrust.org/foodaccess.

¹ San Jose City Council. August 2, 2010. Revised Park Dedication Ordinance/Park Impact Ordinance. http://www.sanjoseca.gov/clerk/Agenda/20100824/20100824_0401.pdf

Increasing access to healthy foods

Access to healthy, affordable, culturally-appropriate foods and the opportunity to eat a healthy diet is one of the prerequisites of a healthy community. Unfortunately, many communities, especially low-income communities, have very limited access to healthy food and an overabundance of cheap unhealthy food. Creating and implement policies that increase access to affordable healthy food is critical to ensuring that all San Jose residents have to ability to lead healthy lives.

Currently, the Plan includes a range of policies to increase access to healthy food for all residents with an approach that targets a variety of healthy food venues. The following strategies should be included in the adopted Plan:

- Working collaboratively with the Public Health Department to measure and locate nutrition deficient neighborhoods, assessing healthy food access relative to unhealthy food access (VN-3.6, VN-3.7).
- Explicitly targeting low-income and nutrition deficient neighborhoods for grocery store and produce market development with economic incentives (VN-3.8).
- Providing grants and incentives for healthy corner store conversions in nutrition deficient neighborhoods (VN-3.9).
- Collaborating with the Valley Transportation Authority to ensure that public transit connects residents to grocery stores (VN-3.2).
- Allowing farmers' markets on public land (VN-3.10).
- Supporting partnerships between school districts and non-profits to connect students to community gardens (PR-2.9).
- Encouraging urban agriculture by encouraging edible landscaping on residential, commercial and public developments (VN-3.11, LU-15.7, LU-15.8); updating the Zoning Ordinance to allow community gardens and incidental gardening as a permitted use (LU-15.11); expanding nutrition deficient communities' access to community gardens (LU-15.1, LU-15.2, LU-15.9, PR-2.8).
- Preserving local agriculture land, and advocating for agricultural land preservation policies (LU-15.3, LU-15.6).
- Promoting local agriculture by allowing farm stands, agricultural tourism, and processing of agricultural products, while discouraging chemical and pesticide use (LU-17.5, LU-17.6).

The Plan could further improve access to healthy food by including policies that:

- Commit to identifying a new, affordable and accessible location for the Berryessa Flea Market produce vendors, such as within the planned mixed use development around the future Berryessa BART station.
- Establish requirements and offer support for farmers' markets to accept EBT, Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP), and the WIC Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (WIC FMNP) in order increase affordability to residents, in addition to promoting the establishment of farmers' markets in low-income neighborhoods.

- Identify steps for substantially increasing community garden plots, and create an urban agriculture master plan for San Jose. PHLP’s recent *Santa Clara Healthy Food Resource Assessment* discovered that there are 737 San Jose residents on a waitlist for a community garden plot. For more information on access to community gardens in San Jose, see www.thehealthtrust.org/foodaccess.
- Language such as “Explore limiting the number of fast food restaurants located near schools” (VN 3.12) should be replaced with precise, direct language, such as “restrict new fast food restaurant development within ¼ mile of schools,” in order to ensure kids have healthy food environments both inside and outside of school.
- Encourage community supported agriculture (CSA) by offering public land as drop off points, especially in nutrient deficient and low-income communities.
- Acknowledge the livestock sector’s demand for resources, energy use, and generation of ground water contamination, and develop incentives (such as tax breaks) to farmers who transition to low-impact, sustainable growing practices.