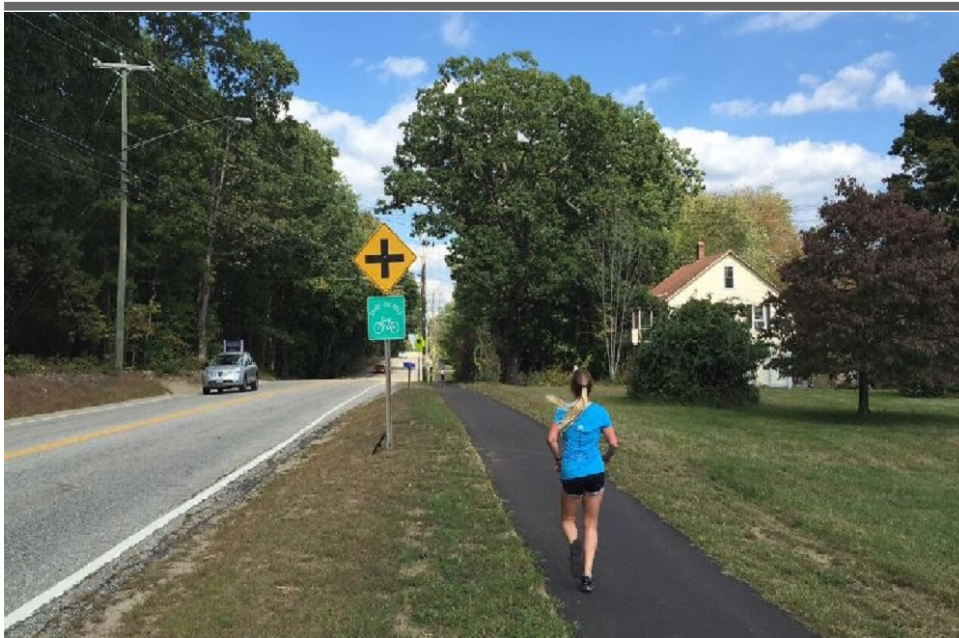


Plan4Health: Eastern Highlands Health District Community Health Action Response Team Eastern Highlands, CT

SUMMARY

Plan4Health connects communities across the country, funding work at the intersection of planning and public health. Anchored by American Planning Association (APA) Chapters and American Public Health Association (APHA) Affiliates, Plan4Health supports creative partnerships to build sustainable, cross-sector coalitions. Launched in 2010, the Eastern Highlands Health District (EHHD) Community Health Action Response Team (CHART), has focused on environmental health and policy change among the 10 towns served by the EHHD. Strategies include assessing zoning policies and codes that have inhibited active transportation and developing a rural community toolkit.



CHALLENGE

The 10-town territory is rich in natural beauty and its many multi-use trails and public parks offer abundant opportunities for “pack and go” activities. Home-based vegetable gardening, animal husbandry, and walking and biking on the rural side streets are enjoyed by many residents in the 10 towns. However, for those residents who live on busy rural routes, walking on the road is not a safe option and cycling can be dangerous due to high-speed traffic,

narrow road widths and the absence of a striped bicycle shoulder. Additionally, 9 out of 10 towns do not have a pedestrian-friendly village center. Bicycle racks and pocket parks are practically non-existent in most towns and sidewalks that lead to schools and popular community destinations are rare. Small housing developments on cul-de-sacs are beginning to fragment the countryside and are situated far from grocery stores, schools, libraries and other amenities.

YOUR INVOLVEMENT IS KEY

If you live in Eastern Connecticut, connect with your local planning and zoning commission, attend meetings and share your ideas for making your community more playful, walkable and bikable! Follow CHART on social media and the project Facebook page at www.facebook.com/ehhdchart. To learn more about CHART and all coalitions participating in Plan4Health, check out the project website (www.plan4health.us) and join the national conversation at the intersection of planning and public health on social media by using and following #plan4health.

"I love the PZC toolkit idea. If commissioners understand that [planning for walking, biking and playing] is an issue important to the larger community, they are going to be more likely to support it. Some Planning and Zoning Commission members feel that their primary role is regulatory and don't appreciate the value of their planning function."

- Local PZC Member

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SOLUTION

CHART is dedicated to increasing the number of Planning and Zoning Commissioners (PZCs) and Health District staff and partners who believe they are equipped with the tools and resources they need to increase opportunities for biking, walking and playing in their communities. The toolkit will also help residents understand the planning and zoning process and encourage them to attend public meetings and/or seek a position on the PZC as a means of creating positive change in the built environment. Working with a range of organizations represented on the coalition—children’s advocates, town representatives from all key areas, planners and public health professionals—the development of a toolkit will be rooted in the experiences and needs of community members.

RESULTS

CHART launched its project with a combination of key informant interviews and focus groups. The coalition diligently catalogued the experiences of local PZCs in the 10-town district through qualitative analysis. Rooting the initial development of the toolkit in interviews clarified the local perception of planning and public health - and highlighted the opportunities for expanding the shared understanding of how the built environment is able to shape biking, walking and playing opportunities. Even in this initial project period, the partnership between planners and public health professionals has been strengthened: five planners have joined the CHART coalition, excited about the possibilities of improving both the built environment and public health.

SUSTAINING SUCCESS

Strong community engagement will continue, particularly after the publication of the toolkit. In addition to the communications plan that involves all residents of the 10-town territory, the toolkit will be released with accompanying workshops and educational opportunities. CHART is committed to making the toolkit a living, useful document that reflects the needs of community members for today—and the vision for tomorrow.

Plan4Health is made possible with funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The views expressed in this newsletter do not necessarily reflect the official policies of the CDC or imply endorsement by the U.S. Government. Learn more about Plan4Health and the National Implementation and Dissemination for Chronic Disease Prevention project at www.cdc.gov/communityhealth.