



Making Health Our Own NEWSLETTER

SUMMER 2008



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FEATURED NON-PROFIT: COMMON THREADS FARM



**Common Threads Farm pro-
motes thoughtful engagement
in sustainable food and energy,
primarily by providing seed-to-
table and seed-to-market edu-
cational programs for youth,
as well as—workshops on a
variety of sustainability-
focused themes for adults and
families. Visit them at their
website at:**

www.commonthreadsfarm.org

COMPREHENSIVE HEALTH PLAN STEP 1 COMPLETED: What We've Learned and Where We Go From Here

We now have a 113-page document that summarizes the seven months of public input obtained in Step 1 of the development of our Comprehensive Health Plan for Whatcom County. This document is available in pdf version on the Health Department's CHP website at: <http://www.co.whatcom.wa.us/health/wcchp.jsp>

Also, if you visit the CHP website you will find a CHP Vision Map that more succinctly summarizes what we've learned. This map shows where we want to go and what we want to see in the years to come.

When the public input process began, we were focused on understanding the issues that impact the health of Whatcom County residents. However, as the process began to unfold we saw a shift from merely identifying issues and problems to creating a vision for health in Whatcom.

The summary document and Vision



Council Member Ward
Nelson opens first public
forum March 19, 2008.

Map, therefore, focus first and foremost on our vision for a healthy Whatcom County. Identified issues/barriers are then organized under the vision statements in the larger summary document.

Likewise, we started with four topics and ended up with four health topics plus an underlying topic that impacts all four health topics. This fifth topic is "Social and Economic Determinants of Health" because without such things as affordable housing, social

justice, and livable incomes (to name a few), it is much less likely that visions for health can be achieved.

Step 2 of the Comprehensive Health Planning process has now begun and the Health Board and Public Health Advisory Board are both contributing guidance as we move forward. As a first step, we are convening to consider the possibility of holding a Future Search Conference later this year.



“Dependence on the automobile for almost all travel has contributed to air pollution, threatening respiratory health, and increased the risk of injuries among drivers, passengers, and pedestrians. With less walking and bicycling, sedentary lifestyles contribute to epidemics in obesity, diabetes, and associated diseases. Sprawl can compromise water quantity and quality, which are essential for public health.”

Howard Frumkin, Lawrence Frank, and Richard Jackson from *Urban Sprawl and Public Health: Designing, Planning, and Building for Healthy Communities (2004)*



The risk of dying from a motor vehicle accident is 1 in 90

The risk of dying from an airplane crash is 1 in 30,000



HEALTH ISSUES OF THE MONTH: Health & The Built Environment

The beginning of the 21st Century has seen an explosion of criticism aimed at urban design features crafted during the mid-to-late 20th Century. Every week it seems that yet another study decries the impacts of our auto-dependent culture on everything from escalating obesity rates in U.S. children to earth-wide global warming.

The ever-present, resource-guzzling auto has locked us into community designs that foster machine-focused transport and disease rather than people-generated propulsion and health.

In 2001, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services re-

leased *“Healthy People in Healthy Communities”* a document to accompany the government’s new Healthy People 2010 goals. This toolkit contained definitions of a healthy community. One of those definitions is: *“A healthy community has roads, schools, playgrounds, and other services to meet the needs of the people in that community.”*

This type of infrastructure includes many of the items mentioned frequently during the CHP public input process: safe routes to school, more trails, more bicycle lanes, more multi-purpose trails, more playgrounds, more

neighborhood parks, and the preservation of agricultural lands and natural environments that make Whatcom such a special place to work and play.

The volume of input we received on the topic of health and the built environment (see below) was instrumental in the choice of the topic for our upcoming Future Search Conference. Also, it is a natural fit with the on-going Health People/Health Places work of our partner, the Whatcom Coalition for Healthy Communities.

Basically, it appears that the time is ripe for action.

CHP Public Comment Regarding Health and the Built Environment

The following is a smattering of paraphrased comments obtained during our public input process that pertain specifically to health and the built environment:

- * Opportunities need to be created for people to live close to work.
- * Full recreational opportunities should be available to individuals with disabilities.
- * Technologies, such as wind power and other alternative energy sources, have fewer impacts on the environment.
- * Currently, health impact analyses are not part of formal land use planning processes.
- * A built environment is needed that supports healthy lifestyles.
- * Cluster services near residences to encourage “active” transportation (walking, biking, etc.)
- * Healthy choices should be easy choices and choices that are encouraged by community design.
- * Design is an essential feature in creating strong communities; strong communities create strong bonds and better mental health.
- * Concentrating populations in urban centers increases the cost-effectiveness of service delivery, such as EMT services. These services are much more costly when the population is spread out.
- * Currently, in the East County it is generally impractical to bike.
- * Better public transit services are needed, especially to link rural areas to avoid rural isolation.
- * Children need safe routes to walk or bike to school.
- * Roads/sidewalk design and bike lanes should be created to separate foot and cycle traffic from road traffic.
- * The current built environment does not adequately support population health; communities should be built for walking/biking access patterned after eco-cities.
- * Parks and green space are needed in every community.
- * Preserve natural habitat and open spaces.