Health and the Built Environment

Presentation to the Childhood Obesity Conference

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The built environment strongly influences physical and mental health. It can enable and encourage or inhibit and discourage active, healthy lifestyles.

How can communities create built environments that enable and encourage people of all ages and physical abilities to lead active, healthy lifestyles?
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Mix land uses and provide frequent street connections

Enable and encourage people to make walking and bicycling trips by mixing land uses and providing convenient routes to these land uses through the provision of frequent street/sidewalk connections.

Variety, density, and access also enhance transit service.
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Healthy neighborhood indicator: neighborhood-oriented commercial activity.

Allow and encourage the development of small commercial nodes that can serve neighborhoods (and regions).

Neighborhood commercial nodes provide places for people to casually interact and encourage people to walk or bike to their destinations.
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Require bicycle- and pedestrian-friendly site designs

...and not-so-pedestrian-friendly grocery store placement.

Pedestrian-friendly grocery store placement...
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Require direct walkway connections between buildings and sidewalks

Pedestrian and parking areas are separated.

Just about right, but pedestrians still have to walk through parking area to reach the building.
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Develop a continuous sidewalk network

Gap-free sidewalk networks can be used by everyone throughout the year...

…but even brief sidewalk gaps can be tremendous barriers for elderly, disabled, and other network users.
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Develop well-connected street systems

Grid Pattern Streets  Conventional Street Pattern

Same Lane-Miles

Greater Capacity and Connectivity

Provide bicycle and pedestrian connections when cul-de-sacs are necessary
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Establish convenient access between developments

Communities should establish public rights-of-way between lots for multi-use paths that connect to neighboring subdivisions, schools, parks, and other destinations.
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Calm traffic and minimize pedestrian exposure to vehicles

Refuge islands calm traffic and allow people to cross one direction of traffic at a time.

Bump-outs define driving lanes, calm traffic, and provide shorter pedestrian crossing distances.
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Build narrow collector and neighborhood streets to encourage people to drive slowly, minimize pedestrian exposure to traffic, and offer a pleasant pedestrian environment.
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Avoid constructing multi-lane arterial streets

Instead of building multi-lane arterial streets, communities should build a system of two-lane arterial boulevards (or three-lane arterial streets) that are complemented by an interconnected collector and local street system, mixed land uses, and efficient traffic control techniques at intersections.
Lawrence Drive in De Pere
Chicago Street in De Pere
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Create safe and accessible intersections

Communities should utilize street design techniques that reduce vehicle speeds, minimize the possibility of conflicts, and enhance traveler awareness to maximize pedestrian, bicyclist, and motorist safety and accessibility at intersections. Techniques that should be used include roundabouts, curb extensions at intersections, and other street design features.

Cardinal Lane/Lineville Road intersection in Howard

Chicago Street/Swan Road intersection in De Pere
Example:
What we have on Lineville Road vs.
What we almost had on Lineville Road
What we have on Lineville Road...
...and what we almost had.
What we have...
...and what we almost had.
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**Bottom Line:** The built environment can encourage or discourage healthy lifestyles.

**Institutional Barriers:** Local codes/policies (zoning, building, street design, sidewalk, etc.).

“Smart Growth”, Safe Routes to School, and other plans are blueprints for the creation of communities that enable and encourage people to engage in healthy activities.
Want more information?

Check out our website

www.co.brown.wi.us/planning
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