

PLANNING FOR HEALTH & WALKABILITY IN SMALL COMMUNITIES

Jean Crowther, Ian Sansom, Aileen Daney
638 E. Washington Street, Greenville, SC 29601
864.205.5650
jeancrowther@altaplanning.com

Through a recent grant from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC) is leading an effort to increase pedestrian planning efforts occurring in South Carolina. The effort is part of the DHEC SC Prevention and Health Across Systems and Environments (PHASE) Pedestrian Planning Project. SC PHASE Pedestrian Planning is a 3 year project in which Alta Planning + Design (Alta) will develop a pedestrian-focused master plan, neighborhood/area plan, or implementation plan for 16 communities in specific counties in the state. Beyond the basic tenets of walkability and pedestrian safety, key elements of the program initiative are: 1) equity-based planning 2) community engagement and 3) safe pedestrian access to healthy foods.

DHEC's Division of Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Obesity (DNPAO) is leading the initiative. The division recognizes the critical need to address both sides of the equation, when it comes to behavioral strategies for obesity prevention: physical activity and healthy eating. With that in mind, the program is designed to leverage efforts in both realms. The scope of each community pedestrian plan includes a "Healthy Food Access Analysis" which offers a GIS-based analysis of outlets for healthy foods and the pedestrian environment around them. By examining the "walk-shed" surrounding grocery stores, farmers markets, community gardens, and similar healthy food outlets, in conjunction with an analysis of the community's most vulnerable populations (such as Non English speaking populations, low-income levels, poverty levels, or limited access to vehicles), this pedestrian planning tool can identify safety needs in areas where community members are most likely to rely on walking trips to access foods. The tool can identify potential pedestrian improvements, as well as help prioritize community investments in walkability.

The SC PHASE Pedestrian Planning Project is also pioneering targeted, equity-oriented community engagement strategies. The outreach programming is focused on reaching the community members most reliant on active transportation and transit and empowering those community members within the decision-making process. This includes creative ways of attracting a broader audience at public events, partnering with HYPE (Healthy Young People Empowerment Project), engaging special needs populations, generating grassroots solutions for existing trails/sidewalks that do not feel safe (in terms of crime), and other approaches.

This paper explores the purpose and process behind SC DHEC's program to develop pedestrian plans for 16 SC communities, the largest of which is under 40,000 population and most of which fall in the realm of 3,000 to 15,000 in population. The paper provides detailed explanations of the unique health-focused planning tools and the equity-focused outreach strategies used in this effort, as well as an evaluation of the effectiveness of these tools.