

February 18, 2009

Councilmember Charleta Tavares
90 W. Broad Street
Second Floor
Columbus, OH 43215

Dear Councilmember Tavares,

The Columbus Public Health Healthy Places program has a mission to increase healthy and active living by establishing development policies and practices to reduce negative health impacts and by creating places that foster physical activity as a part of everyday life. Neighborhood plans are a key component to ensuring the future built environment includes active living features through pedestrian and bicycle amenities, infrastructure and design.

This letter is to express Columbus Public Health's support for the Southwest Area Plan. This plan is tentatively scheduled for a second reading on March 2, 2009. The Healthy Places program has reviewed the plan for opportunities for active living in everyday life. The Southwest area currently has a very car dependent development pattern, in some areas walking or biking is not even safe. The Southwest Area Plan addresses these issues and moves the area towards development where residents will have accessible recreation, employment, transit and retail options without a car.

Active living is important to Columbus Public Health for multiple reasons. First, there is an increase in obesity and chronic diseases- both of which can be reduced or prevented with physical activity. Second, an active living lifestyle means people are driving their cars less. This improves air quality which is good for everyone, but especially for those with respiratory diseases. In addition, as we improve infrastructure for pedestrians and cyclists we make the built environment safer and therefore reduce injuries and fatalities. Finally, while we want everyone to adopt an active living lifestyle by choice, for some there is not an option. Improvements to make it easier to walk, bike and use public transportation also make it easier and safer for those residents who do not have access to a car.

Southwest area statistics show just over half of Southwest residents report getting the recommended amount of physical activity (30 minutes of moderate activity on five or more days of the week). However, prevalence for overweight and obesity (69.2%), and diabetes (10.4%) as well as asthma (13.0%) are higher than the prevalence in Franklin County (59.1%, 8.0%, and 7.3% respectively). The ability to be physically active in your neighborhood reduces the need for a car and increases physical activity and air quality.

240 Parsons Avenue
Columbus, Ohio 43215-5331

Teresa C. Long, MD, MPH
Health Commissioner

BOARD of HEALTH

Mayor Michael B. Coleman, *President Ex-Officio*
John H. Boxill
Karen J. Morrison, JD, MS

Augustus G. Parker III, MD
Martin S. Seltzer, JD, PhD
Mary Ellen Wewers, PhD, MPH

Phone: (614) 645-7417
Fax: (614) 645-7633
TDD: (614) 645-7041

health@columbus.gov
www.publichealth.columbus.gov

The Southwest Area Plan promotes walking, biking and public transit use by recommending the following:

- Franklin County Children Services site will become pedestrian/bike friendly and directly connect to adjacent neighborhoods and on-site uses will connect to each other.
- Residential development will contribute to healthy lifestyles with features such as sidewalks, bike paths, open space and front porches which encourage social interaction and have been shown to increase physical activity.
- New commercial and mixed-use development has a pedestrian and cyclist focus including pedestrian paths from the public sidewalk to the building.
- Bike and pedestrian access for industrial development, where feasible, to promote alternative forms of transportation for employees.
- Recommendations for opportunities to use public transit including pedestrian access to transit stops and bus stops in neighborhoods. Americans who use transit spend an average of 19 minutes walking to and from transit each day.
- Sidewalks are recommended to be five feet wide which has been shown to provide a more comfortable walking environment.
- The Regional and Community Overlay designations are recommended for the main thoroughfares. The Overlays provide for pedestrian and bike infrastructure.
- Road improvements consistent with Complete Streets as well as high pedestrian use crosswalks that are well marked with alternative pavement material or texturized sidewalks make the road safer for pedestrians and cyclists.

The Southwest Area Plan was written with significant community input. From the health perspective, it is encouraging that Southwest area residents want an active living environment in their community.

I look forward to seeing this plan come to fruition and making Columbus even more of an active, vibrant city.

Sincerely,

Christine G. Green
Healthy Places Coordinator

cc: Dr. Teresa Long, Health Commissioner, Columbus Public Health
Vince Papsidero, Administrator, Planning Division, Department of Development