

April 19, 2012

Councilmember Zachary M. Klein
90 W. Broad Street
Second Floor
Columbus, OH 43215

Dear Councilmember Klein,

The Columbus Public Health Healthy Places Program has a mission to increase healthy and active living by establishing development policies and practices that 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 East Columbus Area Plan. This plan is tentatively scheduled for a second reading on April 23, 2012. The Healthy Places program has reviewed the plan and found several positive and innovative development principles, guidelines and strategies that support a built environment for safe and active living.

Active living is important to Columbus Public Health for a number of 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 lifestyle means people are driving their cars less. This improves air quality which is good for everyone, but especially for those with respiratory diseases. Additionally, as we improve infrastructure for pedestrians and cyclists, we make the built environment safer, therefore reducing injuries and fatalities. Finally, while we want everyone to adopt an active living lifestyle by choice, for some there is no other 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, thereby improving health equity in our community.

The East Columbus neighborhood statistics show 60% of neighborhood adults are obese or overweight and 7.3% have diabetes. The prevalence is consistent with totals for Franklin County which are 59.1% and 7.3%, respectively. The asthma prevalence for the neighborhood is 6.6% for adults and is slightly lower than Franklin County (8.0%). However, only 45% of East Columbus residents meet the recommended amount of exercise (30 minutes a day on five or more days of the week).

The East Columbus Area Plan contributes to improving public health by preserving and enhancing a built environment that fosters physical activity. The ability to be physically active in your neighborhood reduces the need for a car and increases physical activity.

Examples include:

- Focusing mixed use development on Fifth Avenue, including multifamily housing, neighborhood scale retail, offices, and other services that contribute to a walkable environment. Mixed use development encourages walking and biking to daily destinations.

- Recommendations for improvements to Cassady Avenue, Stelzer Road, and Johnstown Road, including sidewalks, and bike lanes or bike trail connections. These recommendations add to a built environment that encourages biking and walking in daily life.
- Recommends that efforts should be made to expand the existing community garden in East Columbus. Expanding upon this existing community resource allows the community to further develop a local healthy fresh food source and is an important tool to combat chronic disease.
- The Plan has recommendations to adopt the Urban Commercial Overlay for 5th Avenue. These overlays ensure provisions for pedestrians and cyclists as the area develops.
- The Plan recommends that a neighborhood park, community park, or recreation facility (public or private) should be located within one-half mile of all residents. One-half mile is a very walkable or bikeable distance.
- The Plan includes urban design recommendations, which promote aesthetic improvements throughout the area. Aesthetically pleasing places are perceived as being safer, encourage social interaction and are therefore more walkable.

Moreover, it is important to note that the East Columbus neighborhood had a large public input component. The fact that residents of the East Columbus neighborhood asked for these active living principles shows our community is ready and waiting for improved infrastructure and development that supports pedestrian and cyclist activity.

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

Sincerely,



Betsy A. Pandora, MCRP
Healthy Places Coordinator
Columbus Public Health

cc: Dr. Teresa Long, Health Commissioner, Columbus Public Health
Vince Papsidero, Administrator, Planning Division, Department of Development
Priscilla R. Tyson, Health and Human Services Chair, Columbus City Council

