

# ACTION CONNECTION

## The Built Environment and Health

Jeremy Hofer, Hunger and Nutrition Project

As my family hid from the 113 degree heat this past July with an unsuccessful swamp cooler working to keep our home somewhat livable - it became very apparent to me how environment affects behavior. Cooking a meal over the stove was out of the question and the just the thought of a walk or jog was exhausting. The movie theatre and a nearby pool offered temporary relief, yet our options for food and physical activity were few and far between.

“A good solution solves multiple problems: Changes to the built environment can have a positive impact on many health-related issues, from diabetes and asthma, to traffic safety and community violence. In many cases, a change to the built environment will simultaneously impact multiple health conditions.”

– The Built Environment and Health, Prevention Institute

While the scorching heat only lasted a few weeks, many families have few healthy food or physical activity choices in their neighborhoods – no matter how nice the weather is. There is strong evidence that the built environment – *the physical structures and infrastructure of communities* - influences diet and physical activity. For example, the closer families live to a park the more likely they are to exercise.<sup>1,2,3</sup> A recent study even links early death rates by heart disease and diabetes to lack of access to healthy food.<sup>4</sup> The way our cities are built is contributing to a public health crisis that threatens our health care system and quality of life: the average lifespan of today’s children is expected to be shorter than their parents’. Yet the health impact of sprawl and “toxic environments” has long been ignored by local, land-use decision-makers and is not apparent to regular citizens.

By 1952, the American Heart Association identified obesity as a factor for heart disease – a factor which could be avoided through diet and exercise. In subsequent years, national public health policy has been based on prevention of obesity by individuals without much consideration of the factors in society that act as barriers to good health.<sup>5</sup> Blaming individuals for bad choices certainly is easier than changing a city’s zoning code or a school district’s food policy. However, blame does little to fundamentally change societal norms; we’ve got to do more to stop this death by “diabesity.”

Public health advocates must be involved in local planning and land use decisions. While these meetings are open to the public, often the only “public” present is developers for whom profit (not public health) is most often their top priority. It is the role of the public health advocate at these meetings to demonstrate how healthy and smart growth will reap long-term benefits for all stakeholders within a community.

In March, Fresno Metro Ministry hosted a training on the basics of planning, health and land use. Lisa Feldstein of the Public Health Law Project showed how land use relates to health and nutrition. After reviewing Fresno’s code, Feldstein called it one of the most complicated and confusing ordinances she had ever read, noting it is the only city code that has a “limited neighborhood shopping center district” where one can sell tobacco and liquor, but not fruits and vegetables!

Local communities decide where and what kind of development will take place within state guidelines. For example some cities have passed ordinances which support healthy food access. Hartford, Connecticut’s



Metro’s Edie Jessup walks on a dirt path next to Kings Canyon Blvd in Southeast Fresno during a ‘Walkabout’ hosted by the Building Healthy Neighborhoods Task Force. The event highlighted how the built environment either hinders or promotes physical activity.

See **The Built Environment** inside

## The Built Environment

*(continued from front page)*

code states “city agencies and employees in determining the use to be made of city parks, school yards, rights-of-way, surplus properties and redevelopment parcels, shall give special consideration to the benefit of using such sites, at least in part, for food production, processing, and distribution.” Hartford’s food policies are overseen, in part, by a fifteen member Food Policy Advisory Commission.<sup>6</sup>

A full transcript of Lisa Feldstein’s training and other built environment resources are available at [www.fresnometmin.org/fmm/bhe.html](http://www.fresnometmin.org/fmm/bhe.html)

View a current City of Fresno land use map at [www.fresno.gov/development/landusemap.asp](http://www.fresno.gov/development/landusemap.asp)

Fresno Metro Ministry is embarking on several new initiatives; our goal is to create healthy environments at the regional, county, and neighborhood levels. The Central California Regional Obesity Prevention Program (CCROPP) is an effort primarily funded by The California Endowment

which links County Public Health Departments in six Central Valley counties to health advocacy community-based organizations in forming “obesity prevention” policy councils. Metro has been chosen as the Fresno County community partner. Over the next three years, the Fresno Food and Built Environment Policy Council will be formed with the Fresno County Department of Health. The council will facilitate recommendations for environmental change and then assist with implementation of these recommendations. It is hoped that, like councils in Hartford, Knoxville, Iowa and Toronto (see story below), the council will see food and built environment policies enacted that support healthy eating and physical activity for all of Fresno County’s residents. The goal will be to change the Fresno environment so it supports healthy eating and active communities, and prevents chronic disease.

On a micro level, Metro is working with community partners in Southeast Fresno to assess the built environment and policies, and to plan for a multi-sector intervention to improve the health of these neighborhoods (population 45,000). Among other things, this project will look at food access and opportunities for physical activity – including parks, community gardens, child care, health care, schools, retail stores, advertising, zoning and land use – to develop a comprehensive plan that will create environments that encourage healthy eating and active living. Fresno First Five and Kaiser Permanente are primary funders for the Southeast Fresno project.

## Food Policy Councils across the U.S. and Canada

As Metro staff prepare for the formation of the Fresno Food and Built Environment Policy Council, they note the structure and accomplishments of other food policy councils across the U.S. and Canada.

### Knoxville, Tennessee

The Food Policy Council of the City of Knoxville, formed in 1982, serves as an advisory board to the Mayor and City Council. One key responsibility is to provide reports to the City Council and community. Nine members serve three-year terms; they work with Policy Council staff members who provide an important link with Knoxville City agencies and community-based organizations. The Knoxville Food Policy Council has five stated goals:

- Minimize food-related activities which degrade the natural environment; limit wasteful resources needed for future food production and distribution;
- Strengthen the economic vitality of the private food industry;
- Improve the quality of food available to all citizens;
- Encourage citizens to accept and consume nutritious food;
- Ensure that an adequate and nutritious food supply is available to all citizens.

One unique outcome of the Knoxville Food Policy Council is a community-based food monitoring system developed in 1996-97. It is a system of gathering information through presentations to the Food Policy Council at regular meetings, local hearings, and other input to develop comprehensive responses to food, farm and nutrition issues. Specific indicators have been developed to measure tangible progress for each of the Council’s stated goals. Information gathered through the monitoring system serves as the basis for recommendations to the Mayor, City Council and community regarding policies and actions which will promote food security. See [www.kornet.org/kfpc/kfpc.html](http://www.kornet.org/kfpc/kfpc.html) for details.

### Iowa

The Iowa Food Policy Council, operating since May 2000, has twenty-one citizen members and special advisors from various state agencies. The connection between production, marketing, consumption of locally-grown food, agricultural resources administration, food security, hunger, nutrition and food safety are evident in their reports and recommendations to the Governor and other state officials. (See [www.iowafoodpolicy.org/finalrecs](http://www.iowafoodpolicy.org/finalrecs).) One recommendation calls for the creation of a new position, the Statewide Food Security Coordinator. Four goals drive the Council’s work:

## Get Involved!

Both the Southeast Fresno Planning and the CCROPP Council need public involvement to be successful. Here are some ways to get involved:

- Join Metro’s Built Environment and/or Southeast Fresno planning email listserve.
- Write a letter to the editor.
- Attend City and County planning commission meetings to demand we build healthy communities.
- Offer to participate in the implementation of the FUSD Wellness Policy to change school food and physical activity environment.

Contact Metro staff Edie Jessup or Jeremy Hofer if you are interested in these or other ways to get involved.

### Why Policy Change?

*“We face a serious community epidemic of obesity leading to chronic disease. We must go beyond ‘individual behavioral change.’ The issue is access to healthy food and equitable good health outcomes for all of our neighbors. Addressing local policy and institutional change will help our community and the Central Valley prevent chronic disease, increase productivity, save money and create environments where kids are healthy and ready to learn.”*

– EDIE JESSUP, FRESNO METRO MINISTRY,  
CENTRAL CALIFORNIA REGIONAL OBESITY  
PREVENTION PROJECT

## References / Recommended Reading

- <sup>1</sup> Yanez, Elva and Wendy Muzzy. *Healthy Parks, Healthy Communities: Addressing Health Disparities and Park Inequities through Public Financing of Parks, Playgrounds, and Other Physical Activity Settings*. The Trust for Public Land. 2005.
- <sup>2</sup> Babey, Susan H., Richard Brown and Theresa A. Hastert. *Access to Safe Parks Helps Increase Physical Activity Among Teenagers*. UCLA. 2005.
- <sup>3</sup> Cohen, Deborah et al. *Park Use and Physical Activity in a Sample of Public Parks in the City of Los Angeles*. Rand Health. 2006.
- <sup>4</sup> Gallagher, Mari. *Examining the Impact of Food Deserts on Public Health in Chicago*. La Salle Bank, 2006.
- <sup>5</sup> Nestle, Marion PhD MPH and Michael F. Jacobson, PhD. *Halting the Obesity Epidemic: A Public Policy Approach*. Public Health Reports, Volume 115. Jan/Feb 2000.
- <sup>6</sup> Souza, Amy. *Community Food Needs and Opportunities*. Planning Commissioners Journal, #63. Summer 2006.

- Insure access to nutritious food for all Iowans;
- Sustainable management of Iowa’s resources;
- Promote diversity in Iowa’s foods, culture and people;
- Support prosperous, independent farm and food businesses in Iowa.

## Connecticut

The Connecticut Food Policy Council was created in 1998. The council is comprised of six representatives from state agencies and six from the private sector. The scope of their work includes:

- Advising the legislature and governor on formulation of state food policy;
- Integrating efforts of state agencies toward a common and coordinated approach to food, nutrition and agricultural issues;
- Educating the public and state policy makers about the state’s food system.

For more information, see [www.hartfordfood.org/programs/food\\_policy\\_ct.html](http://www.hartfordfood.org/programs/food_policy_ct.html)

## Toronto, Ontario

Formed in December 1990, the Toronto Food Policy Council is actually a sub-committee of the Toronto Board of Health. The committee has twenty-one members including

individuals from large food corporations, conventional and organic farmers, representatives from co-operatives, unions, social justice and faith groups. Three full-time staff members are devoted to the work of the Council. The goal of the Council is to develop policies at the “municipal and provincial levels that will support Ontario farmers and provide quality, economically-sound, nutritious food to the people of Toronto.” (See [www.ryerson.ca/~foodsec/food-policy/](http://www.ryerson.ca/~foodsec/food-policy/).) The Toronto Food Council works in the following areas:

- Direct response to hunger;
- Research on impact of poor nutrition on the healthcare system;
- Agricultural land preservation and urban planning;
- Economic development;
- Urban agriculture and food waste recovery;
- Community gardens;
- Communications, capacity-building and education.

One sustainable outcome of the Council’s work is a program entitled “Farm to Table,” a project which launched an effective distribution system linking local farmers with low-income residents of Toronto who needed access to affordable fresh fruits, vegetables and eggs. “Field to Table” began in 1992 and soon expanded to accommodate orders for school food programs, community food cooperatives and markets. See [www.toronto.ca/health/tfpc.index.htm](http://www.toronto.ca/health/tfpc.index.htm) for more details.

## Is the air really getting cleaner?

Carolina Simunovic, Environmental Health Director

Is the air *really* getting cleaner? Technically, yes, there have been improvements, and we are grateful of the efforts made by regulators, industries, individuals, and advocates that have enabled us to achieve these gains. But let's reframe the question: "Has the air quality improved to the point where it is healthy to breathe?" Unfortunately, **no**.

How would you reward a student that has been a chronic underachiever and now, after repeated pressure from parents, teachers, administrators, and even peers, improves their grades from an F to a D-? I, for one, wouldn't buy tickets to Disney World quite yet. Praise and encouragement are important, but relatively speaking, this is a small achievement.

A similar scenario is playing out in terms of San Joaquin Valley air quality. The Valley Air District, after being the target of lawsuits and state legislation, is finally starting to take a bolder leadership position—oh you know, like submitting plans to clean up the air *on time*, and passing *really tough* rules, like the rule that tells people not to burn wood in their fireplaces on bad air days. Sarcasm aside, they have made progress in the last few years—granted it was after they were sued repeatedly and were the target of a series of state laws. For example, last December they passed the first rule in the nation to curb pollution from sprawl. But they were forced to pass this rule with a deadline, due to SB 709, one of the air quality laws authored by Senator Dean Florez in 2003.

The Air District also claims to have achieved the federal goal for particulate matter pollution of 10 microns or less (PM 10). But in the words of Sierra Club Tehipite Chapter Air Quality

### Days above the Particulate Matter Standards in the San Joaquin Valley

SJV: PM10 Pollution		
Year	Days above Fed Standard	Days above CA Standard
2005	0	146.3
2004	0.9	113
2003	0	167.2
2002	2	255.8
2001	3	167.9

Source: California Air Resources Board – Historical Air Quality Online (<http://www.arb.ca.gov/aqd/aqdpage.htm>)

Chair Kevin Hall, this "is either a miracle or a lie." Kevin is referring to issues with the monitors that measure PM 10 and maneuvering by the Air District to not consider days of high PM 10 pollution. To meet the federal standard our area can only have three days of PM 10 violations over three years. In September 2004, readings from an air monitor in Corcoran showed high levels of PM 10 pollution, but the Air District designated those days as having uncontrollable natural high winds and therefore did not count them as violations. Then, during Thanksgiving week 2005, air monitors in the Valley again recorded high levels of PM 10. This would have put the Valley over the limit and in violation of the standard. However the Air District has said that the monitors in question are used mainly for forecasting, that they are not "official," and therefore these days of high PM 10 should not count as violations.

What's in it for them? In addition to getting good press after years of being slammed by health and environmental advocates, the Air District has much to gain from having the region re-designated "in attainment" for the PM 10 standard.

### Days above the Ozone Standards in the San Joaquin Valley

SJV: OZONE Pollution			
Year	Days above CA 1-hr Standard	Days above Fed 1-hr Standard	Days above Fed 8-hr Standard
2004	106	9	109
2003	137	37	134
2002	127	31	125
2001	123	32	109
2000	114	30	103

Source: California Air Resources Board – Historical Air Quality Online (<http://www.arb.ca.gov/aqd/aqdpage.htm>)

There are legal requirements they would no longer be bound to—including deadlines, progress reports, and toughening up rules related to agriculture.

In the broader scheme of things, the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is currently revising its standards for PM 10. Part of that proposal is to remove monitors in areas that are attaining the PM10 standards. In other words, if the Valley is found to have met the standard, the EPA may give the District the green light to remove all of its PM 10 monitors, and we will be left with no information on the particles in our air.

As I've learned, everything is relative. While the District wants to celebrate meeting the federal PM 10 standard as a grand victory, the Valley still violates the California standards<sup>1</sup> for PM 10—which are more protective of human health—by more than 145 days of the year! Not much to write home about. The Valley also has a long way to go in terms of PM 2.5 pollution, which is the more dangerous type of PM pollution consisting of toxic particles like diesel soot. *And* the Valley still violated the Federal 8-hr ozone standard 105 days in 2005<sup>2</sup>. So, as you may have already guessed, we breathe unhealthy air almost 300 days out of the year.

#### What you can do: Our Air

District needs to be held accountable now more than ever, especially with the recent defeat of SB 999—the bill that would have added a doctor and a scientist to the Valley Air District Board. Join advocacy efforts lead by Metro and the Central Valley Air Quality Coalition ([www.calcleanair.org](http://www.calcleanair.org)). Metro's Air Champions meet once a month to discuss important issues related to air quality and to strategize for a local campaign on leaf blowers. Your voice needs to be heard. Contact Carolina Simunovic at 559-485-1416 for more information.



**THANK YOU** to all those that made Clean Air Day 2006 a huge success! Read about our legislative victories in Metro's next newsletter!

<sup>1</sup> California has the most stringent air quality standards in the country; in fact we're the only state that's allowed to be more stringent than the federal government. This is because California took the lead in air pollution regulation early on. The federal government eventually followed suit by creating the EPA and authoring the Clean Air Act. California standards are, across the board, more protective of human health. They apply to pollutants like ozone and particulate matter, both of which are at unhealthy levels in the Valley. See how the Valley fares in terms of the federal and state air quality standards in the table above.

<sup>2</sup> The EPA recently adopted the 8-hr ozone standard, which captures more chronic exposure to ozone pollution and is more protective of human health than the old 1-hr ozone standard.

## Reflections on the built environment and our health

We live in communities that others build. Planners, developers, engineers, planning commissions, and elected officials are primarily responsible for what our communities look like, feel like, and how they function. From traffic flow to architectural flair, we live and work in the environment created by others.

A lack of sidewalks or a busy intersection that is not pedestrian-friendly causes us to walk less. Safe and attractive walking paths encourage walking. A locked school ball field prevents family and youth physical activities. The presence of affordable fresh fruits and vegetables in a community at Farmer's Markets or grocery stores promotes healthy eating. A saturation of fast food outlets, candy, and soda machines discourage healthy eating. Well-planned communities provide either nearby access to stores, schools, entertainment, swimming pools, and other recreation venues, or provide low-polluting and pleasant public transportation to those needed resources.

We are being reminded that the environment in which we live and work strongly influences our life-style choices. We are also reminded that many of our current environments negatively influence the choices we make about physical activity and about nutritious eating. The result is a dramatic increase in preventable chronic disease in children and adults such as, but not limited to, diabetes and obesity.

Since the planners, developers, engineers, planning commissions, and elected officials are the ones who are primarily responsible for the evolving nature of our community environment, we must relate to them if our environment is to be improved. We can relate to them as partners, through organization change and through public policy. With all of our people working together to create a healthier environment, we can have healthier people living and thriving in healthy communities.



Walt Parry

Fresno Metro Ministry "Action Connection" is published regularly as part of an ongoing commitment to share information, coordinate resources, and facilitate effective action for the community good.

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Reduce. Re-use. Recycle.



This is a new format for our newsletter and we want to make sure it's working for our readers. Send comments to carmen@fresnometmin.org.

## Metro-Backed Multifaith Exchange Celebrates Ten Years

The Fresno Multifaith Exchange begins its tenth year of meetings with an Orientation Meeting on Sunday, September 17 from 3 to 5:30 p.m. at the Unitarian Universalist Church, 4144 N. Millbrook. George Teraoka, a long-time participant, will present a video of our experience. Copies of A Multifaith Handbook published by the Multifaith Exchange will be distributed. Following a time for getting acquainted in small groups, a light supper will be served.

Eight study meetings on the third Sunday of each month are hosted by various members of the Steering Committee representing the following faiths: Baha'i, Buddhist, Christian (Protestant and Catholic), Hindu, Islamic, Jewish, Sikh, and Unitarian Universalist. Meetings offer an opportunity to learn from and respect one another's faith traditions and consist of a presentation followed by small group discussion. The group's ground rules call for sharing information without proselytizing. Anyone who seeks to learn about others is welcome. To sign up, call Linda Mack at 224-0146 or email smack@csufresno.edu.





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S A V E T H E D A T E

**FRESNO METRO MINISTRY'S THANKSGIVING FESTIVAL OF CHOIRS**

Sunday, November 19, 2006  
3 pm at Hope Lutheran Church, Fresno

If your choir is interested in participating,  
or for more information on becoming a "Friend of the Concert,"  
please e-mail Carmen Pauls Wiens, [carmen@fresnometmin.org](mailto:carmen@fresnometmin.org).



**METRO'S ANNUAL DINNER AND AWARDS**

Thursday, December 7, 2006  
5.30 – 8.30 pm at Hope Lutheran Church, Fresno

This year's honorees: T & D Willey Farms • Francine Oputa • Children's Health Initiative •  
Dr. Helen Jones and Paul Idsvoog for their leadership with the Fresno Unified School District  
Comprehensive Wellness Policy • Fresno Famous • Mennonite Community Church

For more information on table reservations and sponsorship opportunities,  
e-mail Carmen or phone the Metro office, 559.485.1416.