

Linking Public Health and the Built environment



Approved in 2016, Create Loveland is the dynamic comprehensive plan for Loveland, Colorado. The plan drafting process included a robust public engagement process and a 2017 APA Merit Award in the category of Innovative partnerships winning collaboration with local public health non-profit CanDo. This collaboration created a plan that contains strong and inclusive language and policies geared to address the link between public health and the built environment in a way that reflects Loveland's vision and values.

The story of how Loveland was able to achieve the community support to be able incorporate health related policies in its comprehensive plan is one of partnership and patience. The collaboration and partnership between Loveland and CanDo is special due to its length, lasting almost ten years, and its depth during that time, covering multiple projects and plans, with some successes and some lessons learned. Create Loveland is just one example, another being a bicycle and pedestrian master plan, of where the two organizations were able to find ways to support each other's missions, those of planning for a vibrant and economically successful community and planning for a healthy community.

For communities looking to include considerations of the link between public health and the built environment in their plans, the Loveland / CanDo experience provides three lessons. The first is to be patient and, as a community, do the groundwork. This means taking the time to discuss with stakeholders how the way a city is planned, designed, built, and operated has an impact on people's ability to make healthy choices before making it a key piece of a plan. A key part of this strategy is to cultivate a network of stakeholders who can communicate the importance of this topic to elected and appointed decision makers.

Second, it is important to find a health-related message that resonates with the community. In Loveland, this included messaging around safety, after all, getting hit by a car while riding a bike is very unhealthy, and positioning the topic as one of personal choice within the built environment framework that is largely created by the city. This places the city in a position where it recognizes its responsibility towards its citizens. For example, it is harder for people to choose to walk to the store if the city does not provide or require sidewalks.

Third, while it may be tempting to dedicate a stand-alone element or chapter of a plan to public health related topics. The Create Loveland team found it a better approach to weave health related policies throughout the plan. This more closely relates to how people conceptualize health as something that impacts every facet of their lives.

Create Loveland can be found online at www.CityofLoveland.org.

