

ISSUE REPORT

Investing In America's Health:

A STATE-BY-STATE LOOK AT PUBLIC HEALTH
FUNDING AND KEY HEALTH FACTS



MARCH 2012

PREVENTING EPIDEMICS.
PROTECTING PEOPLE.

PREVENTION IN ACTION

Go the Greenway: Mecklenburg County, North Carolina

There is a clear public need and desire for greenways and trail development in Mecklenburg County. In the fall 2007 and early 2008, a series of public meetings were held to provide public input into the Park and Recreation planning process. Greenways and trails were a major topic of discussion at these meetings. Additionally, a community survey conducted by ETC Leisure Vision found greenways and trail development was an important and unmet need for the majority of Mecklenburg County residents.

The results of the 2008 Mecklenburg County Park and Recreation Master Plan clearly reveal the public's appreciation for natural areas and their desire for a trail system.

Survey results indicate County residents understand and support the role of greenways as both corridors for environmental protection and potential trail development. Ninety-three percent of all residents felt the role of greenways as a connected network of walking, biking and nature trails was very important

Connecting people and places

Mecklenburg County currently has 37 miles of developed and 150 miles of undeveloped greenways. The most notable being the Little Sugar Creek Greenway which stretches through the heart of Charlotte. When complete, the greenway will feature over 19 miles of trails and land connectors, from Toby Creek Greenway on North Tryon Street to Cordelia Park just north of uptown. The greenway will continue through the urban section and on to the South Carolina state line, conveniently linking Central Piedmont Community College, Carolina Healthcare System and the Park Road and Carolina Place shopping areas among many other destinations.

Federal Support

In 2009, Park and Recreation received \$2.35 million in federal stimulus funding for the construction of Toby Creek Greenway in the University City area and West Branch Rocky River Greenway in Davidson.

The funding was provided by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009 and obtained through the Mecklenburg Union County Metropolitan Planning Organization (MUMPO) through a competitive ranking process. Originally, the two projects were supposed to receive funding with 2004 Park and Recreation bonds that the County never issued due to the economic downturn.

Toby Creek Greenway and West Branch Rocky River Greenway will add to the Carolina Thread Trail greenway network which will eventually extend over 500 miles into 15 counties and to 2 million people.

"Both West Branch Rocky River Greenway and Toby Creek Greenway add important sections to our overall greenway system," said Park and Recreation Greenway Planner Gwen Cook. "Without the funding, neither project would be possible."

The impact of the stimulus money has enabled Park and Recreation's greenway division to continue carrying out its mission of providing natural transportation and fitness areas that help to improve water quality, reduce the impacts of flooding, and provide wildlife habitat.

Improving the public's health

A region's trail network will contribute to the overall health of residents by offering people attractive, safe, accessible places to bike, walk, hike, jog, skate, and possibly places to enjoy water-based trails. In short, the trail network will create better opportunities for active lifestyles. The design of communities—including towns, subdivisions, transportation systems, parks, trails and other public recreational facilities—affects people's ability to reach the recommended 30 minutes each day of moderately intense physical activity (60 minutes for youth).

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), "Physical inactivity causes numerous physical and mental health problems, is responsible for an estimated 200,000 deaths per year, and contributes to the obesity epidemic."

In identifying a solution, the CDC determined that by creating and improving places in our communities to be physically active, there could be a 25 percent increase in the percentage of people who exercise at least three times a week. This is significant considering that for people who are inactive, even small increases in physical activity can bring measurable health benefits. Additionally, as people become more physically active outdoors, they make connections with their neighbors that contribute to the health of their community.

The above was provided by Mecklenburg County Park and Recreation.