

Creating Walkable Communities in Rural North Carolina



“The Community Guide [was] the first resource that told me that making changes to the built environment can make a difference in physical activity levels.”

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More Information

Granville Greenways
www.gravillegreenways.org

Eat Smart, Move More
North Carolina
www.eatsmartmovemorenc.com

The Community Guide:
Task Force Recommendations
On Promoting Physical Activity:
Environmental and Policy
Approaches
www.thecommunityguide.org/pa/environmental-policy

Division of Nutrition, Physical
Activity, and Obesity, CDC
www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpao

In 2002, North Carolina tipped the scales when more than 1 in 5 of its residents were classified as obese.¹ In rural Granville County, the costs of obesity are evident in high mortality rates associated with heart disease, diabetes, stroke, and cancer. Using the findings and recommendations of the Community Preventive Services Task Force (Task Force) in *The Guide to Community Preventive Services (The Community Guide)*, the county created a plan to develop more walkable communities to help address obesity. The plan—*Granville Greenways Master Plan*—outlines the future of a county that embraces changing the built environment to promote active lifestyles.

Prevention becomes the number one priority

In 2003, the Granville County Community Health Assessment revealed that county residents between the ages of 40 and 64 die sooner from heart disease and diabetes than the average North Carolinian, and mortality rates from stroke and cancer are not much better than the state average.² Recognizing that obesity can increase risk for many chronic diseases, the Granville-Vance District Health Department set out to help prevent or reduce obesity by encouraging its residents to get more physically active. However, in a county lacking adequate trails, sidewalks, and dedicated pedestrian spaces for residents to bike, jog, and walk, the health department realized that a community education campaign would not be enough.

The Community Guide paves the way

Jackie Sergent, MPH, RD, LDN knew from her work as the health department’s health promotion coordinator that for people to lose weight, the health department would need to help find ways to encourage people to be active more regularly. Knowing that classes and programs to encourage behavior change are not a long-term solution, Ms. Sergent consulted *The Community Guide* for sustainable, evidence-based recommendations that could work locally. These Task Force findings and recommendations supported the changes that were to come:

- Creation of or enhanced access to places for physical activity combined with informational outreach activities
- Community-scale urban design and land use policies
- Street-scale urban design and land use policies
- Transportation and travel policies and practices*

Workgroup plans ahead

Within months of the release of the community health assessment findings, the Health Promotion Workgroup of LiveWell Granville was formed. The workgroup’s discussions eventually narrowed to the built environment,

*The Task Force issued “insufficient evidence” findings for transportation and travel policies and practices. This does not mean that these interventions do not work. It means that more research is needed for the Task Force to determine if they are effective. The Task Force encourages those who use interventions with insufficient evidence to evaluate their efforts.



www.thecommunityguide.org

What is *The Community Guide*?

The Guide to Community Preventive Services (The Community Guide) is an essential resource for people who want to know what works in public health. It provides evidence-based findings and recommendations about public health interventions and policies to improve health and promote safety.

The Community Preventive Services Task Force (Task Force)—an independent, nonfederal, unpaid body of public health and prevention experts—bases its findings and recommendations on systematic reviews of the scientific literature. With oversight from the Task Force, scientists and subject-matter experts from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention conduct these reviews in collaboration with a wide range of government, academic, policy, and practice-based partners.



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such as development of trails or “greenways”—corridors of open green space linking parks, recreational areas, residential neighborhoods, employment, schools, and shopping districts.³ Greenways encourage active transportation (such as walking, jogging, running, cycling, and in-line skating) and help people make physical activity part of their daily lives. The county manager encouraged the group to focus on creating a plan for the entire county rather than creating trails one by one. The county received funding from Eat Smart, Move More North Carolina, and The North Carolina Healthy Weight Initiative to develop the *Greenways Master Plan (Master Plan)* to foster this collaboration.

Planning begins to pay off

To lead the greenway planning, development and maintenance, an oversight advisory council was created, which includes representatives from each city council in the county as well as the County Commissioners, the Economic Development Commission, the Board of Education, and the local parent teacher organization. “Granville County has a lot of work to do before it can accomplish all of its goals, but starting the conversation among stakeholders and forming partnerships across private and public sectors was our first milestone,” said Ms. Sergent.

By 2010, the advisory council’s construction and design standards had been approved, all cities and towns in Granville County had adopted the *Master Plan*, and construction was underway on the county’s first greenways. The Butner-Stem School Trail is nearly two-thirds of a mile long and connects the elementary school, middle school, and baseball field. Parents can now walk their children between the schools instead of driving the perimeter. A second greenway was completed to link several worksites to a shopping area in Butner, with a third greenway in the works to expand this connection to nearby apartments. Since Ms. Sergent first consulted *The Community Guide* for recommendations on the built environment, the advisory council has garnered funds for six other greenways, a total of \$4.4 million.

In 2011, the Granville-Vance District Board of Health adopted a health policy to use *The Community Guide* “as a resource to help choose evidence-based programs, practices and policies to better improve health and prevent disease.”⁴ This policy will ensure that public health decisions will incorporate evidence-based information.

Granville’s Greenways *Master Plan* initiative was entered into the Public Health Foundation’s 2011 “I’m Your Community Guide!” contest, which highlighted groups using the Task Force findings and recommendations in *The Community Guide* to improve health in their communities.

Lessons Learned

- **Use *The Community Guide* to support change.** Recommendations backed by solid research from a credible source can assist in making environmental and policy changes a reality.
- **Create a plan to help guide challenging decisions.** *The Community Guide* informed the *Greenways Master Plan*, which addressed the concerns of all stakeholders involved in changing Granville County’s built environment.
- **Adopt policies to guide future public health programs.** The Board of Health made it standard practice to use *The Community Guide* in making informed decisions about programs, services, and policies.

¹Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, North Carolina - 2002 Overweight and Obesity (BMI). <http://apps.nccdc.cdc.gov/brfss/display.asp?yr=2002&state=NC&qkey=4409&grp=0&SUBMIT3=Go>. Accessed on March 20, 2012.

²Granville County Greenway Master Plan. www.granvillegreenways.org/master-plan. Accessed on March 21, 2012.

³Granville Greenways: Frequently Asked Questions. www.granvillegreenways.org/faq. Accessed on March 20, 2012.

⁴Granville-Vance District Board of Health Policy. www.nalboh.org/pdf/files/G_V_District_BOH_CG_policy.pdf. Accessed on March 20, 2012.