



Houghton County, MI

▲ Community Example from Chapter 2 of "Lessons for Leaders:"
Lessons in Communication

Community Background

Situated in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, Houghton County residents are accustomed to long, cold, snowy winters, a significant barrier to physical activity. In addition, high rates of poverty and unemployment make gym membership or expensive sports equipment unattainable alternatives. Furthermore, this rural region lacks sidewalks and bike paths.

Community Action

To change this picture, the Western Upper Peninsula Health Department led an effort to revitalize health. Staff formed the Copper Country *Healthy Kids, Healthy Communities* partnership and prioritized the need to increase opportunities for active transportation. In addition to the development of Safe Routes to School plans and improving trails, Complete Streets became the partnership's mantra. The first municipality it approached was Houghton, the largest city in the county. To motivate members of the city council and increase support from residents, the partnership approached its campaign by showing multiple co-benefits of a Complete Streets ordinance. During a public hearing, partners advocated for passage by listing five reasons why Complete Streets make sense.

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They focused on livability, economic development, health, safety and funding (the Michigan Department of Transportation recently ruled that cities with Complete Streets policies would receive priority consideration for transportation enhancement projects). The ordinance passed in the subsequent council meeting, and Houghton became the sixth Michigan city with a Complete Streets law. The city subsequently earned a silver-level Bicycle-Friendly Community award from the League of American Bicyclists. In addition, a newly approved non-motorized transportation plan now guides future development of sidewalks, bike lanes, safer intersections and an interconnected network of trails and streets for walking and biking.