
Leveraging Neighborhood-Scale Change for Policy and Program Reform in Buffalo, New York

Samina Raja, PhD, Michael Ball, MUP, AICP, Justin Booth, MS, Philip Haberstro, BS, Katherine Veith, BS

Background: The Healthy Communities Initiative (HCI) affects 8500 employees working in the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus and 8925 residents of adjacent neighborhoods, where 37% of people live below the poverty line, and a majority (68.7%) identify themselves as African-American.

Intervention: The HCI partnership, which includes multi-sectoral and multi-disciplinary organizations and neighborhood residents, implemented the Active Living by Design community action model with greatest emphasis on achieving policy and planning changes to support active living behaviors.

Results: The master plan of the campus now incorporates active living as a guiding principle. Physical improvements to support walking and bicycling in the target area have been planned and implemented through a \$14 million federal transportation grant. The partnership facilitated the creation of a citywide Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Board and the passage and implementation of an ordinance to enhance bicycling infrastructure within the city.

Lessons learned: Buffalo's experience suggests that to achieve lasting environmental change in the context of a medical campus and its surrounding neighborhoods, it is critical to: (1) engage neighborhood residents from the outset to build social capital; (2) cultivate a diverse partnership; (3) use a comprehensive approach; (4) balance long-term goals with short-term accomplishments; (5) integrate active living concerns within existing policy and planning mandates; and (6) make sustainability a priority.

Conclusions: Environmental changes in the public domain that support active living require collaboration among public, nonprofit, and private sectors; citizen engagement; and the presence of a legal and structural framework provided by government policies and plans to direct future development.

(Am J Prev Med 2009;37(6S2):S352–S360) © 2009 American Journal of Preventive Medicine

Introduction

The noted landscape architect, Frederick L. Olmsted, once described Buffalo, New York, as the “best planned city” because of its street infrastructure, public spaces, and park system.¹ The city's plan, originally devised by Joseph Ellicott in 1804, was modified in the late 1800s by Olmsted through the introduction of a system of parks and parkways designed to both link neighborhoods and be a haven from the congestion and rapid pace of urbanization. Despite its green infrastructure and architectural legacy, Buffalo faces considerable demographic and eco-

nomic challenges. Although it is the second largest city in New York, by 2007, Buffalo's population had shrunk to 264,292, nearly half of its peak population (580,132) in 1950. Recent estimates indicate that 28.7% of its population lives in poverty, compared to only 13% nationwide.² The condition of younger Buffalonians is even more sobering: 41% of the population aged <18 years lives in poverty, compared to 18% nationwide. Within this socioeconomic context, particular neighborhoods, such as the city's East Side, have been especially hard hit.

This paper describes the experience of the Healthy Communities Initiative (HCI) community partnership to promote active living in one of the especially vulnerable, albeit unique, areas of Buffalo. The initiative was launched in 2003 by the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus, Inc. (BNMC, Inc.) with the aid of a 5-year, \$200,000 grant from the Active Living by Design (ALbD) program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. A nonprofit organization, BNMC, Inc., is re-

From the Department of Urban and Regional Planning (Raja, Veith), and the Department of Health Behavior (Raja), University at Buffalo, State University of New York; Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus, Inc. (Ball); Green Options Buffalo (Booth); and the Wellness Institute of Greater Buffalo (Haberstro), Buffalo, New York

Address correspondence and reprint requests to: Samina Raja, PhD, University at Buffalo, State University of New York, 3235 Main Street, 201 D Hayes Hall, Building 1, Buffalo NY 14214. E-mail: sraja@buffalo.edu.

sponsible for maintaining a globally competitive campus. The initiative's goals are to develop and maintain an effective partnership to promote physical activity, increase community awareness of the benefits of active living, increase access to opportunities for physical activity, enhance policy and organizational supports, and improve built and natural environments to support active living in the campus and its surrounding neighborhoods.

Methods

Setting and Population

The initiative's target area, shown in Figure 1, includes the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus and its two adjacent neighborhoods. This area was chosen by BNMC, Inc., to integrate the campus with its surrounding yet disconnected neighborhoods: the vibrant Allentown neighborhood and the historic but economically challenged Fruit Belt neighborhood on Buffalo's East Side. The Fruit Belt faces greater challenges, with limited services, poor housing stock, and fewer economic opportunities available to its residents, while Allentown, a

historic preservation district, is home to eclectic businesses, a vibrant art community, and a mix of affordable and high-end housing. The two neighborhoods, which lie on opposite sides of the city's Main Street, have had little recent cultural, economic, and social exchange. The campus, which physically bridges these neighborhoods, aims to integrate itself and these neighborhoods into a unified social, cultural, and economic subregion of the city, while celebrating the unique identity of each neighborhood.

The population affected by the initiative includes 8500 employees working on campus and 8925 residents of the two neighborhoods. The 2000 census reported that about 37% of the population in the target area earns income below the poverty line. A majority (68.7%) of the residents identify themselves as African American, 24% as white, 0.5% as Asian, and 6.2% as other. Six percent of all residents identify themselves as Hispanic.³

Among the 8500 employees, about 36% live in the Fruit Belt, while about 6% live in Allentown. With about \$1.5 billion in economic impact and 1 million annual patient visits, BNMC, Inc.'s 115-acre campus houses world-class medical and research institutions that are poised to be a growth catalyst in the region. In addition to holding economic

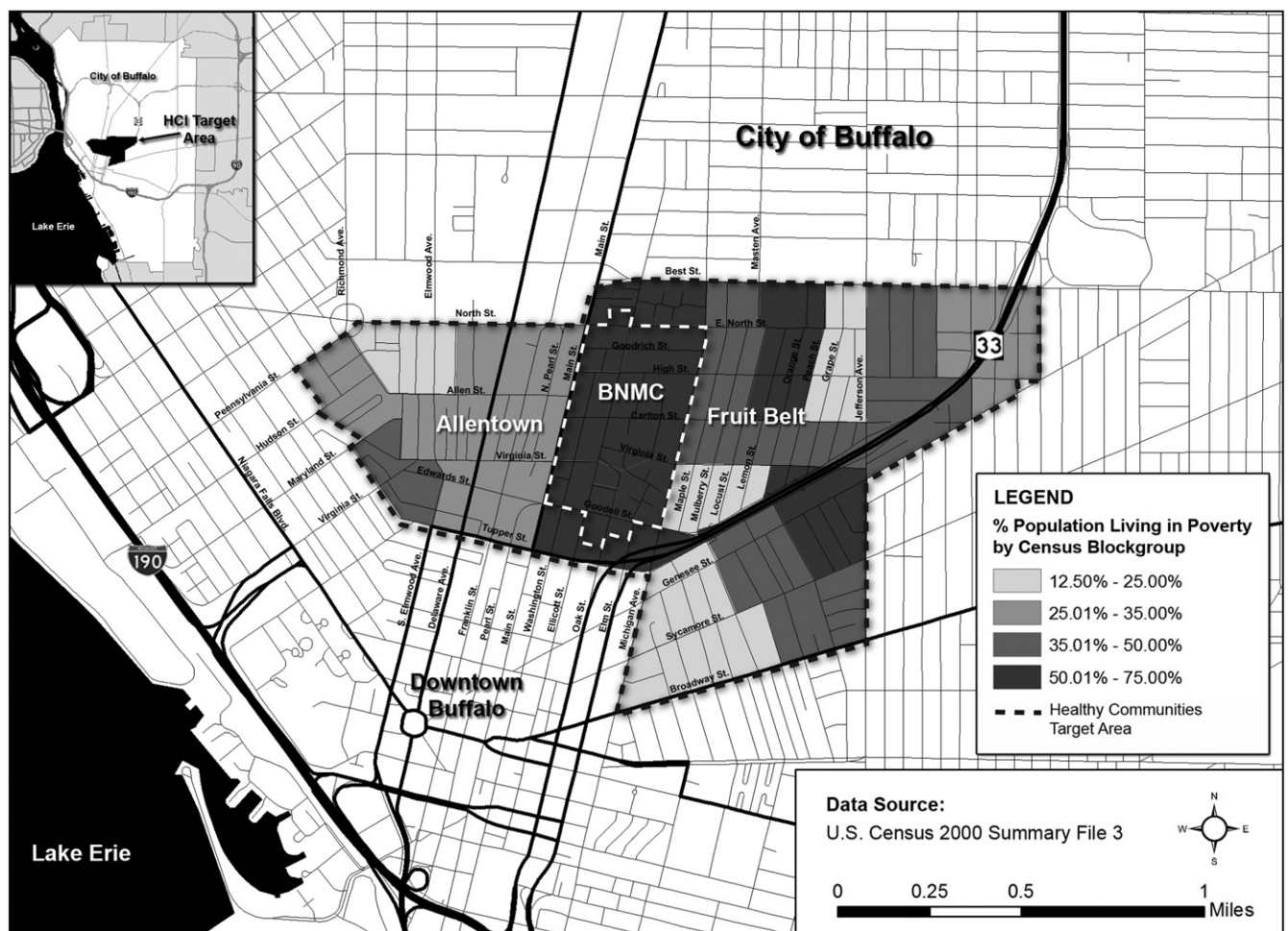


Figure 1. Healthy Communities Initiative target area: Allentown extends west of Main Street, while the Medical Campus (bounded between High, Main, Goodell, and Michigan) and the Fruit Belt neighborhood extend east of Main Street

promise, the campus is emerging as a model for planning and developing a healthy environment for employees, visitors, and residents living in its vicinity.

Active Living by Design Community Action Model

The initiative deployed all 5P strategies (preparation, promotion, programs, policy, and physical projects) of the community action model,⁴ including: preparatory strategies through assessments of infrastructure and policies that affect active living; new programs to promote active living; pursuit of policy and planning strategies to promote active living; communication and outreach efforts to promote active living; and changes to the physical environment to facilitate active living within the target area and the city at large (www.activelivingbydesign.org/our-approach/community-action-model). Among these, the initiative places greatest emphasis on policy and planning strategies.

Preparation. With the launch of the initiative in 2003–2004, BNMC, Inc. invited diverse stakeholders to join the partnership. Although BNMC, Inc. continues to be the lead agency, the initiative is implemented through a diverse partnership of about 30 organizations and individuals, including employees of institutions located on the campus, residents of adjacent neighborhoods, representatives of the nonprofit sector and the municipal and state governments, and academic partners. All partner organizations have fairly delineated roles. Key partners are listed in Table 1.

The partnership conducts extensive outreach to build connections between the campus and its surrounding neighborhoods. In 2004, for example, the partnership conducted visioning sessions with campus representatives and the residents of Allentown and the Fruit Belt, a historic first-time effort to engage them in developing a shared vision for the target area.

Table 1. Partner organizations and their roles in HCI

Name of organization/entity	Type	Role in HCI
BNMC, Inc., a consortium of institutions, representatives of neighborhoods, and the city and county governments. The board of directors includes representatives of:	Nonprofit organization	Lead agency of the HCI
Member institutions		Staff provides facilitation and coordination; fiscal agent
Buffalo Hearing and Speech Center		Board of directors determines the vision and policies for the medical campus, and facilitates HCI's work within the campus, surrounding neighborhoods, and the city and county
Buffalo Medical Group		
Hauptman–Woodward Medical Research Institute		
Kaleida Health		
Olmsted Center for Visually Impaired		
Roswell Park Cancer Institute		
The Center for Hospital and Palliative Care		
University at Buffalo		
Upstate New York Transplant Services		
Residents	Nonprofit organization	
Fruitbelt residents		
Allentown residents		
Government		
City of Buffalo (Mayor)		
Erie County (County Executive)		
Wellness Institute of Greater Buffalo and Western New York		Core partner; program delivery
Green Options Buffalo		Walking on Wednesdays
		Core partner; program delivery and policy advocacy
		Buffalo Blue Bicycle Program
City of Buffalo	Municipal government agency	Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Board
Department of Public Works		Adopts policies and plans; implements physical projects
Office of Strategic Planning	State government agency	
New York State Department of Transportation		Implements of physical projects
University at Buffalo (UB), State	Local university	Goodell Street improvement
University of New York		Academic partner; research, policy, and evaluation assistance
Department of Urban Planning, School of Architecture and Planning		HEbD–Buffalo ^a
		Ellicott Street Evaluation
		Research and prepare of addendum on active living for City's Comp plan

^aOn behalf of HEbD–Buffalo, UB led a collaborative effort with the American Planning Association and the University at Washington, culminating in the publication of a monograph on planners' role in shaping food environments and promoting healthy eating. Raja S, Born B, Kozlowski Russell J. A planner's guide to community and regional food planning: transforming food environments, building healthy communities. Planning Advisory Service (PAS) Report. Number 554. American Planning Association, 2008.

BNMC, Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus; HCI, Healthy Communities Initiative; HEbD, Healthy Eating by Design; UB, University at Buffalo

One of the key partners, the Wellness Institute, completed an assessment of existing policies, plans, and physical infrastructure—including sidewalk conditions and pedestrian amenities—that affect active living on the campus and in the Fruit Belt and Allentown neighborhoods. The partnership is committed to using evidence-based solutions to guide its efforts and therefore engaged the University at Buffalo to empirically evaluate whether proposed physical improvements on campus (e.g., street redesign and placement of signage and street furniture), scheduled to occur in 2010, will influence walking behavior of employees.

Policy. Several campuswide plans and policies have been developed and modified by BNMC, Inc., including a master plan, an art plan, a security plan, and an urban design template that incorporate active living concepts. The initiative also works with city policymakers and administrators to create or modify policies and plans and make budgetary commitments to support active living.

Physical projects. Ultimately, the partnership aims to improve the built environment in the target area to make it more walkable. These improvements include the redesign of streets; provision of sidewalks, adequate lighting, and way-finding signage; and assurance of safety within the target area. Necessary capital improvements are made possible through a complex public-private partnership among multiple agencies.

Promotions. In 2004, the partnership developed and implemented a multi-media communication and education strategy using print media, television, radio, and community presentations. Electronic and hard copy newsletters regarding active living programs and events are distributed among employees by BNMC, Inc. The Wellness Institute featured the initiative on its local television show focused on wellness.

Programs. In the second year (2004–2005) of the initiative, BNMC, Inc. facilitated the creation of the Employees' Wellness Committee to guide the initiative and to act as a liaison with campus institutions. The same year, the Wellness Institute began implementing a weekly walking program, Walking on Wednesdays, on the campus. In 2005–2006, BNMC, Inc. launched an annual Summer Wellness Block Party, where vendors provide attendees with information and services on physical activity, healthy eating, and wellness. Some programming efforts by the partnership have occurred citywide. For example, in 2005–2006, Green Options Buffalo launched Buffalo Blue Bicycle, a citywide bicycle-share program (www.buffalobluebicycle.org).

Results

The initiative has resulted in systemic, environmental, and policy changes to support active living within the target area and the city at large, as described below and summarized in [Table 2](#).

Creating Partnerships, Facilitating Conversations Among Diverse Stakeholders, and Building Social Capital

One of the greatest successes of the initiative has been to build social capital by initiating conversa-

tions through the establishment of a citizen-based Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Board neighborhood bicycle and pedestrian audits; and through visioning exercises among diverse stakeholders—such as campus employees and residents from Allentown and Fruit Belt neighborhoods—who previously had limited interaction, little trust in each other and the city, and no shared vision for the future of the area. A statement generated in one of these visioning exercises captures the residents' and employees' shared vision:

To have a campus that evolves by choice, not by chance; that incorporates and respects the needs of every stakeholder regardless of their individual wealth or perceived power. A safe and secure place where [people] want to live, work, and play and where surrounding neighborhoods combine their unique strengths to benefit Buffalo and the region. An inviting and vibrant community that is clean and well lighted, well connected socially, [with access] to multiple types of affordable transportation; [one that] offers access to high-quality food and neighborhood services, has well integrated parks and greenspaces that provide recreation opportunities for all . . . (Community Visioning Workshop, Healthy Community Initiative, September 7, 2004).

Due largely to the initiative, the three entities—the campus, Allentown, and the Fruit Belt—have created a shared vision for the area, without subsuming the distinct identity of each. Partners see this participation of neighborhood residents in visioning, planning, and development of the target area and the emergence of a dialog and trust among Allentown and Fruit Belt neighborhoods and the campus as a step toward nurturing social capital.^{5,6}

Overall, approximately 120 people—residents and representatives of the neighborhood associations and a local church—participated in the visioning sessions and in bicycle and pedestrian audits completed during the preparatory phase. Building on this process, in 2008, the city and BNMC, Inc. embarked on a comprehensive planning process—the Four Neighborhoods, One Community planning process—to further integrate the campus's planning efforts with those occurring in the surrounding neighborhoods. This effort—which broadened to include the Downtown district—ensures that returns from investment of resources in the campus are not limited to the confines of campus boundaries but are shared in the surrounding community. The city and BNMC, Inc. hosted four community forums in 2008 in Allentown and the Fruit Belt. More than 100 residents, business owners, and community members gathered to discuss changes they would like to see in their neighborhoods. Residents' ideas include focusing infrastruc-

Table 2. 5P strategies used in the HCI in Buffalo NY^a

	2003–2004	2004–2005	2005–2006
Preparation	Established HCI community partnership; HCI area (BNMC, Inc.) Infrastructure assessment report completed; HCI area (Wellness Institute) Visioning exercise and development of shared vision statement; HCI area (Wellness Institute)	Campuswide wellness committee formed; medical campus (BNMC, Inc.) Conducted funding identification workshops; citywide (BNMC, Inc.) Procured \$14 million from USDOT for physical improvements; citywide (BNMC, Inc. in partnership with city)	Selected design firm for Ellicott Park redesign as per the master plan; campus (BNMC, Inc.)
Promotion	Developed a communication and education strategy; HCI area (BNMC, Inc.)	Conducted workshop on planning and public health in partnership with local chapter of the American Planning Association; citywide (BNMC, Inc.)	Launched 1st Annual Summer Wellness Block Party; campus (BNMC, Inc.; Wellness Institute) Celebrated America on the Move Day; campus (BNMC, Inc.)
Programs		Launched Walking on Wednesdays, a weekly walking group program; campus (Wellness Institute)	Launched Blue Bicycle bike-share program; citywide (Green Options Buffalo)
Physical projects			Improvements made to Goodell Street; HCI area (NYSDOT)
Policies and plans			Common Council authorized Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Board; citywide (Green Options Buffalo, HCI partners) Integrated “Active Living” into BNMC mission; campus (BNMC, Inc.) Public art master plan completed; HCI area (BNMC, Inc.)

^aEach cell in the table contains information on outcome of strategies used in Buffalo; its geographic focus (in italics), and, wherever pertinent, the lead agency (in parentheses).

ture resources along High Street and forming a unified voice for the area.

Changes in Physical and Cultural Environments

The initiative has facilitated a subtle, but sure, cultural shift toward active living among public officials. For example, during a partnership meeting in 2008, an engineer from the New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT) acknowledged that, for him, the issue of physical activity through active transportation was never a paramount consideration in road design prior to his involvement in the initiative.

Eventually, the engineer’s involvement in HCI facilitated actual physical improvements to support walking/bicycling. In 2005–2006, NYSDOT made physical improvements on state-owned right-of-ways, including installation of countdown timers, high-visibility crosswalks, and speed-limit signage, to facilitate walking and biking by residents and employees in the target area (Figure 2). Signage has also been installed by BNMC, Inc. to facilitate way-finding in the target area.

Additional street and sidewalk improvements are planned in the target area within the next few years

through complex sources of funding, including \$14 million in grant monies through the U.S. Department of Transportation. The partnership played a key role in securing this grant. In 2004–2005, BNMC, Inc. facilitated a funding identification workshop, which subsequently led to the proposal submission and grant award. Another important source of funding for the planned improvement is the annual capital budget of the city’s Department of Public Works and that of NYSDOT.

Proposed physical improvements are occurring at a slower pace than originally anticipated. No physical improvements in the target area occurred until Year 3 of the initiative, and improvements on one of the target streets (Ellicott Street) were delayed by another 3 years. These delays are not surprising given that ALbD did not fund capital improvements, and the responsibility of making physical improvements rests with multiple public agencies, including the municipal Department of Public Works and NYSDOT. Capital projects that are publicly funded—such as those in the target area—usually take years to make it into a capital budget plan and to be implemented.

Table 2. 5P strategies used in the HCI in Buffalo NY^a (*continued*)

2006–2007	2007–2008	Future
Launched pre–post test evaluation of how changes to Ellicott Street will affect physical activity of employees; campus (UB)	Pre-test phase of evaluation of Ellicott Street complete; campus (UB)	Continue expanding and strengthening partnership (BNMC, Inc.) Post-test phase of evaluation of Ellicott Street improvements; campus; (UB)
Disseminated information about the HCI partnership through three public access television programs; citywide (Wellness Institute; BNMC, Inc.)	Presentation at Partners for Smart Growth Conference; nationwide (BNMC, Inc.)	Continue promotion efforts
Developed year-round wellness program for campus employees; campus (Wellness Institute)	Commercial district bicycle parking program; citywide (Green Options Buffalo)	Continue programs
Developed a security master plan; campus (BNMC, Inc.) Bicycle parking administrative order; Citywide (Green Options Buffalo)	Update to BNMC master plan; campus; (BNMC, Inc.) Complete streets ordinance amendment; citywide; (Green Options Buffalo)	Physical improvements to streets, sidewalks, and outdoor environment; campus; (City of Buffalo and BNMC, Inc.) Four Neighborhoods One Community plan; HCI area (City of Buffalo, BNMC, Inc.) Addendum to citywide comprehensive plan to incorporate active living and healthy eating; citywide (Green Options Buffalo; BNMC, Inc.; UB)

BNMC, Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus; HCI, Healthy Communities Initiative; NYSDOT, New York State Department of Transportation; USDOT, U.S. Department of Transportation

Changes in Policies and Plans to Influence Future Development and Investments

Among the strengths of the initiative has been its ability to shape the policies and plans that guide future development. On campus, the board of directors of BNMC, Inc. modified its mission statement to acknowledge the importance of active living, committing to “creating a distinct environment that provides opportunities for active living.” Likewise, the campus master plan, which was prepared before the launch of the initiative, discusses pedestrian circulation primarily as a transportation issue but does not expressly link it to physical activity.⁷ Following the initiative, the master plan is being revised to clearly incorporate active-living concerns as illustrated in the schematic design for the redesign of Ellicott Street (running north–south through the campus), which is scheduled for construction in 2010 (Figure 3).

Having successfully shaped the development trajectory on campus, the partnership is now facilitating citywide change. A key accomplishment is that partners were able to advocate for and successfully establish a

citywide Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Board in November 2005, effective January 2006. The board is charged with reviewing and commenting on the impact of the city’s development activities on bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure in the city. The board, whose members are appointed by the city’s Common Council, is chaired by Justin Booth, a key member of the partnership.

Although the board remains concerned that its recommendations are not yet mandated as part of the city’s development review process, its recommendations do receive considerable support from the Common Council. In 2005, following the board’s recommendation, the council passed a modification to the city’s ordinance to mandate that any new development that results in new parking spaces for automobiles must also provide parking for bicycles.⁸ The administrative order, which operationalized the ordinance within the planning board approval process in 2007, stipulates that

bicycle parking facilities shall be provided . . . for any new building, addition, parking lot, or en-



Figure 2. Highly visible crosswalk and countdown timer on Goodell Street (photograph by Katherine Veith)

largement of an existing building or any change in occupancy of any building that results in the need for additional auto parking facilities.⁹

As a result of the board's efforts, numerous bicycle racks have been installed as part of new development citywide.

Discussion

Engage Neighborhood Residents, Build Social Capital

To ensure that the 5P model works in the context of a campus located between two unique and disconnected neighborhoods, it is critical to engage neighborhood residents and build social capital. In doing so, it is important to have residents involved in the decision-making process right from the outset—as Fruit Belt and Allentown residents are in Buffalo—through visioning, planning, and now implementation. Fruit Belt and Allentown residents also hold one (nonvoting) seat each on the BNMC, Inc. board, which ensures that their voice is heard during all phases of the initiative.

Cultivate a Diverse Partnership

Although a number of factors contribute to its success, the Buffalo partners repeatedly cite two key factors: the diversity of the partnership and consistency in leadership. The partnership includes multiple sectors and disciplines (including health promotion, urban planning, and transportation engineering): BNMC, Inc. is experienced in working with municipal agencies; Green Options Buffalo has a record for advocating for policy change within city government; the Wellness Institute has experience in health promotion programming and facilitating community visioning; and the Department of Urban and Regional Planning at the University at Buffalo actively supports research and

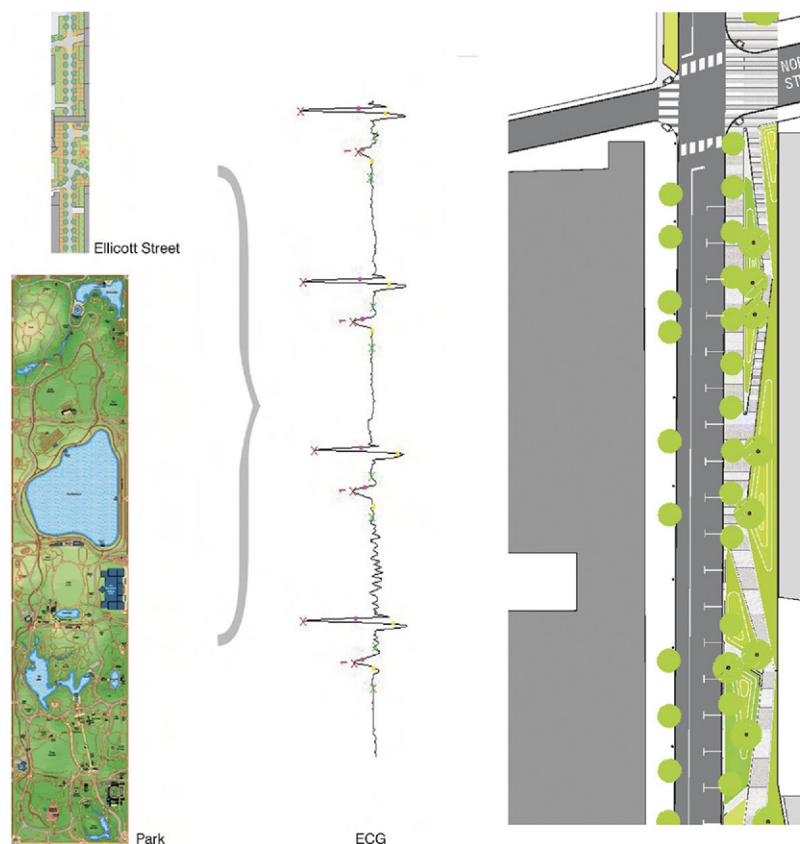
civic engagement on the intersection of active living and urban planning. The complementary expertise of the partners enables the partnership to implement all 5P strategies.

Even when partnerships are diverse, they may fail to sustain their work over the long run due to the absence of consistent and effective leadership.¹⁰ The partnership is fortunate to have such leadership from BNMC, Inc; their director of planning has consistently engaged diverse partners in conversations focusing on active living. Likewise, the Wellness Institute and Green Options Buffalo have consistently led intra-partnership dialogues with the city to facilitate policy change. Emphasizing both inter- and intra-partnership conversations is an essential strategy for building social capital to achieve sustainable change. Partners that have a demonstrable record of success lend credibility to any efforts to pursue policy change. In Buffalo, the campus is perceived as a model of successful development. Partly because of this success, ideas emanating from the partnership are well received by the city government.

Finally, a key challenge in cities such as Buffalo is a lack of financial resources. Therefore, it is important to remain open to unusual alliances to facilitate environmental change that support active living. For example, in spring 2007, BNMC, Inc. partnered with ReTree Western New York, a nonprofit organization, to plant 150 new trees in the Fruit Belt (www.re-treewny.org/main.html). Along with creating environmental benefits and scenic walking vistas, this alliance has resulted in tangible changes visible to residents.

Take a Comprehensive Approach

Environmental and systemic change to facilitate active living requires a comprehensive approach. In this case, the approach was shaped by the 5P model. Early preparation through assessments allowed the partnership to develop more informed programs and policies and also enabled the leveraging of additional funding for the initiative. Provision of programs and promotional activities generated excitement and awareness of active living as an issue in the target area. For example, the Walking on Wednesdays program has conducted 78 walks, so far, with an average weekly attendance of 35 participants. A key partner from the Wellness Institute personally leads the walks across the campus and adjacent neighborhoods. Likewise, the Summer Wellness Block Party, now in its third year, has about 2000 attendees annually. The adoption of plans and policies to support active living in Buffalo ensures that short-term gains will continue in the long term. Using a comprehensive 5P approach allowed the HCI partnership to demonstrate short-term successes without losing focus on long-term goals.



1.3 Linear Park as Campus Spine

Unlike a sidewalk adjacent to a lawn, we have developed a space that will feel more like a linear park, within the ROW (~16') + setback (20'). Although at ~36' from the curb this space is narrow by the standards of a park, we have developed design strategies that try to make the experience of walking along and through it park-like. Key features that we believe will contribute to a Park-like experience:

1. FEELS PUBLIC: a space for use by all.
2. PROMOTES ACTIVITY: Our hope is that pedestrians will be encouraged to use this spine, even if this only means walking to/from a car parked at one end of Ellicott Street to an office at the other.
3. EXPERIENCED AS A SINGLE SPACE: the 36' width should feel like one space without a dividing line at the ROW.
4. VARIETY OF EXPERIENCE: our design balances the need for an overall identity and a limited palette of elements, with a desire for a variety of experience that reflects different conditions and opportunities along Ellicott Street.
5. ENJOYED IN ALL SEASONS: a space where people can enjoy the outdoors throughout the year, and which includes diverse planting that will provide an equally compelling experience in all seasons, including winter.
6. FEELS SECURE: a space that feels secure, through adequate lighting and visibility from the street and existing/future buildings. The more public, the more active; the more active, the more secure.
7. IS WELL MAINTAINED: Ellicott Park design has taken maintenance into consideration - we have developed ideas previously vetted by the City of Buffalo. BNMC has committed to developing a Maintenance Plan in which the BNMC will play an active role.

Figure 3. Design scheme to facilitate walking along Ellicott Street (image source: BNMC Public Spaces, Phase I: Ellicott Park. 100% Schematic Design 07.20.07. nArchitects, PLLC, Scape Landscape Architecture, PLLC, Linnaea Tillett Lighting Design, Inc. Foit-Albert Associates P.C.)

Balance Long-Term Goals with Short-Term Accomplishments

Environmental change requires a great deal of time. The initiative began 5 years ago but is just now beginning to see the results translated into physical projects: \$14 million in federal grant monies for street improvements in 2004–2005 has not yet been used, largely due to the many actors involved in the design and construction phases. Therefore, it is critical for partnerships to be prepared to pursue environmental change over a long time. Because of this, it is important to have immediate, demonstrable results to energize a partnership and maintain its momentum. A Fruit Belt resident in Buffalo noted that “[BNMC, Inc.] have participated in clean-a-thons in the Fruit Belt; the streets have fixed up in the last 4 months or so . . . not sure who did it, but it’s happened; trees have been planted on Carlton and High streets . . . ; [BNMC, Inc. are] very responsive . . .” (personal communication, Fruit Belt resident, December 2008). Such immediate accomplishments—very rare in the Fruit Belt, no matter how modest—keep residents excited and engaged in a process of environmental change that can be arduously long.

Integrate Active Living Concerns Within Existing and New Planning and Policy Mandates

Research shows that particular features of the built environment—such as the availability and quality of parks and sidewalks—and proximity of commercial destinations—influence a person’s decision to walk or use active transportation.¹¹ These features are shaped in part by local government plans, such as comprehensive and land use plans and zoning codes. Therefore, a promising strategy for pursuing environmental change is to integrate active living concerns within existing and new planning and policy mandates in municipalities.¹² In Buffalo, as described above, the partnership initially chose to incorporate active living concerns within an existing campus master plan.

Once active living mandates are integrated into existing plans, communities can explore more ambitious tools. For example, municipal governments can broaden the scope of development impact assessments, a common urban planning tool used to gauge the impact of land development on the physical activity of residents. Owing to advocacy by the partnership, Buffalo’s municipal government has begun this process through its new bicycle parking ordinance. Recognizing that this effort, like many others to create environ-

mental change to promote active living, would have been even easier had the citywide comprehensive plan included a section on “health,” the partnership has now embarked on a scaled-up collaborative effort with city officials to prepare an addendum on active living and healthy eating for the official comprehensive plan. This initiative is funded through the ALbD sustainability grant. Such codification would enable residents to invoke these policies as a basis for requesting any publicly provided active living infrastructure that may be necessary in the future.

Make Sustainability a Priority

Because environmental change initiatives require considerable resources, it is important to plan for sustainability. This is especially important in economically strapped regions such as Buffalo, where local governments are fiscally unable to undertake new mandates such as active living. In this initiative, sustainability is ensured through institutionalization of policies by BNMC, Inc. and the city government; continual expansion of the partnership to include new partners; and aggressive pursuit of funding for future initiatives.

Conclusion

Environmental changes in the public domain that support active living require collaboration among public, nonprofit, and private sectors; citizen engagement; and the presence of a legal and structural framework provided by government policies and plans to direct future development.

This initiative was supported by a grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation through Active Living by Design

(#49736) and by a grant to Raja (PI) through the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus, Inc. The authors are grateful to the Transtria team and the ALbD NPO for facilitating this initiative. William Smith of the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus, Inc. provided excellent geographic information systems mapping assistance. The authors thank Mrs. Atheria Weir of the Friendly Fruit Belt Block Club Association and Ms. Amy Schmit for sharing their insights, and all Healthy Communities Initiative partners for their work in promoting active living in Buffalo. The authors are responsible for all errors and omissions.

No financial disclosures were reported by the authors of this paper.

References

1. Kowsky F. Municipal parks and city planning; Frederick Law Olmsted's Buffalo Park and Parkway System. *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 1987;XLVI:49–64.
2. U.S. Census Bureau. American Community Survey 2007. factfinder.census.gov.
3. U.S. Census Bureau. Census 2000. factfinder.census.gov.
4. Bors P, Dessauer M, Bell R, Wilkerson R, Lee J, Strunk S. The Active Living by Design national program: community initiatives and lessons learned. *Am J Prev Med* 2009;37(6S2):S313–S321.
5. Hawe P, Shiell A. Social capital and health promotion: a review. *Soc Sci Med* 2000;51(6):871–85.
6. Putnam RD. *Bowling alone: the collapse and revival of American community*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000.
7. BNMC Master Plan Implementation Strategy. 2002. Prepared by Chan Kreiger Associates for Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus, Inc. Buffalo NY.
8. City Ordinance Chapter 307, Amendment No. 115, City of Buffalo, New York.
9. Administrative Order No. 2007-014. City of Buffalo, New York.
10. Carley M. Urban partnerships, governance and the regeneration of Britain's cities. *Int Planning Studies* 2000;5(3):273–97.
11. Frank LD, Schmid TL, Sallis JF, Chapman J, Saelens BE. Linking objectively measured physical activity with objectively measured urban form: findings from SMARTRAQ. *Am J Prev Med* 2005;28(2S):S117–25.
12. Sallis JF, Cervero RB, Ascher W, Henderson KA, Kraft MK, Kerr J. An ecological approach to creating active living communities. *Annu Rev Public Health* 2006;27:297–322.