
Get Active Orlando

Changing the Built Environment to Increase Physical Activity

Malisa McCreedy, AICP, MPA, Jill G. Leslie, MPA

Background: Active Living by Design's Get Active Orlando partnership (GAO) focused on downtown Orlando's Community Redevelopment Area, including the Parramore Heritage District, home to many low-income and ethnically diverse residents, including many seniors. The area had undergone substantial development, and GAO aimed to incorporate active living considerations into the city's changing landscape.

Intervention: Get Active Orlando conducted a baseline survey of all streets, sidewalks, and bicycle lanes in the project area and identified a sequence of plans and policies in which to incorporate changes identified in the assessment. To create more immediate opportunities for active living, the partnership initiated a senior walking program, a bicycle refurbishment and giveaway program, and community bicycle-riding events, and led a social-marketing campaign that emphasized simple lifestyle changes.

Results: Get Active Orlando influenced adoption of public policies supporting active living in Orlando, including the Downtown Transportation Plan, Streetscape Guidelines, Design Standards Review Checklist, and growth management policies. Establishment of the Mayor's Advisory Council on Active Living is testament to the heightened significance of active living in Orlando.

Lessons learned: Initial assessment data served as a strong platform for policy change. Creating connections across disciplines including land-use planning, transportation, public health, and economic development allowed GAO to secure substantial policy change to influence design of the built environment. Engaging community members, including youth, as leaders was an important factor in program success.

Conclusions: The physical environment in Orlando's Community Redevelopment Area is beginning to change as a reflection of a new policy framework designed to support active living. (Am J Prev Med 2009;37(6S2):S395–S402) Published by Elsevier Inc. on behalf of American Journal of Preventive Medicine

Introduction

The City of Orlando's Active Living by Design (ALbD) initiative, Get Active Orlando (GAO), brought together multi disciplinary community partners with a strong presence in the city and the ability to bring about changes to increase active living among residents.

Although Orlando is widely seen as a tourist destination, that status can overshadow the residential population, which includes a large proportion of lower income residents and seniors concentrated in downtown. Two major interstate highways bisect the center of downtown Orlando, severely affecting the mobility of residents in the downtown area. When GAO partners assembled in 2002 to respond to the ALbD call for proposals, the data suggested that a strong focus on

active living was needed in Orlando. Local data revealed that, in 1999, a larger percentage of adults in the greater metropolitan Orlando area had sedentary lifestyles compared to the state and national averages (57.4% metro vs 53.7% statewide and 52.8% nationwide).¹ High numbers of area residents reported no leisure-time physical activity, and 70% of Hispanic residents and 46% of African-American residents reported sedentary lifestyles.¹

The GAO partnership was particularly motivated to change policy and the downtown physical environment, where a new period of development promising major change in the city's landscape was underway. Substantial public and private dollars were being invested in building new residential units, retail space, and office space. The partnership was convinced that the time was right to implement the 5Ps of ALbD—preparation, policy, programs, promotions, and physical projects—to encourage active living (www.activelivingbydesign.org/our-approach/community-action-model).² The most important goal of GAO was to reduce community barriers and create and promote environments that

From the City of Orlando (McCreedy); and Get Active Orlando! (Leslie), Orlando, Florida

Address correspondence and reprint requests to: Malisa McCreedy, AICP, MPA, Families Parks and Recreation, City of Orlando, 595 N. Primrose Avenue, Orlando FL 32803. E-mail: Malisa.McCreedy@cityoforlando.net.

Table 1. Get Active Orlando: highlights from 5P strategies

	2003–2004	2004–2005	2005–2006	2006–2007	2007–2008
Preparation	Expanded partner recruitment Surveyed redevelopment area; pedestrian and bicycle level of service	Conducted focus groups to frame challenges Integrated survey data into GIS; mapping; recommendations	Social marketing plan funded and planned Inventoried parks and bicycle racks to plan future racks Partnership subcommittee began grant-writing	\$3000 from Track Shack Foundation for walking programs and coach Evolve Marketing created ad campaign as a partner \$1500 from Florida Freewheelers for bike parts and repair	\$45,000 Robert Wood Johnson Foundation for 6th year \$100,000 from Blue Foundation (Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Florida) to continue initiative in Parramore
Programs	—	—	Community garden, Nap Ford Community School First biannual bicycle giveaway initiated	Giveaway continued; safe riding clinics; community rides with more than 150 volunteers Senior Walking program Collaborations between Parramore Kidz Zone and Teenz of Parramore for bike rides	Parramore community garden
Promotions	—	—	Developed website	“Reasons” to Get Active, “Walk, Bike, Play,” and “Point of Choice” campaigns; 36 downtown banners	—
Physical projects	—	—	—	Development projects guided by reviews	70 bicycle racks from Florida Planning and Zoning Association Since 2000, \$1.3 billion invested; design influenced by policy change/GAO input
Policies	—	Incorporated survey data into Downtown Transportation Plan w/recommendations for pedestrian and bicycle safety	GAO designated as advisory committee to mayor and city council; began advising on all major development	Downtown Transportation Plan formally adopted Design Standards Review Checklist developed for use by planning department	Recommendations from bicycle/pedestrian plan included in Capital Improvement Plan

integrate routine physical activity. That goal was grounded in the belief that, by making opportunities and facilities more accessible, physical activity would be safe, convenient, affordable, and practical. Walking, bicycling, and community gardening were identified by GAO as focal physical activities, and older adults and low-income minorities as its focal populations. The initiative’s strategy was to begin by emphasizing simple lifestyle changes and educating the community through targeted marketing efforts. Long-range goals focused on creating and sustaining changes through community design and public policies in areas such as land-use planning, transportation, parks, trails and greenways, and public health. In light of these policy change goals, GAO designated the City of Orlando Planning Division as the lead agency.

Methods

Get Active Orlando was awarded \$200,000 over 5 years to meet the following objectives: (1) identify conditions, barriers,

and opportunities for active living for all ages; (2) implement promotional and outreach techniques to facilitate resident participation; and (3) promote the incorporation of active living elements in city decision making about building, street, and intersection design, parks, and planning. All activities of GAO reflected the ALbD 5P model.² Highlights of 5P strategies and results are shown in [Table 1](#).

Settings and Populations

The geographic location of this initiative was the Community Redevelopment Area (CRA) within the City of Orlando. Created in 1982, the CRA is a 1620 acre area that encompasses the downtown business area and adjacent neighborhoods ([Figure 1](#)). Within the project area are neighborhoods of varying social and economic diversity, including Callahan, Arlington/Concord, Parramore, Park/Lake Highland, Eola Heights, Thornton Park, South Eola, and Delaney Park. Many of the initiative’s efforts focused in the Parramore Heritage District, which was settled in the 1880s by African Americans. It is a 1.34-square-mile mixed-land use district where over 89% of its more than 7000 residents are minorities—primarily African-American (93%) and Hispanic (4%). Over 51% of

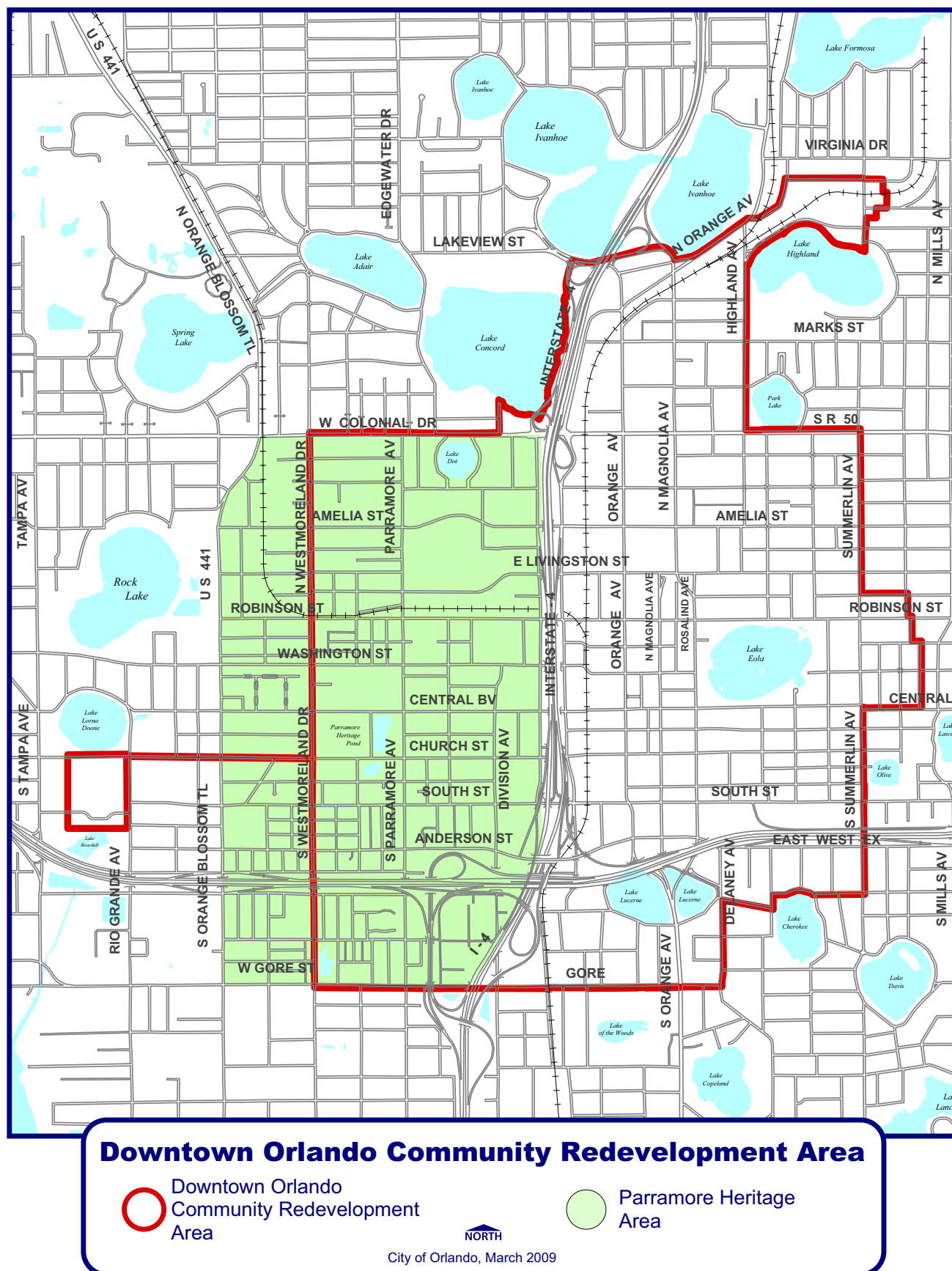


Figure 1. Downtown Orlando Community Redevelopment Area

Parramore's population is below the poverty line, and 40% of the households have no vehicle.

High crime levels, lack of neighborhood schools, industrial areas adjacent to residential areas, and bifurcation of the downtown by major highways have contributed to the decline of this previously solid community. For Parramore to become a livable, sustainable neighborhood, additional green space, activity generators and attractors, and other changes to the physical environment needed to be introduced into the residential areas.

Active Living by Design Community Action Model

Preparation. The City of Orlando's planning director realized the tremendous opportunity to create a more active, healthy Orlando through the ALbD initiative. A unique group of individuals from private, nonprofit, and government organizations with expertise in transportation, health, education, planning, and other relevant fields assembled to discuss active-living strategies and formed the GAO partnership. Partner organizations included Parramore Kidz Zone; Orange County Health Department; University of Central Florida; Florida Hospital; Orlando Health Hospital; Florida Nurses Association; Metroplan Orlando; Arlington/Concord Neighborhood Association; Florida Freewheelers bicycling club; Florida Bicycling Association; bike shops (Orange Cycle, Bike Works); and the City of Orlando Planning Division, Transportation Department, and Families, Parks and Recreation Department.

Assessing the physical environment and how people functioned within the environment was an integral component of GAO's 5-year goals. To establish a baseline, a survey of all streets, sidewalks, and bicycle lanes in the project area was conducted by GAO partners with over 100 community volunteers from neighborhood associations, the University of Central Florida, Metroplan Orlando, and the City of Orlando. The survey instrument was the Sprinkle Consulting Bicycle Level of Service and Pedestrian Level of Service model.³ Volunteers assessed key parameters: streets (one-way versus two-way, number of lanes); sidewalks; bicycle lanes (presence, width, condition); pleasantness; shade; and personal safety. Following an extended training session, the volunteers paired off to ensure inter-rater reliability of the recorded responses. Armed with the survey instrument, clipboards, and tape measures, the volunteers surveyed over 300 street segments in the project area to provide quantitative data on elements of the built environment that were not in the city's GIS database. Spatial data were gathered to provide information about perceptions of safety, security, and visual appeal of the street. City transportation planning staff entered the street survey data into the GIS database, creating an additional usable GIS layer.⁴ This information would prove useful for many of GAO's subsequent efforts, including public visioning sessions in support of policy change.

Implementation

Policies. Recognizing that the most meaningful and lasting effect GAO could have on the City of Orlando would be the ability to influence city policy, GAO pursued multiple strategies to achieve policy change. One of GAO's main objectives was to provide a secure, convenient, and comfortable network for bicyclists and pedestrians. General recommendations to

improve walkability in the CRA included updates to the city's Land Development Code (LDC) to prioritize sidewalk gaps, designate primary and secondary pedestrian corridors, and specify streetscape elements. The partnership identified a sequence of plans and policies in which to incorporate changes identified by the original survey data. These included the Downtown Transportation Plan, Streetscape Guidelines, and growth management policies.

Get Active Orlando continually examined best practices and innovative ways to retrofit existing communities and to ensure that new communities would be built to standards that encourage healthy lifestyles. A new tool was developed by GAO to assist the planning department in guiding proposals for new development: a Design Standards Checklist.

An important strategy for acquiring a greater voice and influence over policy change was the formation of a committee to serve the mayor and city council. Designated in 2006 as the Active Living Advisory Committee to the City Council, GAO advises the council regularly on all active living issues affecting the city and encourages an active living environment.

Physical projects. Orlando has been one of the most rapidly developing areas of the country over the past decade, leading GAO to focus intensively on ways to influence the shape of the expanding built environment to reflect its active living vision. Most of its strategies focused on policy change that would ultimately influence physical projects. Get Active Orlando also pursued physical projects including community gardens (see Programs section) and used the compiled survey data to write grants for infrastructure projects.

Promotions. One focus of the partnership was to influence people's behavior directly by exposing them to messages encouraging active-lifestyle choices. Get Active Orlando decided to implement a social-marketing campaign in 2005 aimed at seniors, families, and low-income individuals to increase awareness and knowledge of active living issues throughout the community. Efforts began in 2006 with focus groups to garner the thoughts of target populations on how they remain healthy and their barriers to staying active. Comments recorded during these focus groups led to the "Reasons" to Get Active social-marketing campaign, placed in weekly publications, with messages such as "Reason #14 to Get Active: Enjoy the Company of Others."

The Walk, Bike, Play campaign targeted youth and families with inspirational images of regular people engaged in enjoyable physical activities such as bicycling and hopscotch in the Parramore neighborhood. Advertisements were placed in the local African-American newspaper, with a weekly circulation of over 70,000.

The partnership placed 36 banners downtown promoting active living to reach out to the general community. The LYMMO, a free downtown circulator bus, was painted with the GAO message in January 2008, which remained in place for over 1 year (Figure 2). The GAO website, launched in 2005, has promoted physical activity by displaying photos of GAO, media stories, and links to resources (www.getactiveorlando.com).

Programs. A senior walking program in a local park near a senior center was conducted twice a year from 2006 to 2008.

Program activities were conducted 2 days per week for 10 weeks and accommodated a variety of fitness levels.

Beginning in 2005, bi-annual adult bicycle giveaways focused on low-income, minority adults in the CRA's Parramore Heritage District. Liaisons from the Orlando Police Department and LYNX bus system provided confiscated or abandoned bicycles. Bicycling partners and organizations rehabilitated bikes to meet usability and safety standards. Recipients were outpatients who come to the Orange County Health Department for health care and expressed an interest in having a bicycle. The giveaway event included helmets and lights for safety and locks for security (Figure 3).

Parramore Kidz Zone community bicycle-riding events began in 2006 and were led by GAO partners, including the Orlando Police Department and members of bicycling organizations. They were held to encourage safe participation in bicycling and as recreation for families. Several local bicycle shops held maintenance clinics prior to the ride. Bicycle helmets, lights, and locks were provided to riders who did not have them. The Teenz of Parramore have held leadership positions for the Pedal for Pride ride and provided direction on how best to structure the event.

Two community garden projects were launched in Parramore. The first, initiated in 2004, began with container gardening at an elementary school and later moved to a nearby in-ground plot. The second garden, Parramore Community Garden, came to fruition in 2008 and currently occupies a formerly vacant city lot. Although it is leased rent-free to GAO and community residents, GAO assumed the responsibility for fencing, tool storage, and water supply.

Community gardeners were supplied with soil, mulch, fertilizer, seeds, and tools to grow their crops. The head of Orlando's Leu Gardens, a GAO partner, was instrumental in the development of both sites. Although these gardens were initiated as a program to enhance physical activity, the community gardens also became visible and very successful physical projects. Over 70 attendees including the mayor, city commissioner, chief of police, and many neighborhood residents celebrated the first harvest at the grand opening of the Parramore Community Garden in March 2009.

Working in concert with other community groups in the area brought exponential returns to GAO, its collaborators, and the youth who participated in the jointly supported ventures. The



Figure 2. Get Active Orlando partners with the LYMMO bus

current GAO president is a Parramore resident. Partnering with other nonprofits under the Parramore Kidz Zone umbrella enabled GAO to effectively reach youth population through networks already established in the neighborhood.



Figure 3. Community bicycle giveaway program

Results

Creating and Sustaining Change Through Policy Affecting Community Design

The initial assessment data documenting the perceived and actual conditions facing pedestrians and cyclists became a strong platform for change. Get Active Orlando used the data in dozens of presentations to document existing problems and to illustrate how policy and physical changes could support more physical activity. A visioning exercise drew community members into the process and helped lead to a series of policy changes supported by GAO. By incorporating the data into reports and plans, public policy has been affected on various fronts, embedding active-living criteria into the decision-making framework. Through the efforts of GAO and its partners, the street survey data collected in 2004 were successfully incorporated into the city's Downtown Orlando Transportation Plan (2006); Streetscape Guidelines (ongoing); Transit Expansion Report (2007); Downtown Outlook Update (2007); and Sidewalk Inventory Study (2008). Survey data will be utilized in future projects such as the Strategic Master Plan for Families Parks and Recreation in 2009. All of these plans include active-living principles that are calculated to support design and facilities to improve access to walking and bicycling.

Growth Management Policies were updated in 2007–2008 to include GAO and active-living principles, especially regarding land use, recreation, and transportation. These policies support goals to reduce reliance on automobiles, encourage transit use, and facilitate active transportation by providing human-scale and pedestrian-friendly environments, nearby work and recreational opportunities, and convenient commercial retail establishments such as grocery stores.

Over the past 5 years, the development in downtown Orlando has resulted in meaningful and permanent change to the city's landscape. The influence of GAO includes streetscape changes designating primary and secondary pedestrian corridors with wider sidewalks (i.e., 13–15 foot); awnings incorporated into building design; and additional trees, lighting, and bike parking throughout newly developed and redeveloped areas. A Design Standards Checklist for a walkable, bikeable Orlando was successfully developed and implemented (www.getactiveorlando.com/home/).

The checklist provides an additional step for planners, architects, engineers, and developers to review their development projects carefully for potential walkability and bikeability elements. The checklist, which is required to be filled out when plans are submitted for approval, has been used over 120 times since its creation in 2007.

Reducing Community Barriers to Routine Physical Activity

While policy change continues to shape neighborhood facilities and infrastructure, an integrated approach using other P's has resulted in GAO successes in creating and promoting physical activity opportunities. Get Active Orlando linked communications messages with programs and services that enable individuals and the community to make active-living choices easier. Extensive media and communications efforts made GAO messages abundant in the target community and downtown areas.

The senior walking program, bike giveaways, and community bike rides have continuing benefits. Many program graduates continue to walk in their own neighborhoods and form their own walking groups. Nearly 50 bikes have been distributed in the bike giveaways, and the organized community bicycle rides are held on open city streets to teach participants how to safely navigate real traffic conditions. Examples of completed projects and those underway are included in Table 2.

Discussion

Importance of Assessment Data

The “aha” moment for the partnership happened during review of the mapping of the Pedestrian Level of Service (PLOS) assessment. The data showing presence of sidewalks in good repair did not necessarily correlate with perceptions that the environment was comfortable, convenient, or safe. When the basic infrastructure/physical environment data were compared to how the assessment volunteers rated the visual appearance, shade, and security, it became clear that a ribbon of connected concrete does not address other factors, such as stray dogs, people hanging out on street corners, or lack of walking destinations. The partnership realized the initiative was about more than advocating for sidewalk construction.

Achieving Success Through Strategic Partnership

Get Active Orlando has worked to change attitudes and behaviors by involving numerous partners to enhance and coordinate messages that encourage active living. The momentum of the partnership has served as a point of engagement for recruiting new partners and inspiring GAO to pursue additional funding. In addition to the initial \$200,000 ALbD funding, the partnership has secured grants and generous in-kind support totaling more than \$250,000.

Learning to enlist the right partners to complete various tasks during the course of the initiative proved to be the key to the success of different efforts. Using the knowledge base of the most-active partners has

proved beneficial for creating and updating the GAO website, navigating the process for policy creation, and keeping an eye on how to measure the effort. As the partnership has evolved, the four core agencies driving GAO have strategically held alliances with different organizations to complete goals. Examples include pursuing a marketing company to assist with promotions, aligning with local hospitals to reach target audiences, including the police department for certain events, finding funding partners to execute desired programs, and having local community advocates on the board to help with outreach and understanding the community. These strategic partnerships allowed GAO to integrate the 5Ps and created a synergistic effect on policy at the city and within the other represented organizations.

Planning-Division Influence on Policy Changes

Having the partnership led by the City Planning Division helped facilitate policy changes and physical project implementation. Getting the city council and the mayor to approve the creation of an Active Living Advisory Committee helped remove obstacles. The need to convince a local government that active-living principles are important is rendered moot when the effort is driven and supported by those creating public policy. Having the initiative housed within City Planning provided a platform for raising awareness of the relationship among urban design, transportation, the built environment, and public health.

Policy Change Will Shape Physical Change

Active-living tentacles reach throughout the city via various plans and policies to link back to the creation of a built environment, and commitment to active living. During the grant period, GAO successfully influenced physical projects, including greenspace, bike parking, community gardens, and walkability improvements. With a portfolio of policy changes now in place, physical changes that support active living will continue to unfold, one project at a time.

Table 2. Examples of physical changes completed or planned for Orlando

Trail acquisition	\$3 million combined between the city and Florida Department of Transportation funding for land acquisition, design, and construction of the Dinky Line Spur segment of the Orlando Urban Trail. Get Active Orlando and the city of Orlando worked closely with the Trust for Public Land and CSX (rail-based transportation company). The corridor was abandoned in 2007 after over 20 years of effort.
Street enhancements	Primary and secondary street enhancements have become standard conditions for approval on plans submitted for development review
Downtown streetscape	\$17 million federal appropriation has been allocated for the Church Street streetscape and other enhancements to this active downtown corridor.
Bike racks	\$10,000 has been spent to place 70 bike racks around downtown from a donation by the Florida Planning and Zoning Association board.
Pedestrian improvements	An original \$1 million pedestrian friendly-crosswalk grant was combined with another transportation project to upgrade pedestrian signals to countdown timers at all 429 intersections throughout the city.
Community gardens	Two community gardens, one at Nap Ford Community School and the other near the Callahan Community Center; GAO provided an initial \$10,000 to start the projects and will pay the water bill for the first year. Partners from Leu Gardens, Neighborhoods Services, and the Orlando Police Department teach the community gardeners about preparing, planting, fertilizing, controlling pests, and watering in order to maintain their gardens.

Project Sustainability

Get Active Orlando was recently awarded grants from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the Blue Foundation of Blue Cross Blue Shield of Florida to enable the partnership to work toward sustaining its efforts and programs through 2010. Improving organizational effectiveness and building capacity to better achieve its mission are GAO's top priorities for this period. Get Active Orlando intends to transfer programmatic responsibility to partner or community agencies and to offer planning and implementation assistance to guarantee a smooth transition.⁴ After some early program failures, such as failed attempts to establish a community garden, the partnership realized that the community has to ultimately be responsible in order for the programs to be sustainable. Recruiting community members to take leadership roles, as in the case of the current community garden, has proven successful. The current chair of GAO lives in the Parramore community and took a special interest in the garden as an active way to spend time with her daughter. By working with residents in the surrounding neighborhood and with considerable assistance from GAO, Leu Gardens, the Orlando Police Department, and Neighborhood Affairs, all hurdles were overcome to have a successful community garden.

The City of Orlando's Transportation Department is incorporating bike giveaways as part of an annual event during Bike Month. The biannual Pedal for Pride ride

is now organized by Teenz and Kidz of Parramore. Owing to the success of the Parramore Community Garden, city commissioners and residents are requesting gardens in their neighborhoods. The effort for additional community gardens is being led by a GAO partner from Leu Gardens. Senior walking programs are also continuing and are organized by the community center and some of the original participants in the program. This translation of programs to community organizations supports GAO's shift in focus from physical activity programs to the development of policies and changes in the built environment that support active lifestyles.

Conclusion and Next Steps

With the transfer of physical activity programs to other agencies in a movement toward sustainability, new areas of opportunity will emerge for GAO. New partners may be identified as the organization pursues a heightened focus on policy and physical projects. Expansion of the target population and geographic boundaries of the original project based on the model effectively used in the Parramore community will be important for future application within and beyond the City of Orlando.

The GAO partnership remains strong and highly successful, with many partners participating in its projects over a number of years. Its goals and activities represented the first time the Central Florida community came together to address active living in such a broad-based, multi-dimensional approach. A major

thrust of the sustainability efforts will be to investigate and lay the groundwork for organizational continuity and fund development. The ALbD initiative provided a unique opportunity for the GAO partnership to successfully influence policy, shape the environment, and create programs to benefit the entire Orlando community.

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