



Kansas City, KS

▲ Community Example from Chapter 4 of "Lessons for Leaders:"
Lessons in Advancing Policy/Systems Change

Community Background

In the bi-state Kansas City metropolitan area, local organizing around active transportation and access to healthy food has grown rapidly. The Rosedale community in Kansas City, KS, is a diverse, low-income community where persistent efforts to revitalize Southwest Boulevard/Merriam Lane, the historic business district corridor, have yielded powerful community change on multiple levels.

Community Action

In 2010, the Rosedale Development Association (RDA) led a highly inclusive, health-oriented neighborhood planning process to develop the Green Corridor Master Plan, which called for improving Southwest Boulevard/Merriam Lane as a "complete street." The plan, adopted by the Unified Government Commission in 2011, led to first-phase construction of bike lanes, crosswalks, curb cuts, new storm water drainage and resurfacing by July 2013, and that is only a small part of the story.

Beginning in 2010, RDA collaborated with the Kansas City Art Institute to launch an "I Need A Sidewalk" campaign in the neighborhood, and raised money to hire a bicycle/pedestrian coordinator. It expanded walking school bus and bicycle programming, and encouraged (unsuccessfully) the city to apply for Bicycle-Friendly Community status. Partners also secured leadership positions on the local Healthy Communities Wyandotte Coalition and took the city planner and transportation engineer on a tour of potential bike infrastructure sites. These experiences, new relationships and successes positioned the partnership for future wins.

The seed for one of those wins was planted when a resident approached RDA to express concern about poor transit access throughout much of the neighborhood. Rosedale Ridge was a particular concern. It is an apartment complex for 160 low-income families located more than a mile from the nearest bus stop at the top of a high, steep hill. RDA worked with churches, residents, businesses and neighborhood groups to form a Bus the Boulevard team, designed and conducted a survey together, shared data with the transit agency, and met individually with each commissioner to build support for a new bus line to connect Rosedale to the rest of the city. When one of the commissioners mentioned her support for a Save-A-Lot grocery store, they realized the bus line could connect directly to it, benefiting both residents and the store. With strong support from this commissioner and armed with compelling resident stories and data, the partnership made its case. The Unified Government Board of Commissioners approved the new bus line and allocated \$140,000 to it in the 2014 budget. The line will connect residents to the grocery store, the medical center, the community center and the library, among other destinations.

The collective effect of a variety of follow-up projects and advocacy efforts in the neighborhood greatly enhanced the potential of the Green Corridor Master Plan to generate active lifestyles for Rosedale residents. The diversity and quality of relationships forged through those efforts and the active constituency that grew from those successes has generated greater demand for active transportation, strong political momentum, and the kind of community watchfulness that can ensure more successful implementation in the future.