

Local Governments as Health Champions

Wake County Healthy Community Case Stories



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**THIS DOCUMENT TELLS THE STORY
OF SIX MUNICIPALITIES IN WAKE
COUNTY, NC AND THEIR PROJECTS.**

**BY SHARING A BRIEF OVERVIEW
OF EACH PROJECT AS WELL AS
INSIGHTS AND CHALLENGES,
WE HOPE THESE EXAMPLES
INSPIRE AND INFORM SIMILAR
ACTIONS THROUGHOUT WAKE
COUNTY AND BEYOND.**

During a time when public confidence in government is low, six municipalities in Wake County, NC, have demonstrated that local governments can still have a profound effect on their communities' health. Fuquay-Varina, Garner, Knightdale, Morrisville, Raleigh, and Zebulon embodied the spirit of Health in All Policies—the idea that non-health sectors and departments consider health in all decision-making processes—and stepped up to embrace community health as a new and growing responsibility. They examined opportunities to incorporate health into government programs, services, master plans, and big and small policy decisions. Not only did local elected officials make their own new investments for health by creating new positions, redirecting capital funds, and adopting new policies, but municipal staff now do business differently as a result. That's something we can all have confidence in.

Background



Municipal governments can play an important role in creating economically strong, healthy, and equitable communities. County-level public health departments and nonprofit groups are typically recognized for their responsibility for community health, but town councils, mayors, city managers, and municipal staff are increasingly seeing their contribution to residents' health as well.

Municipalities in Wake County, NC have embraced healthy eating and active living as emerging responsibilities. Now, parks and recreation staff, planners, and public works engineers often see through a new health "lens," incorporating it into their work in big and small ways. They do this by planning more deliberately to promote health in existing programs, procedures, and services.

In 2013, the John Rex Endowment engaged Healthy Places by Design (known then as Active Living By Design) to conduct a county-wide assessment of healthy food access and active living opportunities. Based on the data, the Endowment confirmed its belief that cities and towns could benefit from support to create healthier environments for their residents. In 2014, the Endowment partnered with Healthy Places by Design to create the Wake County Healthy Community (WCHC) initiative.

Six municipalities were funded following a competitive request for proposals—Fuquay-Varina, Garner, Knightdale, Morrisville, Raleigh, and Zebulon—and also received technical assistance and peer support to help ensure their success. This three-year program was part of the John Rex Endowment's Healthy Weight funding area in Our Plan for Impact, 2013-2018, and was designed to build municipal capacity to sustain healthy eating and active living (HEAL) efforts beyond the grant period. The initiative's goals were clear: to boost municipal staff's effectiveness to implement healthy eating and active living strategies and to enhance policies, official plans, and built environments to expand vulnerable children's access to healthy food and safe opportunities for active living.

The WCHC initiative included a "layered" approach, with the six municipalities receiving one-on-one technical assistance and access to peer learning. Healthy Places by Design held regular coaching calls with each municipality's project team and coordinated ongoing learning network gatherings, primarily through in-person convenings. These gatherings emphasized capacity and relationship building, best practices content, and peer exchanges. Throughout the initiative, Advocates for Health in Action provided collaborative support to Healthy Places by Design, John Rex Endowment, and the peer learning network.

Key Lessons

The WCHC initiative helped local governments sharpen their focus on healthy eating and active living, share their efforts with peers, and ensure the sustainability of healthy community changes.

Municipal staff, managers, and elected officials became stronger champions for health in their communities. Each municipality is now poised to sustain and potentially expand beyond the original healthy eating and active living goals to support a broader understanding of health as a priority.

“The most challenging part of this grant was the lesson in patience that we were forced to learn. It seemed everything took three times longer than it should have and was delayed multiple times. But the delays gave us time to be more strategic with plans and policies.”

ROB SMITH, TOWN OF GARNER

COLLABORATIVE LEARNING

Collaboration was key to success in each community. Nonprofits, private businesses, and county and state government officials were critical partners. And success relied on substantial teamwork within and across municipal departments. Although five of the six grants were led by parks and recreation departments (the other was housed in the planning department), each project was integrated with other departments, including planning, public works, and administration. In some cases, the first step was to connect around a shared vision and learn what each brings to the table. Partnering in this way took additional time, but was critical for success and sustained impact.

Project leaders and other staff stated that group learning and interaction with other municipalities led to new areas for professional development, and that the WCHC initiative advanced their knowledge about implementing capital projects, strengthening multidisciplinary partnerships, and assessing community needs. Peer learning meetings created and deepened relationships, built trust, and enabled professionals to share challenges and exchange ideas.

FLEXIBILITY

Most municipalities were required to learn and adapt to obstacles encountered over the three-year period. Proposed plans often shifted in order to strengthen the project or focus on an emerging need. Municipalities are dynamic, and occasionally uncovered challenges that were too large to address given the time or resources available at that moment. Similarly, priorities shift, staff undergo transitions, and new relationships must be formed to regain momentum.

Some early strategies were upended by changing conditions, timing, and other unforeseen obstacles. Project leaders grew professionally as they overcame obstacles and dealt with the complexity of creating healthier communities. Project delays and competing priorities were common.

“Now that we are aware, it is easier to see what needs to take place, and we can advocate for why it is important to keep things moving forward.”

ANTHONY DIMARZIO,
TOWN OF FUQUAY-VARINA

SUSTAINABILITY

Participating municipalities now incorporate health into their services and policies. New staff practices and norms are just as important as formal policies that are passed by elected officials. This Health in All Policies philosophy makes a department more intentional about advancing the health of residents.

Some project leaders acknowledged that the finite term of funding and inadequate staffing could threaten the momentum that the WCHC initiative’s projects created. However, these municipalities also acknowledge the projects’ value to communities and have taken extra steps to sustain them. Healthy community priorities are now codified in adopted plans, policies, and budgets. In some cases, managers secured municipal funding, created new positions specializing in community health, and leveraged additional funding.

CHAMPIONS

Policy, systems, and environmental changes that support healthy eating and active living are critical for residents to sustain healthy lives over time. But they alone are not enough. Policies must outlast the turnover of key individuals and municipal leaders. And policies that prioritize health rarely occur without the passion and individual commitment of people who champion the work: elected officials, department heads, and other staff members who provide the vision and urge others to take action. Even with adequate policies in place, implementation is unlikely without effective municipal officials who continue to see community health as a priority and as something worth the extra effort, collaboration, and expense.

Highlights



FUQUAY-VARINA

The Town of Fuquay-Varina renovated an underutilized space in its community center, transforming it into a community kitchen that now offers cooking classes to residents. In particular, this work resulted in additional thinking about programming and partnerships that offer increased healthy food access to low-income children and families.

GARNER

The Town of Garner connected its sidewalk network to a nearby underserved neighborhood, expanding opportunities for safe walking to downtown destinations. This includes the new Garner Recreation Center, which is slated for completion in 2018. The center will connect to the town's sidewalk system and provide new healthy vending options for residents.



KNIGHTDALE

The Town of Knightdale created pedestrian-friendly wayfinding and intersection improvements and transformed its weekly farmers market into a larger, more popular monthly event: the Market at Knightdale Station. The new approach results in a more festive atmosphere, with people coming together to visit the park, purchase healthy food, and enjoy family activities.

MORRISVILLE

Town of Morrisville officials and their partners created a new "food hub" in the center of town. Elected leaders and town staff collaborated with the Western Wake Farmers Market and Morrisville Community Garden, bridged their organizational differences, and leveraged resources from unusual sources to create a permanent location for healthy food sales and an educational garden.



RALEIGH







The City of Raleigh's Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Resources Department recognized the need to make park access more equitable by identifying and addressing areas of the city that were deemed as "play deserts," or places where parks and playgrounds are hard to get to. Working closely with Wake County Public School System, the Department created a shared-use policy at two elementary schools, which opened playground facilities during non-school hours so that community members could use them for unstructured play.

ZEBULON

In the rural Town of Zebulon, the Farm Fresh Market was developed to serve residents and provide a new venue for local farmers to connect with their community by providing fresh, healthy food. In addition to accepting SNAP EBT, the market helps feed food-insecure residents by making it easy for shoppers to donate cash or produce directly to the local food pantry.



Strategies

	FUQUAY-VARINA	GARNER	KNIGHTDALE	MORRISVILLE	RALEIGH	ZEBULON
HEALTHY EATING						
FOOD IN GOVERNMENT <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Healthy food at recreation centers, parks, and government events • Food assistance benefits • Community gardens 	✓	✓		✓		✓
FOOD RETAIL ENVIRONMENTS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New and enhanced farmers' markets 	✓		✓	✓		✓
ACTIVE LIVING						
MASTER PLANS AND POLICIES <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design guidelines, land use plans, park master plans, greenway plans • Subdivision regulations 		✓		✓	✓	✓
OPEN SPACES, PARKS, AND RECREATION <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New and enhanced facilities 	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
ACCESS AROUND SCHOOLS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shared-use agreements 					✓	
ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Walking and bicycling infrastructure 	✓	✓	✓			✓

A photograph of two people, an adult and a child, working together to plant a seedling in a garden bed. The adult is standing and leaning over, while the child is kneeling on the ground. They are both focused on the task. The image is overlaid with a teal color filter. The text "Community Stories" is written in white, bold, sans-serif font across the upper middle of the image.

Community Stories

TOWN OF Fuquay-Varina

COMMUNITY CONTEXT

Fuquay-Varina is one of the fastest growing towns in North Carolina. The population has grown 25 percent from 2010–2014, with no sign of slowing.

The Fuquay-Varina Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Resources (PRCR) Department staff understood that when this much growth happens so quickly, it can strain resources as they adapt to the needs of new residents. In order to meet increased demand, PRCR needed to expand and diversify programming.

PRCR leveraged ongoing efforts to advance its goals. Town leaders were already actively engaged in efforts to promote physical activity and improve access to healthy food in the community. The town had also recently finalized its pedestrian master plan and provided space for a Growers' Market in a highly visible downtown location. The commitment and engagement from town leadership was both a reason for and response to the town's population growth.

As a public-facing department that regularly interacts with its community, PRCR's staff is constantly assessing needs, developing new programs, and thinking about how to increase impact with their existing budget.

At the same time, the Fuquay-Varina Downtown Association partnered with Advocates for Health in Action to help the Growers' Market accept SNAP EBT for low-income residents. It didn't take long for the Growers' Market and PRCR staff to realize that a mutually beneficial partnership would provide more access to healthy eating opportunities for Fuquay-Varina residents while also advancing both organizations' missions.



In addition to the community kitchen, the Growers' Market increases access to healthy food.

Fuquay-Varina's PRCR followed the lead of the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA), which has expanded its focus to include healthy eating as a component of health and wellness. The town's PRCR Director and Assistant Director created a simple yet innovative approach to more efficiently use existing space and create a new programming area. They identified an underutilized space that could be used for healthy food preparation and education. Three years later, that space is now a community kitchen that provides cooking classes and food demonstrations.

OVERVIEW

Fuquay-Varina's Wake County Healthy Community (WCHC) project set out to increase access to healthy eating for families by creating a community kitchen for cooking classes, supporting the Growers' Market program, and providing funds to help a local co-operative grocery store accept SNAP EBT. The project also sought to increase access to active living opportunities by implementing strategies that emerged from a recent pedestrian planning process. Given these ambitious plans, the municipality knew it couldn't do it alone. Partners included other municipal departments, the Fuquay-Varina Downtown Association, local vendors, chefs, and many others.

Although the project evolved from its original intent, the municipality still reached its goal of increasing access to opportunities for healthy eating and active living.

CHALLENGES

The proposed WCHC project encountered unexpected delays, shifting priorities, and staff turnover. First, the community kitchen renovation costs were higher than expected, which delayed construction. Planners of the proposed co-operative grocery store also experienced internal transition and challenges with securing the right location, and they decided to relocate to another municipality.

At the Growers' Market, four different managers led the market over the three-year grant period. With each new manager, the market had to adjust to a new vision while still aligning with the expectations of the project. Finally, dedicated staff time for the project often competed with planning for a new cultural arts center and other expanding programs.

OUTCOMES

Although the Fuquay-Varina WCHC project evolved from its original intent, the municipality still reached its goal of increasing access to opportunities for healthy eating and active living. For example, the co-operative grocery store's relocation allowed the project team to reallocate funds to offset the higher costs for the community kitchen. The community kitchen was intended to be an inviting amenity for residents, with high-quality appliances and other features; the reallocation of funds allowed the town to reinvest WCHC dollars and uphold that vision without sacrificing quality.

The partnership between the Growers' Market and the town also prompted both entities to think differently. And the partnership gave the PRCR—and newer market managers—better insight into logistical challenges like staffing the market and identifying and managing the multiple demands of local growers and customers. The community kitchen has helped maintain that relationship between the market and the town. The Growers' Market Manager introduced the town to volunteers and has proposed low-cost ways to run its cooking classes, and the town is considering a more permanent place to host the market. In this way, both entities are getting additional support from the other.

PRCR's intended plans and proposed grant budget shifted in order to address emerging needs in real time. This provided an opportunity for the department to continue offering scholarships for children from low-income families to participate in programs, purchase garden boxes to improve the gardening education programs, and install wayfinding signs downtown.

Toward the end of the project, PRCR invested in a community-wide facilities assessment. The assessment included residents' input on infrastructure needs that aligned with the greenway and previous pedestrian planning efforts. Some of the findings from the assessment pointed to simple implementation ideas (like bicycle racks in parks and benches along greenways and trails), while others will inform longer-term planning for the department and other town services.



TOWN OF Garner

COMMUNITY CONTEXT

Garner is a vibrant and growing community that values health and a high quality of life. In 2013, residents passed a bond to build the Garner Recreation Center in order to meet the growing need for public access to recreation downtown.

Low-income residents, seniors, and others who are at high risk for poor health also live near the downtown area and would most benefit from these developments. Like many southern Main Street communities, historic downtown Garner is bisected by railroad tracks. While the downtown had a significant sidewalk network, it was patchy and did not provide safe and continuous connections.

The Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Resources (PRCR) Department provides facilities, programs, and activities for residents on its 475 acres of park land and recreation centers. However, some residents do not engage in traditional recreation activities. Garner's Assistant PRCR Director says, "Our active living initiatives are increasing the safety and convenience of walking and biking and will have a potentially greater impact on the socially and economically diverse neighborhoods surrounding the recreation center and the entire downtown district."

OVERVIEW

The Garner WCHC project planned to improve safe access for bicyclists and pedestrians in downtown, increase the availability of healthy options at parks and recreation programs, and embed health into other programming and planning activities. These connections were especially important, given the construction of the new 40,000 square-foot Garner Recreation Center underway along Main Street.

The recreation center is not only expanding facilities and programming but will also be a new destination in the downtown business area. The facility, scheduled to open in late 2018 down the street from a coffee shop, barber shop, and other small businesses, includes gymnasiums, multi-purpose rooms, art and fitness facilities, and administrative and meeting spaces. The WCHC grant provided funding for the site's increased connectivity and a multi-use path for walking, jogging, and biking. The Public Works Department, with support from PRCR staff, created additional supports, like sidewalks, crosswalks, signage, and consistent health-focused services to complement the recreation center. Envisioning health beyond the walls of the new center can produce ripples of opportunity throughout downtown. Staff also plan to adopt a Health in All Policies approach for the next Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Resources master planning process in order to build on the momentum.

CHALLENGES

Policy and built environment change takes time. Construction delays, mostly due to weather and other challenges outside project staff's control (like the process for allocating department-level planning funds), put parts of the project behind schedule. The outdoor walking track is not yet complete, and the healthy vending options will not be available until the new center opens. And although the department's updated master plan will include a Health in All Policies approach, the process will not start until the next fiscal year.

"The timing could not have been better... the center will be located in an underserved section of town, where many children walk to most destinations. By providing safe crosswalks and continuous sidewalks, parents will be more likely to allow children to visit the center, participate in active living programs, and have access to healthy food."

ROB SMITH, TOWN OF GARNER

However, these delays did not limit the project's success. The connectivity strategies—which included working with a railroad company and town engineers, building new sidewalks, and adding new signage—continued. The sidewalk and crosswalk were completed in time for the recreation center groundbreaking in October 2016. This achievement was followed by new lighting and crossing beacons under the railroad tracks at the crossing from Garner Road to Main Street.

More health-focused programming within PRCR also continued. A new full-time Recreation Program Specialist was hired, and the position description was written to ensure that the department would deepen its commitment to healthy eating and active living. This role was originally written for an intern, and the ultimate expansion of the position shows the flexibility allowed within the initiative and the town's commitment to advancing health.

And while the upcoming Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Resources master plan update won't happen for another year, staff are already considering how their practices, programs, and procedures influence health at every turn. The master plan will strengthen that dedication to health, as it will determine the direction of the department for the next decade.

OUTCOMES

Garner's PRCR staff adjusted their original plans slightly, which improved outcomes and made them potentially more sustainable. For example, the original proposal included a position for an intern who would conduct an assessment of the current walking environment and research healthy vending ideas. In the first year, staff saw that the position would be better filled by a full-time staff person for continuity and efficiency. Support from the WCHC initiative, along with town funds, allowed the new position to be created and sustained by the town.

The department incorporated healthy eating in other ways. It is now routine practice for all PRCR meetings to include water instead of sugar-sweetened beverages, and Garner athletic teams and parents receive educational information about healthy snacks. The new recreation center will also have healthy vending machines installed. The department continues to examine all of its practices in order to make healthy eating options the standard.

The new sidewalk infrastructure will increase families' access to healthy food and opportunities to be physically active.



Delays seem inevitable when work includes partners and outside entities with different timelines and priorities. However, as the Garner PRCR Department proved, delays can also create opportunities to make a project better (like transitioning the intern position to a full-time one); lay the groundwork for what's to come (for example, by building sidewalk connections and installing signage); and sustain momentum in areas that are within the department's control (like incorporating Health in All Policies within the recreation master plan).



TOWN OF Knightdale

COMMUNITY CONTEXT

The Town of Knightdale has grown rapidly in recent years, with many of its 15,000 residents commuting into Raleigh for work.

Knightdale is Wake County's second most racially and ethnically diverse town; 38 percent of its residents are African-American and 11 percent are Hispanic. The railroad loomed large in Knightdale's history and is still a prominent presence today. The town's most recent recreation facility, the 76-acre Knightdale Station Park, continues that legacy. But although the park is a former train depot and an ideal venue for family-friendly events and physical activity, it lacked safe and walkable connections to nearby low-income neighborhoods.

In order to improve connectivity and make it safer to walk to Knightdale Station Park, town planners proposed pedestrian safety improvements at a busy railroad crossing as their priority strategy for the project.

OVERVIEW

In order to improve connectivity and make it safer to walk to Knightdale Station Park, town planners proposed pedestrian safety improvements at a busy railroad crossing (Smithfield Road and First Avenue) as their priority strategy for the Wake County Healthy Community (WCHC) initiative. The railway created a barrier for Knightdale residents hoping to walk or bike from the Old Town Neighborhood to the park and other downtown destinations.



Better connectivity to Knightdale Station Park will make it safer for families to use the space.

Knightdale's strategy would involve a collaboration with two divisions of North Carolina Department of Transportation (NC DOT), which owns and maintains Smithfield Road and oversees the state's rail system. The project would also require cooperation with the owner and operator of the railroad. The town envisioned leveraging the WCHC initiative to spur the design, engineering, and construction of a new type of pedestrian crossing over the tracks and also complete a nearby segment of sidewalk. During the initial 18 months of the WCHC initiative, Knightdale planners collaborated with NC DOT to study the rail intersection and scope the project.

Ultimately, the town was forced to shift its pedestrian safety focus to several intersections and crossings identified in Knightdale's 2013 pedestrian plan that were in need of high-visibility crosswalks, pedestrian beacon signals, and signage. Despite the change of plans, these improvements now enable Knightdale residents to walk more safely to Knightdale Station Park and other destinations.

Knightdale also focused on its fledgling farmers' market as another component of the WCHC initiative. Managed by the Parks and Recreation Department, the Knightdale Farmers' Market was originally held as a weekly event, with local growers providing fresh produce, meat, dairy, and other food items. Once Knightdale Station Park was completed, the market found its permanent home under a sheltered space at the entrance of the park.

In 2017, under the direction of the new Parks and Recreation Director, the town adjusted its approach to the market to improve attendance and excitement. Instead of a weekly farmers' market, the town created a monthly Market in the Park event. While healthy fresh produce was still a prominent feature, families could also come for a fun and educational atmosphere with a different theme each month. As the 2017 season progressed, event planners added vendors and new activities for families. For example, the final two-day event, "Mumkin Fest," drew an estimated 2,000–3,000 visitors.

CHALLENGES

After repeated delays in obtaining commitments and trying to move the pedestrian railroad crossing project forward, NC DOT informed Knightdale planners that the project would not be feasible within the grant period. As a result, the town refocused grant resources on pedestrian safety projects that were under greater control of the town's Administration, Planning, and Engineering and Public Works departments.

Early in the planning phase, Knightdale's staff were challenged to find the right formula for a successful farmers' market. In part due to competition by other Saturday markets in nearby municipalities, the Knightdale Farmers' Market had trouble attracting consistent produce vendors and, likewise, a consistent customer base.

Ultimately, the Knightdale team reconsidered the potential of the market as a larger community gathering, celebrating the public park space with food, entertainment, and seasonal activities. Not only was the market better attended after these changes, but people were also more physically active because of the monthly Market in the Park events.

In 2017, the town adjusted its approach to the market to improve attendance and excitement. Instead of a weekly farmers' market, the town created a monthly Market in the Park event.

OUTCOMES

Knightdale's initial strategy—to create a safer railroad pedestrian crossing to improve walkability to and from Knightdale Station Park—progressed slowly through the initial phase. This project relied heavily on NC DOT to create and approve a workable design and move the project forward. Eventually, the town learned that the high cost of relocating key utilities would make the project prohibitively expensive and infeasible within the WCHC grant period. At that point, town officials identified other necessary pedestrian safety projects, including changes to wayfinding, crosswalks, and beacon signals, which were more easily implemented by the town. The lesson? Successful policy and built project implementation requires patience and the flexibility to shift gears.

Knightdale's project leadership also experienced significant turnover during the WCHC initiative. While losing and transitioning key staff members can hinder momentum, it can also create an opportunity for new energy and ideas. The new director not only took over as the town's WCHC grant project lead in the final year, but he also changed roles from Knightdale's Public Works Director to its Parks and Recreation Director. His institutional knowledge of town government made for an easy transition, and his previous role in Public Works helped see the pedestrian projects through to completion.



TOWN OF Morrisville

COMMUNITY CONTEXT

Like much of Wake County, the Town of Morrisville grew rapidly from a former railroad hub with a landscape of mostly farmland into a diverse suburb.

Today, Morrisville has approximately 5,000 families, and many residents commute to Raleigh, Durham, and the Research Triangle Park for work. The town's 2016 population was estimated at nearly 25,000 residents. There is a sizable Asian-Indian community, and 42 percent of Morrisville residents speak a language other than English at home. And while the town has a relatively high median income, six percent of the population live in poverty and have limited access to fresh produce.

"It was important for all partners to fully understand the limited resources and capabilities of our respective organizations. After this was clarified, collaboration became much easier."

BRAD WEST, TOWN OF MORRISVILLE

OVERVIEW

In 2013, Morrisville's Planning Department, with an emerging partnership that included the Western Wake Farmers' Market (WWFM), Morrisville Community Garden, and Community Food Lab, began discussions about how to achieve each of their goals with a collective strategy. The town's goal was to create a destination that would incentivize future development near existing government buildings. The WWFM, although already a successful organization offering locally grown produce, needed a new market location. The Morrisville Community Garden wanted to increase its profile and offer more educational opportunities for young people. Community Food Lab, a Raleigh-based "food system designer," helped advance these goals by assessing local interests and providing design ideas.

Prior to the WCHC initiative, Morrisville undertook extensive planning to develop its greenway system and create a vibrant and walkable town center. In addition, elected officials strongly supported the launch of the Morrisville Community Garden. Morrisville's WCHC proposal leveraged these existing elements in order to develop a project which would relocate the WWFM's Cary location to the emerging town center and create space for the Morrisville Community Garden, adjacent to a major greenway crossing. The site is also near low-income households and could be integrated into the town's planned "downtown" destination concept.

The town identified property that could accommodate a farmers' market, garden space, and public and vendor parking. The Planning and Public Works Departments designed a concept, site plan, and other engineering documents. In an effort to reduce costs, planners secured a developer's donation of 2,000 cubic yards of fill dirt needed to level the site. WWFM provided substantial input on the site plan and led the effort to raise the additional funding needed to begin the project. A Memorandum of Understanding between town officials and the Western Wake Farmers' Market Board of Directors was ultimately approved to formalize their collective effort.

Looking to broaden the town's focus beyond the Healthy Food Hub, the planning department created Morrisville's blueprint for active children and families. In 2017, the Town Council approved the Active Kids Plan, a publicly available strategic plan informed by resident surveys, focus groups, stakeholder meetings, community gatherings, and reviews of best practices. The Active Kids Plan emphasizes physical activity in Morrisville's youngest residents and specifies how transportation, development, schools, and parks and recreation can support active living.

The Active Kids Plan emphasizes physical activity in Morrisville's youngest residents.



CHALLENGES

Morrisville's Healthy Food Hub idea was simple: to create a centrally-located space on town-owned property that would accommodate a farmers' market and community garden. However, the process to make that idea a reality was far from easy. During the initial proposal phase, projections were significantly lower than the actual expenses needed to complete even the most basic market design. By 2016, as the design and bid process was underway, booming development in the region created a higher demand for skilled contractors and higher prices for their services. This reality required the project's partners to adjust and identify additional resources beyond grant funding. Morrisville's Town Council ultimately approved additional funding for the most affordable revised estimate.

This fundraising challenge stalled the Healthy Food Hub's momentum and groundbreaking. However, partners devised a solution to temporarily "stage" the weekly market at the town's government complex parking lot, which was mutually beneficial for WWFM and the town. This helped residents get used to the new location adjacent to the Healthy Food Hub site and helped partners work together through a "soft launch." Town officials relied on Western Wake Farmers' Market to spearhead the search for outside funding, and they were able to generate another \$28,000 to help offset construction costs. In the end, Morrisville's Town Council contributed \$45,000 to complete the project.

OUTCOMES

Local planning departments normally help clarify a vision for future development and its impact on transportation, housing, commerce, real estate, and environmental quality. Morrisville now includes healthy food access and active kids as part of that vision.

The Morrisville Healthy Food Hub project relied on a critical collaboration between local government and nonprofit partners. Each partner had to learn each other's priorities, possibilities, and constraints even though they shared the goal of creating a permanent venue for healthy food sales, gardening, and education.

By moving the market to a highly visible location in the center of town, this project will raise the market's profile, ensure that it remains in the community, help expand its customer base, and enable residents nearby to access it by foot or bike. The market will also increase healthy eating access for two apartment complexes within one mile of the Morrisville Healthy Food Hub site, which are home to more than 400 low-income residents. Altogether, more than 9,000 total residents live near the market. The town's two WCHC strategies to advance health in Morrisville (the Healthy Food Hub and the Active Kids Plan) complemented each other, contributing to greater engagement and positive energy for each.



CITY OF Raleigh

COMMUNITY CONTEXT

In the spring of 2015, the Raleigh City Council adopted its "first strategic plan." One of the plan's six goals was to create a "safe, vibrant, and healthy community."

A year earlier, the Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Resources (PRCR) Department created the Parks System Plan with the vision of "bringing people to parks and parks to people" by ensuring equitable park access. Municipal leaders were ready to more directly address health and access to healthy living opportunities through their work. This is significant because, in the largest city in Wake County (and the second largest in North Carolina) with the widest income disparity, not all neighborhoods have the same access to resources. The Wake County Healthy Communities (WCHC) initiative came at an ideal time to address "play deserts" in the city, which are areas with limited access to public park facilities.

Many Raleigh neighborhoods still don't have easy access to playgrounds and parks. The PRCR Department is striving to address this; one goal is to have a park or greenway within a mile of every resident. However, it costs the city roughly \$750,000 to \$1 million to construct a new neighborhood park, which may only include playgrounds, restrooms, picnic shelters, and parking spaces—but not the land itself.

Municipal departments, including PRCR, must be creative with resources in order to get the most out of tight government budgets. The Assistant Director of PRCR wonders, "Who are the partners who can help fill those gaps?" and "How can current assets be leveraged to fulfill the PRCR mission?"

The Wake County Healthy Communities (WCHC) initiative came at an ideal time to address "play deserts" in the city.

OVERVIEW

Raleigh's WCHC approach sought to increase access to physical activity for children by working directly with the Wake County Public School System (WCPSS) to create the first-ever shared-use policy at two Raleigh elementary schools. A shared-use agreement gives residents open access to unstructured play during non-school hours. In this strategy, the two schools would be located in identified play deserts. In return, some of the project would fund school ground enhancements.

In 2015, Raleigh voters approved a \$1 million bond to create the Neighborhood and Community Connections Program, which is helping the city develop strategies to connect neighborhoods to the parks and greenway system. The grant allocated staff time to research best practices and create criteria that would prioritize projects to improve connectivity. Those criteria, which include circuitry (connectivity), unemployment, age, education, housing, poverty, and pedestrian safety, will help identify high-need locations and measure the program's efficiency and effectiveness in increasing equitable pedestrian access to parks.

CHALLENGES

This project aimed high, and it took the full three years of the project to achieve the intended goal. The WCPSS is the largest school system in North Carolina and the 15th largest in the country. The Assistant Director of PRCR knew that bridging two large city bureaucracies with the school system would take time and patience. He also recognized that passing the shared-use agreement would be challenging, even with trust between both parties.

The two elementary schools that were chosen had to meet certain criteria: they needed to be located in a play desert, and the new play areas had to be accessible from the road. Other challenges included sharing responsibilities for liability and maintenance issues. The city and school system attorneys had to agree on draft policy language, and, perhaps most importantly, the policy agreement had to be approved by both governing boards. And to complicate matters further, construction would have to work around school schedules.

It also didn't take long to realize that it would be more complicated than originally anticipated to identify equitable—and comprehensive—policies across a variety of PRCR facilities like aquatic centers, historic parks, and community centers. Although the plan has scaled back these aims, the department is still considering how to support healthy opportunities for staff, such as encouraging walking meetings and incentivizing healthy eating.

Any one of these challenges could have derailed the project. Adjustments along the way required consistent, clear communication and attention to detail. An unexpected permitting issue delayed the project further. Despite these hurdles, the PRCR and WCPSS continued to patiently work through them. In 2018, Poe and Walnut Creek Elementary Schools will have walking paths, picnic shelters, and gazebos available for children during school hours and other residents after hours.

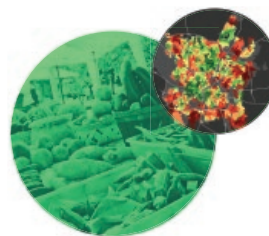
“This project was successful for three reasons: finding common ground; thinking a little differently; and knowing that everything comes down to relationships.”

SCOTT PAYNE, CITY OF RALEIGH


OUTCOMES

PRCR accomplished a lot in three years. The Neighborhood and Community Connections Program policy was approved, positioning the city as a leader in improving neighborhood access to parks and greenways and promoting health equity. A shared-use agreement at two elementary schools was also approved by the city and WCPSS. This new agreement, which was passed without any concerns from either board, is leveraging existing public assets and reaches more of the population without duplicating efforts. It may also inspire other municipalities to consider similar agreements and collaborations.

Finally, two elementary schools will have new shelters, safe walkways, and playgrounds that are open for the community after hours. PRCR is certainly achieving its vision of “bringing people to parks and parks to people” through this initiative by addressing residents' needs and using departmental resources efficiently and effectively.



Mapping circuitry, safety, and vulnerability by census block in Raleigh, NC.



TOWN OF Zebulon

COMMUNITY CONTEXT

The Town of Zebulon is one of Wake County's most rural and diverse communities.

With roughly 5,000 residents across four square miles, Zebulon's poverty rate is also three times higher than in the Wake County suburbs bordering Raleigh. Despite the abundance of nearby farms, the USDA identified the town as a food desert in 2014. In addition, the community has limited access to trails and other opportunities for safe walking and bicycling. Despite these challenges, Zebulon's elected leaders, government officials, churches, and residents have a strong record of supporting positive community change.

OVERVIEW

Zebulon's response to its recent designation as a food desert was to connect local growers to residents by creating the town's first farmers' market. Wake County has a few farmers' markets, but none previously served the residents of Zebulon. The Zebulon Farm Fresh Market, which is led and managed by the Parks and Recreation Department, would become one of only three in Wake County operated by a municipality. The Wake County Healthy Community (WCHC) initiative allowed the town to test the idea.

The market launched in spring 2015 in the parking lot of the Zebulon Community Center, a site with convenient parking that is managed by Parks and Recreation. The Parks and Recreation Director hired a part-time market manager, who quickly developed good relationships with farmers in and near Zebulon. The department also two hired part-time outreach workers—who went door-to-door with small bags of fresh vegetables—to grow awareness about the new market. The town obtained a SNAP EBT card reader and created a reimbursement process for vendors. Local high school students from the Zebulon Youth Council, an organized group of student leaders and advocates, also helped staff the market and spread the word to other young people.

In 2016, the weekly market moved to the lawn in front of Town Hall, which is a beautiful historic building that is more accessible to residents and visitors. With the help of North Carolina nonprofit Farmer Foodshare, the market hosted a "Donation Station," staffed by volunteers of Zebulon Methodist Church. Church members attended the market each week, collected cash donations, and directly purchased produce for the church's food pantry.

CHALLENGES

The market also became a venue for the USDA summer meals program, allowing low-income parents to feed their kids while shopping at the market. Seeing the value and hearing about its impact from residents, the Town Council's approved 2017-18 budget continued to fund the market manager position.

In addition to creating its first farmers' market, Zebulon sought to create a new greenway system as part of the WCHC initiative. In collaboration with Parks and Recreation staff, the Public Works Department oversaw the greenway master planning process and led its implementation. OBS Landscape Architects, a local planning firm, helped organize surveys, conduct public meetings, develop terrain and infrastructure maps, identify best practices, and draft the Zebulon Greenway, Bicycle & Pedestrian Master Plan. After significant public input and support, the Town Council adopted the master plan in October 2015.

“Zebulon approved funds to operate the farmers’ market for another year, and now offers healthy options any time it provides food for staff or the public. This wasn’t the case [before]. It’s a direct result of Health in All Policies.”

GREG JOHNSON, TOWN OF ZEBULON

With the new master plan, the town now has a blueprint to build its greenway system and prioritize early projects. Zebulon's Public Works Director led the town's effort to fund design work and seek outside investment as well. In 2016, the town invested \$225,000 for greenway engineering and design and also updated its subdivision regulations to require developers to provide greenway easements and construction. And in 2017, the Town Council approved a half-cent dedicated sales tax for active transportation projects to improve walking and biking locally.

Zebulon is one of Wake County's poorest communities. Market planners were well aware of the importance of encouraging low-income residents to shop at the market. Despite providing SNAP EBT card technology, fresh produce coupons, and extensive efforts to reach low-income residents, the market struggled to attract Zebulon residents who were the most food-insecure. While there were few SNAP EBT customers, they slowly increased over time. In addition to SNAP EBT, the market's Donation Station generated 7,000 pounds of fresh produce for the church's food pantry in 2017 and over \$4,000 worth of produce purchased from local farmers.



The Zebulon Farm Fresh Market became an effective venue for addressing food insecurity.

Some Zebulon elected officials were originally skeptical of investing community resources into a greenway initiative. By creating a thorough resident engagement process during the development of the master plan—including community meetings, surveys, and an online forum for resident engagement—town staff and the planning consultant demonstrated community members' strong interest in a greenway system. Also, particularly useful was a "field trip" for town leaders to other Wake County greenways. The trip helped alleviate skepticism and provided real-world examples that influenced Zebulon's vision.

OUTCOMES

The Zebulon Farm Fresh Market effectively addressed food insecurity in other ways, too. The Zebulon community invested generously in a successful Donation Station program: market customers readily dropped extra cash into the donation box for their neighbors. This effort also drew significant in-kind contributions from Zebulon United Methodist Church, which in turn provided market-fresh produce for food-insecure families at its food pantry. What began as health-promotion projects evolved into a broader appreciation for Zebulon's role as a health leader.

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