

# HEALTHY COMMUNITIES Tool Kit



## How You Can Work Toward Creating Healthy Communities



*A Policy Guide for Public Health Practitioners and Their Partners*

## CHAPTER 3

## WHO'S WHO AND WHAT'S WHAT

In this chapter you will learn whom to get to know and what sorts of organizations are involved in healthy-community work at the local, regional, state, and national levels. The chapter contains five sections:

1. Local and Regional Planning Resources
2. Worksheets to Help
3. Getting to Know Each Other—A Public Health Practitioner Interviews a Town Planner
4. Introducing the Michigan Department of Transportation
5. National Movements—Think Globally, Work Locally

**LOCAL AND REGIONAL PLANNING RESOURCES**

The best way to begin to understand local planning efforts is to identify local municipal officials, departments, and volunteer boards that play a role. Once you determine who's who and what's what (which can vary widely in different locations), it's a good idea to attend meetings, review minutes, and start contacting decision-makers (elected officials, staff, and volunteer board members). Check out their level of interest, see what they are working on, and—most importantly—offer to be a resource or partner in their efforts.

Below is a general list of local contacts with whom you may want to partner and present your ideas. Please keep in mind that your area may not have all of these boards and committees, and it may have other relevant groups. Committees are often formed to address specific needs of a community. Investigate to learn what is out there. Also recognize that there are regional and state-level resources that may also be of assistance to a community. A few key examples, with descriptions, are included in this list.

**Village, Township, or City****Governing Board**

Township or City Council  
Board of Aldermen  
Mayor

**Departments**

Planning  
Zoning  
Public Works  
Police  
Parks and Recreation  
Transportation

**Key Staff**

Township/City Manager  
Planning Director  
Zoning Administrator  
Transportation/Traffic Engineer  
Police Chief  
Public Works Director  
Parks and Recreation Director  
Community Development Director

**Citizen Advisory Councils/Boards**

Planning and Zoning  
(these may be separate or together)  
Appearance/Aesthetics  
Bicycle and Pedestrian  
Community Design  
Greenways  
Historic District  
Housing and Community Development  
Transportation\*  
Land Use and/or Development\*

*\*Indicates that this committee may be ad hoc or temporary in nature.*

**Private/Public Organizations and Boards**

Chamber of Commerce  
Convention and Visitors Bureau  
Main Streets Programs  
Neighborhood homeowners associations  
Parent/teacher organizations and associations  
Travel and Tourism Board  
Local school board  
Gardening associations such as Master Gardeners  
or Cooperative Extension  
Local tobacco-reduction coalitions

## County Government

### **Governing Board**

County Board of Commissioners  
Chair, County Commission

### **Key Staff**

County Manager  
Planning Director  
Zoning Administrator  
Inspections and Permits staff  
Law Enforcement  
Superintendent  
Parks and Recreation Director

### **Departments**

Planning  
Zoning  
Public Health  
Parks and Recreation  
Sheriff's Office

### **Citizen Advisory Councils/Boards**

Planning  
Zoning  
Health  
Environment  
Extension  
Greenway  
Social Services  
Housing  
Economic Development  
Recreation  
Transportation  
School Board

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## Metropolitan Planning Organizations



Metropolitan Planning Organizations, or MPOs, are required by federal transportation planning law. MPOs generally contain Census Bureau–designated “urbanized areas”—areas with a base population of at least 50,000 persons and densities equal to greater than 500 persons per square mile. MPO boundaries are mutually agreed upon by the governor and the majority of the local elected officials within an urbanized area. Michigan has 12 major MPOs. MPOs usually consist of two committees—the Transportation Policy or Executive Committee

(TPC) and the Technical Coordinating Committee (TCC), each of which identifies community needs and makes transportation project recommendations for the Priority Needs List for its planning area. Each MPO adopts a Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) for its region, and all MPOs work with the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) to develop a State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP). State law permits adjacent MPOs to consolidate as needed and requires that MPOs within a non-attainment work together to coordinate air-quality programs. This is particularly relevant for Healthy Communities Advocates because efforts to improve air quality often include efforts to make communities more bicycle- or pedestrian-friendly.

### **Rural Task Forces**

Rural Task Forces represent the jurisdictions providing transportation services and consist of cities, unincorporated villages with fewer than 5,000 residents, transit operators, county road commissions, MDOT, and, when appropriate, Indian tribal governments.

The Rural Task Forces select projects in accordance with funding targets established by MDOT, based on projected amounts of federal and state funds to be received. Projects within the task force boundaries are also reviewed for eligibility and consistency with the criteria established for the state’s Transportation Economic Development Fund and the federal Surface Transportation Program.

## Regional Councils of Government (COGs)

These organizations work to meet the region’s needs in a wide range of areas—land use planning, economic development, environmental protection, emergency medical services support, programs for the aging, and information services. While programs may vary across regions, COGs generally provide a number of services to their member governments that may include mapping and geographic information services and website design and maintenance.

## Local Community Health Coalitions and Community Tobacco-Reduction Coalitions

These coalitions are located in cities and counties throughout Michigan and can provide technical assistance and resources to increase access to nutritious foods, opportunities for physical activity, and local smoke-free environments. Community coalitions can collaborate with community agencies and organizations to assist with planning, supporting, and implementing physical activity, nutrition, tobacco-free programs, policies, and changes in the environment that will aid in the creation of a healthier community.

## WORKSHEETS TO HELP

The following pages contain three worksheets:

- Who Makes the Decisions in Your Community?
- When Do Meetings Take Place?
- Informal Leaders

### Who Makes the Decisions in Your Community? Worksheet

Name	Title	Contact Information	Board or Committees	Preferred Contact	Pet Project or Focus
Bruce Cats	Mayor	555 Main Street Smart City, MI 48888 555-3333(t) 555-3331(f) mayorbruce@smrty.org	City Council, Regional Planning Commission, Rotary	Emails for short notes; in person for lengthy conversations	Smart Growth, affordable housing
Pete Cowthorpe	Planning Director	444 Main Street Rural, MI 48111	Staff to Planning Board, Zoning Board, Land Development	Telephone, email	Revising Land Development Plan to include higher density, mixed uses, and multiple modes of transit, connecting neighborhoods to local schools.

### How To:

To gain an understanding of who's who within your community, complete the *Who* and the *When* worksheets (located on the following pages) by visiting the local government websites for both your city and county. If none currently exists, visit your local library and ask the reference specialist for this information or visit/call your local government sites (town halls, county office buildings, wherever meetings are held) and ask the secretary or staff person for the relevant information.

The *Informal Leaders* worksheet may require time and experience to figure out who the "movers and shakers" are in your community. Informal leaders may change as the nature of the work changes.

### When Do Meetings Take Place Worksheet

Committee or Board	Meeting Frequency	Time	Public Comment Period	Relevant Information
<i>Planning Board (City)</i>	<i>3rd Monday of each month</i>	<i>4 pm</i>	<i>Yes, varies</i>	<i>Request agenda packet from Luann prior to meetings; talk to Mike about content of agenda &amp; best practices.</i>
<i>County Commissioners</i>	<i>1st Monday and 3rd Wednesday of each month</i>	<i>5 pm, Mondays 9 am, Wednesdays</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Request agenda from Libby; talk with county manager to get an agenda.</i>

## Informal Leaders Worksheet

Name	Contact Information	Boards or Committees	Pet Project or Focus	Notes
<i>Eva Luna</i>	<i>1133 S. Main St. Happyville, MI 48887 553-4545 (tel) 553-4546 (fax) evarocks@scream.net</i>	<i>One Less Car Coalition; Council for Women; School Board</i>	<i>Fewer widenings of roads, more sidewalks and bike lanes</i>	<i>Good organizer and public speaker</i>
<i>Barney Bedrock</i>	<i>4433 Bedrock Lane Brevard, MI 48555 554-5566 barney@yahoo.com</i>	<i>Chamber of Commerce; Committee of 100; Partners for Economic Progress; Rotary</i>	<i>More road widenings = bigger and better business and more \$\$ for residents, industrial growth</i>	<i>Doesn't get the bike/ped connection to econ. development; had some meetings with him, but need more.</i>

### GETTING TO KNOW EACH OTHER—A PUBLIC HEALTH PRACTITIONER INTERVIEWS A TOWN PLANNER

This is an actual interview that a public health practitioner conducted with her town planner. Conducting an interview like this one is an excellent way to get to know professionals in transportation and land use planning, as well as to learn more about the planning process in your area.

#### Planning and Policy

**Public Health Practitioner (PHP):** *If a health professional or a citizen wants to suggest community changes or get involved in the planning process, where should he or she start?*

**Town Planner (TP):** Start by contacting the planning staff, either at the municipal level or with the county. They may already be planning on doing what you are requesting as part of a short- or longer-term plan. For example, our Capital Improvements Program is an extensive five-year plan that includes roads, sidewalks, and trails.

PHP: *If we don't have township/city planning, where do we start?*

TP: You can also start with the County Planning Department. There is a County Planning Director and usually a County Parks and Recreation Director. You can usually go to their websites for contact information.

PHP: *What is the main difference in what the Planning Department focuses on versus the Parks and Recreation Department?*

TP: The Planning Department is generally more focused on patterns of development, including land uses and transportation, whereas the Parks and Recreation Department is more focused on recreation facilities and programs. In some communities these departments work closely with each other, while in others they may work very separately.

PHP: *Is there a policy manual for planning?*

TP: The Land Use Plan of the city/county is the "policy," but it is not set in stone and can be flexible depending on the situation. That plan along with, for example, a Thoroughfare Transportation Plan and a Capital Improvement Program/Budget act as the policy for planning. Tools are then needed to implement the plan—such as the Unified Development Ordinance, which details the processes concerning new development.

PHP: *How can we tell if "new development" is occurring?*

TP: When property is being developed, we generally post signs on the property, such as Development, Rezoning. This is always done if a public hearing is required about the development. If you want to see if a sidewalk or community garden space will be included or just want to know what is being developed, you can call the planning staff for information.

### **Local Involvement**

PHP: *Can community members get involved in shaping these policies, implementing specific standards, or influencing the design of developments?*

TP: Corridor Plans or Small Area Plans generally focus on a specific area for a limited amount of time. These are usually more interesting to people and often involve a steering committee to which people are appointed or recommended, sometimes through an expression of interest to be part of the process. For example, for one corridor plan in town, the GIS system identified property owners in a particular area and then contacted them to see if they were interested in participating. Ultimately, the mayor selected the steering committee. So if it is well known that a particular individual has an interest or if an individual has built a relationship with staff and the board, then that individual may find himself receiving an invitation to participate in some capacity.

#### **BRIGHT IDEA:**

Keep your ear to the ground and your eyes peeled! Read the public notice section of your local newspaper to find out about upcoming rezoning issues, permits, etc. You can also request agenda packets for planning boards and commissions, boards of adjustment, and town councils.

Also, Planning Board meetings and Town Commissioner meetings are always open to the public and public comment is welcome, both non-agenda items and during public hearings on issues.

PHP: *In addition to steering team committees for certain projects, how else can community members be involved?*

TP: Community members can be involved on boards. One can express interest and submit an application in some townships. Generally, boards are appointed by the mayor and have terms of two years, but some appointments are indefinite. People can and should get involved anytime the opportunity presents itself—attend meetings and keep your eyes open for public workshops and hearings.

PHP: *What other groups should I get to know if I want to learn more about these issues?*

TP: Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) typically deal with transportation issues on a regional level. Councils of Government focus on regional planning as well, but they focus on the region more comprehensively—not just transportation but environmental issues, trails, etc.

PHP: *What is the bottom line for getting started in the arena of promoting Active Community Environments (known as Healthy Communities in Michigan)?*

TP: Establish relationships with your Planning Department staff—know what is going on and let them know what you are interested in. Get involved!

### **Sidewalks and Bike Lanes**

PHP: *Are there provisions for the inclusion of sidewalks in new development?*

TP: In this township, when land is being developed for a new purpose, sidewalks must be included. Depending on the type of street, sidewalks may be on both sides or on only one side of the road. For main thoroughfares, sidewalks must be on both sides. For urban streets, which are classified as all roads except for thoroughfares and cul-de-sacs, sidewalks must be on one side of the road. Cul-de-sacs usually do not require sidewalks because it is thought that traffic will be slower on these roads.



PHP: *If we or a group of neighborhood citizens request a sidewalk, will we get it?*

TP: A sidewalk can be requested but may not be approved because, for example, not everyone on the street may be in favor of it. Some people oppose sidewalks because they feel it will take away area from their front yards. Often it takes unanimous support of residents who would be affected by the sidewalk for it to be approved. Technically, municipalities have the power of eminent domain—they can take the property and pay the owner fair market value for it, but usually towns do not want to do that. Another reason a sidewalk may not be approved is that the township does not have funds to construct it.

PHP: *Are provisions for bike facilities (bike lanes, wide shoulders, wide curb lanes) similar to those used for sidewalks?*

TP: Bike lanes are more difficult because they require more space. Often, if a bike lane is to be included, it may require that some of the utilities (e.g., traffic sensors) be placed under the road, rather than under the bike lane. Many townships do not want to do this in case there are problems and the street needs to be dug up. Bicycling often defaults into “Share the Road,” where bicyclists are expected to share the road with cars rather than use a separate lane.

## Smoke-free Bike Lanes and Other Recreational Areas

PHP: *How can community members get involved in increasing smoke-free environments where people are physically active?*

TP: Community members can contact their local tobacco-reduction coalition and develop a plan to present to the city or township manager or village board, depending on the municipality, and request that they consider making new and existing bike lanes, walking trails, and parks smoke-free. Making these areas smoke-free not only protects the health of residents while they are active but also increases safety by decreasing fire hazards and preventing fires that can be caused by people throwing away cigarette butts on the ground. In addition, not allowing smoking increases the beautification by eliminating cigarette butts on bike lanes, on walking trails, and in parks as well as other recreational areas.

## INTRODUCING THE MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

When individuals or groups start working to create more-active communities, at some point they will cross paths with the MDOT). Learning the inner workings of MDOT can be somewhat overwhelming. But knowing some basics about our state DOT can help.

First, understand that MDOT is a very large state-level organization. MDOT has responsibility for a tremendous number of roads and highways and consequently has many divisions and departments. Main roads through a community are typically state-maintained, but there are many municipal-system roadways over which MDOT has no jurisdiction. It serves Healthy Communities Advocates well to understand the difference between these two systems, how the systems work, and ways to partner with MDOT and local decision-makers in order to achieve common goals. Yes, common goals exist!

Second, understand that MDOT's structure suggests that a particular order be followed to achieve local changes in support of healthy communities.

- **Start Locally.** It is always critical for a Healthy Community Advocate to work with local elected officials, whether the community is part of a MPO a Rural Task Force, or neither. Begin by informing the local elected officials and key staff of needed improvements and the importance of having a community with safe bicycle and pedestrian facilities. Other key contacts include engineers, directors of public works, and the city or county manager. When a community resides within an MPO jurisdiction, all transportation plans formulated within these jurisdictions must be made in collaboration with the MPO. The same applies to communities within a Rural Task Force jurisdiction. Depending on where you reside, it is important to work first with these planning organizations in developing a plan before approaching MDOT. Without the support of the MPO or Rural Task Force, a community plan will not go very far.
- **State-Level Contacts:** While the transportation system has a structure and a recommended order for getting things done, the process is not always linear.

### CAUTION:

For most communities, it is critical that before contacting the state level, Healthy Communities Advocates work through all other levels—that is, start locally! This works to a community's advantage. If local and regional players (local elected officials, MPO representatives, Region and TSC engineers) are fully informed, they can have a ready response should a state-level staff person contact them. If a community group has not worked through the suggested channels, then it will appear not to have the support of local elected officials. Local support is critical to a project's success.

Sometimes a community may feel compelled to start with state-level contacts, rather than at a local level. This may be due to time constraints, new information regarding a particular project or development, or staff changes. Building relationships is always important, but remember that a project will ultimately go through the MPO process.

- **Regional Level:** As you identify and work with your local contacts, also begin working at a more regional level. In MDOT terms, that means within a particular region office.

MDOT has seven regions across the state and each has an MDOT field office with engineers and other key staff who may be able to answer questions or provide guidance on particular improvements to roads under state jurisdiction. These include all statewide interstate freeways and state trunkline roads. State trunklines are identified with a black and white sign and the letter M followed by a number, such as M-43 (Saginaw Hwy.) or M-99 (Martin Luther King) in Lansing.

Within each region are also multiple Transportation Service Centers (TSCs), which serve the local communities in that area. It is imperative that the region engineer and staff be informed of a community's bicycle and pedestrian needs. Having a good relationship can go a long way toward making lasting improvements within a community. The region engineer will have extensive knowledge about the community and potential funding options. In particular, the region engineer will have knowledge of all planned projects and resurfacing projects for their assigned region.

### **NATIONAL MOVEMENTS—THINK GLOBALLY, WORK LOCALLY**

National Quality of Life movements are directly and indirectly related to creating active and healthy communities. They span a broad spectrum of issues, from affordable housing to clean air. Promoting physical activity may not be at the top of these potential partners' agendas, but what public health brings to the table is often found to be intriguing and less controversial. It serves public health practitioners and their partners well to investigate a fit within these groups.

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation convened a panel of experts from multiple disciplines in November 2000 in Washington, D.C. The experts compiled the following list of Quality of Life movements, each with identified key principles. Read through this list and then investigate to find out whether there is a similar group or effort in your locality or region. Once you determine who and what exists, meet with key individuals, see what they are working on, and evaluate whether a collaborative partnership will further your efforts.

*See page 10 for Quality of Life Movement Table*

Some of these Quality of Life movement principles may be familiar or intuitive to you, while others need additional investigation. Take time to do some Internet research in order to boost your understanding and comfort level.

<b>Quality of Life Movement</b>	<b>Associated Disciplines</b>	<b>Principles</b>
<i>Smart Growth</i>	<i>Land Use Transportation Economic Development</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Mix land uses</i></li> <li>• <i>Take advantage of compact building design</i></li> <li>• <i>Create housing opportunities and choice</i></li> <li>• <i>Create walkable communities</i></li> <li>• <i>Foster distinctive, attractive communities with a strong sense of place</i></li> <li>• <i>Preserve open space, farmland, natural beauty, and critical environmental areas</i></li> <li>• <i>Strengthen and direct development toward existing communities</i></li> <li>• <i>Provide a variety of transportation choices</i></li> <li>• <i>Make development decisions predictable, fair, and cost-effective</i></li> <li>• <i>Encourage community and stakeholder collaboration in development decisions</i></li> </ul>
<i>Livable Communities</i>	<i>Architecture City Planning</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Create better homes and communities</i></li> <li>• <i>Create community school and civic places</i></li> <li>• <i>Encourage smart growth</i></li> <li>• <i>Enhance water resources</i></li> <li>• <i>Empower individuals and communities</i></li> <li>• <i>Preserve open space and farmland</i></li> <li>• <i>Promote transportation choices</i></li> <li>• <i>Reclaim brownfields</i></li> <li>• <i>Strengthen local economies</i></li> </ul>
<i>Sustainable Communities</i>	<i>Environment</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Live sustainably</i></li> <li>• <i>Create community</i></li> <li>• <i>Grow a sustainable economy</i></li> <li>• <i>Protect natural resources</i></li> <li>• <i>Smart growth</i></li> <li>• <i>Govern community</i></li> </ul>
<i>Healthy Communities</i>	<i>Public Health</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Broad definition of health</i></li> <li>• <i>Broad definition of community</i></li> <li>• <i>Shared vision from community values</i></li> <li>• <i>Improve quality of life for everyone</i></li> <li>• <i>Diverse citizen participation and widespread community ownership</i></li> <li>• <i>Focus on system change</i></li> <li>• <i>Develop local assets and resources</i></li> <li>• <i>Benchmarks and measures of progress and outcomes</i></li> </ul>
<i>New Urbanism</i>	<i>Architecture Economic Development Urban Design</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Compact, walkable neighborhoods with clearly defined centers and edges</i></li> <li>• <i>Interconnected network of streets</i></li> <li>• <i>Neighborhoods and surrounding region connected by public transit</i></li> <li>• <i>Diverse mix of activities (residences, shops, schools, workplaces, parks) in close proximity</i></li> <li>• <i>Wide spectrum of housing options should enable people of broad range of incomes, ages, and family types to live within a single neighborhood.</i></li> </ul>