

## Executive Summary

### Active Community Design Forum 2021:

### *Building Healthier Community*

In January 2021, the Thurston Thrives Community Design Action Team and Thurston County Public Health & Social Services hosted its 3<sup>rd</sup> Active Community Design Forum, featuring Dan Burden, Director of Innovation & Inspiration at Blue Zones. The Forum is an effort to bring together local government staff and other interested parties to discuss ways that the regulatory framework of communities in Thurston County can align best to support the planning, development and building of active community design – a built environment of streets, trails, buildings and other public spaces that supports high levels of physical activity. This is otherwise known as an active community or active-friendly community environment.

#### **2021 Results:**

- Total participants: 50
- Local governments, authorities, agencies participating: 8  
(Lacey, Olympia, Rainier, Thurston Co., Tumwater, Yelm + Intercity Transit + TRPC)
- Other organizational partners: Cascade Pacific Action Alliance, Olympia Master Builders, Olympia Safe Streets, Parks Arts, Recreation and Culture (PARC) Foundation, and more.

#### **ACD Forum Main Presentation:**

After a local introduction that discussed the active community design strategy for Thurston County with its three objectives of improving places, improving connections and aligning the regulatory framework, Dan Burden presented two sessions via webinar, centered on the topics of built environment/health and land use and then active transportation. Main points from these presentations included:

- The characteristics of places people live longest, so-called Blue Zones, include that they are designed to encourage people to be active in their daily lives.
- Highly walkable places have good proximity (nearby-ness) of destinations and desired services to where people live and work = compact, diverse development
- Design details matter, both for safety and convenience, to make walking (and active transportation more broadly) attractive to people: connected facilities (for example sidewalks, trails), protected crossings, features that encourage desired activities of walking, bicycling, interacting with others (such as benches, drinking fountains, clear guidance or information at pedestrian scale, accessibility).

- These characteristics support many other community goals - economic, social (such as aging-in-place), and environmental – as well the public health objectives ranging from increased physical activity and reduced injuries to several other areas of overall health in a community.

The extended workshop presentation event (1/27/21) featured a similar introduction and presentation, but was followed by workshops for staff on three topics and assisted by other Blue Zones staff and Mark Fenton, affiliate of the Pedestrian/Bicycle Information Center, HSRC, UNC

1. Crossing safety, especially at roundabout intersections
2. Trail design, challenges and opportunities
3. Walkable/Bicycleable Community – How to Make It Happen

Details of the findings from these workshop sessions are provided below.

### **Active Community Design Workshop Session Group Summaries:**

#### **1. Crossing Safety, at Roundabouts**

**Roundabouts contribute to walkability by reducing vehicle speeds while keeping traffic (including pedestrians) moving.**

**What difficulties arise?** (known in literature; experienced in local communities)

- Especially on major streets with high traffic volumes (busy), which often results in a two-lane roundabout design: can create ADA issues; trouble getting traffic to stop or to develop breaks/gaps in traffic; multiple threats with two lanes
- Near schools: without a traffic, vehicles don't stop
- Roundabouts can be challenging for people on bikes.

**How can design mitigate these challenges?**

Major Streets:

- Pedestrian islands
- Central island is domed and allows larger vehicles to drive over top
- Color differentiation on pavement to slow vehicles down
- Raised crosswalk
- Really good lighting
- Curb extensions

At/Near Schools:

- Can include flashing beacons that students and other pedestrians can activate
- Pedestrian crossing flags
- School crossing guards

Other bicycling/pedestrian improvements in design:

- Protected bike lane, separating people bicycling from people walking
- Add a bike rail for persons on bikes to stop/pause for traffic without getting off bike.

## 2. Trail Design: Challenges and Opportunities – participating

### What challenges are coming about as we build more trails in our communities? (especially interface roads, busier streets)

- For built out community, difficult to align trails where we want them to go - constrained by limited existing ROW - Not a lot of existing property to construct trails
- Need more frequent nodes/access points along trail to provide greater community access by foot, bike, or transit
- Need for bicycle network planning to connect more people via street network to trail system
- Parking issues in neighborhoods when trailhead aren't available to provide convenient access for people outside neighborhoods. Parking isn't available in urban & rural areas where there is demand; some roadway shoulders are used, especially in more rural areas, but many are not official parking for trail users. Can create conflicts with businesses, and also poses safety issues (people exiting vehicles at edge of narrow roadway; or creating sight distance problems for adjacent trail crossing)
- At present, no major street crossings on Tumwater trails.

### What solutions have been working for trails with regard to these challenges?

- Trail crossing points need more prominent landing areas with park like features and better aesthetics, park benches, placemaking
- Roadways need design features (signs, flashing beacons, pavement surface, etc.) to warn motorists of a soon to be encountered trail crossing - to make them more prominent
- Rectangular Rapid Flashing Beacon (RRFB) at Woodland Trail crossing of Fones Road.
- Parallel street routes can be preferred in some areas to avoid potential unsafe situations on-trail - good surveillance – but pose other challenges
- Landscaping design and CPTED concepts are important for creating a sense of security/safety rather than an overgrown corridor.
- Maintenance is key to foster respect within the environment and may encourage more desirable trail behaviors
- Add a bike rail for persons on bikes to stop/pause for traffic at crossings without getting off bike.

### What trail features or design elements are most significant to supporting active transportation?

- Need balance between natural vegetation and openness to anticipate traffic and other safety issues
- They need to be Multi use - support a variety of modes
- Navigation – generally more and better (posting with signage and providing maps)
- Grade and slope - make it easy to ride/walk on - more accessible for all ages and abilities

## 3. Walkable/Bicycleable Community – How to Make It Happen

### What's going great and what's a big challenge

- Challenge: Cost – it can be a shocker

- Takes years to get the projects done
- Sometimes lack of coordination
- Sidewalks for access to transit are a challenge at times.
- Providing paratransit is expensive.
- Challenge of lack of connectivity of routes for walking and cycling

#### **Going Great/Possible Solutions:**

- Marginal cost can be smaller when project is happening anyway
- Meeting Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) for people walking should provide support for improving accessibility and continuity of routes.
- Communication between departments might result in a better project overall.
- Transit: Some of the high cost can be avoided if folks can get to a scheduled transit route.
- Great community we are doing well in many ways

#### **Magic wand question – what would you do if you could change anything?**

- We still start with cars – so magic wand would be to give other users equal weight in the process
- Improve the system for those who are not using the car so that more people do not need to use the car
- Actually implement when policy decisions come up.