



Maryland "1422 Communities" WALKshop Series Baltimore City Community Walking/ Walkability Plan

Jessica Brittingham: July 3, 2018

Introduction

With all the major issues that a large metropolitan city like Baltimore has to deal with; the physical fitness of its residence seems to fall lower on the priority list by the year. The Baltimore City Health Department is the oldest, continuously-operating health department in the United States. The Health Department has a wide-ranging area of responsibility, which include department that focus on everything from animal control to Chronic Disease Prevention.

After searching for new initiatives to address the many Chronic Diseases that have plagued the residents of Baltimore City, the team came up with the Billion Step Challenge. The Billion Step Challenge was created as a new and fun way to get the residents of Baltimore out and active with a city-wide goal of tracking 1 Billion Steps collectively. Walking is an activity that has the ability to reduce the risk of stroke, high blood pressure, cardiovascular disease, and diabetes to name a few.

The Billion Step Challenge aims to promote walking on the community level. We hired local community walking ambassadors to spread the word in his or her respective neighborhoods and organize walking groups. On a larger level, we created a website to highlight free and low-cost walking and wellness events around the city. That combined with the syncing technology provided by our third party app vendor allows for a non-intrusive way to track resident's steps once we get them out to they sponsored events.

The Baltimore City Health Department's stakeholders are working together to highlight already existing events around the city. Government agencies like Rec and Parks and community organizations like Health Freedom Inc. provide programming information for the website calendar and on-site sign up for the Billion Step Challenge.

The Billion Step Challenge will not only mobilize individuals and groups to walk but also serve as a catalyst for greater systems and policy in physical activity.

Template for your Community Walking/Walkability Plan

Part 1: Vision

All Baltimore City residents should have access to safe and sustainable walking/ biking spaces throughout the city. As the city develops new infrastructure and continues to welcome and retain a graduating collegiate population, the city needs to prioritize green spaces, walking paths, and connecting trails. The overall health impact on community residents with access to these amenities is undeniable and can no longer be ignored.

Part 2: Background

The current walking infrastructure in Baltimore City is greatly in need of repair. We have numerous cracked sidewalks; broken cross walk indicators, unconnected trail paths, limited lighting, and a crime rate that has many residents afraid to leave their homes after a certain time. In 2016 1,226 pedestrians were involved in a motor vehicle accident. This is up 252 people from the same time in 2015. With this exponential rate of growth, how can the walkability of the city not represent a major concern for policy makers? The Billion Step Challenge is the first walking challenge of its kind in the city. The Mayor and Health Commissioner are both extremely dedicated to this initiative. Upon the conclusion of the challenge, the goal is to have the data collected become the foundation for policy changes that create a more walkable city.

Part 3: Community Partnership

Health Freedom Inc. – Jeanne Charleston

Health Freedom, Inc. is a 501c3 nonprofit organization dedicated to improving the overall health of Marylanders. They offer a variety of free or low cost health education classes to help individuals develop the skills and knowledge to prevent or control disease risk factors. Their mission is to place behavioral change strategies in the hands of people who can motivate and assist one another to adopt healthier lifestyles and become more self-reliant. This organization has the ability to provide historical content that can act as an educational motivation to walk the city and explore its part.

Dept. of Recreation and Parks – Joel Conde

Baltimore City Recreation and Parks is the city's leading provider of affordable, year-round leisure and recreational activities for citizens of all ages and abilities. Beautiful parks, trails and waterways provide the perfect urban oasis. Their facilities are all located in or near a park and offer a respite from the fast pace of life! A great deal of free and affordable programming happens through the Dept. of Recreation and Parks. They have also just completed extensive usability survey with information that can be used for our plan as well.

Charm City Run- Kathy Logson

Charm City Run is a Running & Walking Specialty company that is committed to fitting every customer in the "right" shoe. They have 8 retail store locations around Maryland, including a dual-concept running and lifestyle boutique in Belvedere Square. If you are training for your next event, something comfortable to wear, or a race organizer; Charm City Run is the best know group in Baltimore. Most of the major running/ walking events in Baltimore or connected with Charm City Run and they have a wealth of knowledge about what works and what doesn't in the city.

GameOn Fitness- Donte Samuel

Coach Donte Samuel is a fitness expert and personal trainer that work in the community to help provide free fitness sessions to residents. He is a skilled public speaker, consultant, and team building host. Coach works with children in schools across the city to fight childhood obesity. He has a real connection to the communities he serves and can provide ground level insight that is integral to the walking plans implementation and success.

Friends of Patterson Park – Alexandra Friend

The Friends of Patterson Park is an independent 501c3 organization with a mission to ensure the park's vitality as a treasured green space and encourage its use and appreciation by neighbors, visitors, and future generations. The Patterson Park area has become an up and coming neighborhood with a mix of seasoned residents and new millennials. Finding the delicate balance of pleasing these specific groups of residents is a skill that this organization can bring to the table.

YMCA – Eric Sommerville

Impacting over 350,000 Central Marylanders, the Y will provide bold leadership in advancing a holistic approach to well-being that strengthens the community's commitment to healthy living, youth development and social responsibility. They actively engage the community to measurably improve well-being and the value of the Y in the lives of families, individuals and communities throughout Central Maryland. The impact the YMCA has on the city of Baltimore is priceless. They have a community engagement model that has been working forever. This model would certainly be of great use to the walkability team.

Part 4: Team Goals

- specific outcomes that will need to happen to achieve vision
 - Implement a communication campaign that engages local residents in using existing parks and trails more often
 - Create a group with legislative power to address the lack of walkability infrastructure in the City
 - Gain political support for the Greenway Trails Coalition

Part 5: Strategic Plan and Timeline

- Implement a communication campaign that engages local residents in using existing parks and trails more often
 - Meet with group to discuss roles and responsibilities (Middle of May 2018)
 - Gather and analyze data compiled by the completed Rec and Park survey (End of May 2018)
 - Set up focus groups to discuss the components of the communications plan to gauge what resonates most with residents (End of June 2018)
 - Draft communications plan and share with the team for feedback (Middle of July)
 - Group feedback due (End of July)
 - Revise plan based on group feedback (Middle of August 2018)
 - Final plan distributed to team (End of August 2018)

- Create a group with legislative power to address the lack of walkability infrastructure in the City. The working group should include a member of the Mayor's administration to push policy and funding initiatives.
 - Meet with group to discuss roles and responsibilities (Middle of May 2018)
 - (Sherl Streeter (AARP) and Eric Somerville (YMCA) will add this policy to their legislative agenda for additional support)
 - Group members with political contacts to reach out to solicit support for the Walkability Infrastructure Initiative. (End of June 2018)
 - Meet with potential legislative members to discuss goals and next step (End of August)
 - Draft policy language and circulate with team for feedback (End of September)
 - Coordinate policy inclusion into upcoming legislative session (September – December 2018)

- Gain political support for the Greenway Trails Coalition
 - Meet with group to discuss roles and responsibilities (Middle of May 2018)
 - Group members with political contacts to reach out to solicit support for the Walkability Infrastructure Initiative. (End of June 2018)
 - Meet with potential legislative members to discuss goals and next step (End of August)
 - Meet with community associations in areas affected by the trail connections to gain residential support and receive feedback on upcoming legislative policies (End of September 2018)
 - Draft policy language and circulate with team for feedback (End of September) Coordinate policy inclusion into upcoming legislative session (September – December 2018)

Part 6: Challenges

Possible Challenges

- Lack of group member support
 - Designate back up members for all roles and responsibilities
- Difficulty in securing elected officials for policy implementation

- Begin creating a list of community and government leaders the team has access or a direct relationship with
- Lack of local residential support
 - Keep residents engaged and included on milestone events and provide time for them to provide their feedback.

Part 7: Evaluation

Measures of Success

- Implement a communication campaign that engages local residents in using existing parks and trails more often
 - Work with Rec and Park to establish a way to obtain data on usage of parks and trails from the start of the communications campaign until it concludes
- Create a group with legislative power to address the lack of walkability infrastructure in the City
 - Contact representatives from districts with the highest pedestrian fatality rates to form a coalition to create a policy similar to Vision Zero.
- Gain political support for the Greenway Trails Coalition
 - Add at least 2 political figures to the coalition to provide insight on upcoming initiatives with the same overall goals that can partner with the coalition