

Dorchester County's Community Walking Plan

A. Vision

A culture of walkability in Dorchester County, supported by safe and engaging walking opportunities for all.

B. Background

The benefits of coordinating a Community Walking Plan are numerous. Specific priorities can help agencies plan to use limited resources more efficiently, especially as recreational trails/parks are identified as rallying points. Chronic disease has become an epidemic, and walking is one of the best strategies for improved health (or reversing poor health trends). More walkable communities increase community cohesion and social interaction, improve accessibility, lower transportation costs, and create a safer and more liveable community. Dorchester County's mission is to create safe, walkable communities that will increase the number of people walking and ultimately build a culture of walking, health and wellness.

The rural areas and small towns that make up Dorchester County have obstacles to walking. Small towns do not have the retail or employment base to allow for short-trip opportunities and there is a high dependency on vehicles. Recent Maryland Department of Transportation data for Dorchester demonstrated an increase in pedestrian injuries in the past year (7 persons injured in 2015 to 14 persons injured in 2016). Dorchester County and most of the towns have comprehensive master plans which include a basic statement of policy regarding pedestrians, walking or sidewalks, but some plans are outdated and do not fully address pedestrian priorities or facility needs.

The County has made significant progress and identified major projects to improve walkability. The County has greatly increased physical infrastructure, such as new and repaired sidewalks and traffic calming structures. Most recently, a Rails-to-Trails conversion project is moving forward, beginning with Cannery Park. The Park is envisioned as a recreational resource that will provide open space and has three components: a bicycle/walking trail, small stream restoration, and central park space between the two. In addition, the County is plentiful of parks, but most are underutilized or under-equipped. Improvements and upgrading is needed for walking trails, being mindful of the projected increase in the over 55 years of age population. Stronger, coordinated awareness campaigns need to be in place to connect more residents to parks, trails and other walking opportunities.

More specifically, through public outreach, stakeholder input, and evaluation, Dorchester County identified several gaps, which are listed in the Dorchester County 2017 Land Preservation Park and Recreation Plan. Overarching themes include a lack of coordination/communication between organizations and through media, scattered information and an incomplete resource guide, under-maximized asset and facility usage, and limited signage for existing trails, parks, etc.

Our Walking Plan addresses these gaps by improving signage, updating physical activity resource guides, creating a Heritage Trails App, installing benches and crosswalks, establishing walking clubs, and developing stronger marketing campaigns. These projects are purposed to improve connectivity, increase usage of walking areas and parks, as well as walking opportunities, and simply get more people walking. A huge asset worth mentioning is the rich heritage and history of Dorchester County. This is a driving force in bringing partners together and engaging the community. The County strives to preserve and enhance its historic and cultural resources, natural landscape and heritage, creating intrinsic opportunities to build a culture of walkability.

C. Community Partnerships

County Government (including Recreation and Parks) – Rebecca White

Mission: To provide safe athletic facilities, clean parks, and programmatic support, or leadership, for myriad activities for citizens. This is done by gauging the needs of its citizens and developing appropriate spaces, and times, for recreation and leisure, both in the natural setting and in various developed facilities. The Vision of Dorchester County’s Recreation and Parks Department is to provide sustainable opportunities for enjoyment and relaxation; and to provide an integrated resource for information regarding enrichment programs that enhance the QOL of each and every citizen regardless of age, income, or location with the County.

Contributions:

- Assessment of current assets
- Facilitates activities for citizens of all ages
- Development and maintenance of parks and recreation areas
- Access to funding
- Marketing
- Linkage to Resources
- Ability to analyze data (i.e. Equity Park Mapper) to steer goals and planning

City of Cambridge Planning – Brent Jett

Mission: N/A

Contributions:

- Ability to analyze data i.e. Equity Park Mapper to steer goals and planning
- Signage
- Linkage to City planning resources
- Knowledge regarding planning and zoning policies/protocols
- Engineering expertise

Dorchester Community Services, Inc. – Diana Edwards

Mission: At DCS we believe all people should be treated with respect. The services we provide should always embrace the highest integrity and quality. As advocates for our consumers, we assist all individuals towards self-sufficiency and independence. We do this through a process that emphasizes communication, planning, and teamwork that recognizes and seizes opportunities that will benefit our consumers while realizing we are accountable to the public we serve and stewards of government and community resources.

Contributions:

Translation of materials
Transportation resources
Perspective of aging and disabled population
Understanding of public transit system
Walking experience

Dorchester County Health Department – Angela Mercier

Mission: From disease prevention to crisis intervention, from birth to death, we are working in partnership with the community to make a safer place for healthier people.

Contributions:

Steering
Access to funding
Printed guides, maps
Leveraging of resources and community partnerships
Walkability and wellness expertise and resources

Dorchester County Tourism – Amanda Fenstermaker

Mission: N/A

Contributions:

Promotion of social and cultural heritage of the community through Heritage Tourism
Budgetary guidance
Access to funding
Printed guides, maps
Marketing linkage to resources
Assessment of current assets

D. Team Goals

1. Update the *Commit to be Fit Guide* to a comprehensive resource guide
 - a. Assess current parks, trails, recreation and fitness sites, water trails, and public boating/kayaking access sites
 - b. Compile new information and updates for graphic artist
 - c. Revise and print guides
 - d. Distribute *Guide* and continue marketing efforts

2. Implement a StoryWalk® project
 - a. Collaborate with local partners to build permanent structures for the pages
 - b. Contract with the Curious City company to design pages and secure publisher's permission to use book
 - c. Secure a trail or park to install the StoryWalk®
 - d. Contract with company to build structures to house pages of the StoryWalk®
 - e. Collaborate with local partners to conduct a "kick-off" or "unveiling" event

3. Walking Clubs
 - a. Develop and announce Request for Applications (RFA)
 - b. Promote funding opportunity to businesses, faith-based community, housing authority, senior centers, etc.
 - c. Develop Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) agreements
 - d. Evaluate applications and establish contracts with selected groups
 - e. Coordinate with MDH for the provision of walking leader training
 - f. Formation of ongoing, sustainable walking clubs offering and promoting group walking activities within community
 - g. Ongoing provision of technical assistance (TA) to groups

4. Installation of Park Signage (i.e. way-finding)
 - a. Inventory and assess current parks' signage
 - b. Create universal signage template
 - c. Develop signage and acquire needed structures
 - d. Determine suitable locations and coordinate installation of signs
 - e. Continue branded marketing efforts

5. Revise community guides (Cycling, Water Trails)
 - a. Update the current cycling and water trails guides
 - b. Send guides for production and printing
 - c. Assist in the distribution and marketing of guides

6. Development of a Heritage Trails App
 - a. Prioritize trails for the app
 - b. Research developers and release RFP
 - c. Establish contract with app developer
 - d. Develop scripts
 - e. Recruit local radio personalities or community leaders to record needed audio
 - f. Build app

7. Support the Rails to Trails Project as rails are converted countywide
 - a. Confirm required/appropriate benches to purchase
 - b. Research and select circuit training equipment to purchase
 - c. Confirm trail locations for installation of benches and equipment
 - d. Secure funding for additional circuit training equipment and benches

8. Install crosswalks for walking connectivity and safety
 - a. Construct a crosswalk across Cedar Street in Cambridge for connectivity
 - b. Submit request for a crosswalk across Washington Street in Cambridge to Maryland Highway Safety Administration

9. Celebrate Walk Maryland Day
 - a. Provide resources to and encourage all groups/organizations, such as the walking clubs, Rails to Trails/Cannery Park leaders, businesses, churches, and other community partners to host Walk Maryland Day events
 - b. Promote all Walk Maryland Day events within community, engaging the media and elected officials

E. Strategic Plan and Timeline

Timeline for Short-Term Goals:

Goals	April 2018	May 2018	June 2018	July 2018	Aug. 2018	Sept. 2018
1. Update the <i>Commit to be Fit</i> Guide	Park, trail, and water access audits.	Continued audits and revisions.	Revise Guide.	Production of Guide and distribution.	Continued marketing.	Continued marketing.
2. Implement StoryWalk®	Contract Curious City.	Negotiate with welding companies. Site selected. Establish MOU with involved partners.	Design framework of structures. Develop and print pages.	Install StoryWalk®. Kick-off planning.	Kick-off event.	Continued promotion of StoryWalk®.
3. Promotion of Walking Clubs			Develop RFA and MOU agreements.	Release RFA. Application evaluation. Establish contracts with selected groups.	Coordinate with MDH for the provision of walking leader training. Provision of TA to groups.	Continued support and TA to groups.
4. Signage to promote parks, trails and water access (i.e. way-finding).		Park, trail, and water access audits.	Continue audits.	Determine signage needs.	Research signage costs and potential funding sources.	Present signage recommendations to City/County Councils.
5. Revision of cycling and water trail guides		Partners identify updates to guides.	Revise guides.	Guides sent for production and printing.	Marketing of guides.	Continued marketing of guides.
6. Development of a Heritage Trails App		Prioritize trails for the app.	Research potential developers.	Negotiate with developer.	Scripts developed. Secure narrators.	Begin App development.

7. Support the Rails to Trails Project	Build partnerships.	Build partnerships.	Meet with partners and research benches and circuit training equipment.	Select benches and equipment. Present to Cambridge City Council for approval.	Purchase benches and equipment.	Identify placement of benches and equipment.
8. Install crosswalks				Request Washington Street crosswalk. Establish MOU with Cambridge Public Works to develop Cedar Street crosswalk.	Monitor the development of crosswalk.	Installation Cedar Street crosswalk completed.
Celebrate Walk MD Day				Hold planning meetings with various groups to build momentum of walk events.	Share resources with walking clubs and organizations to plan walk events.	Coordinate and promote events.

Long-Term Goals (3-5 years):

- Yearly review of Walking Plan.
- Installment of wayfinding signage throughout County.
- Cohesive, coordinated communications/marketing plan to promote physical activity resources. Compile photos, showcasing people being physically active in community, for storytelling.
- Seek additional funding sources to expand walkability and trail connectivity. Identify ways to leverage resources, such as aligning efforts with the Transportation Development Plan and Comprehensive Plans.
- Ongoing promotion of walking resources and opportunities.
- The provision of technical assistance and support to community.
- Continued building and strengthening of partnerships and collaborations.

F. Challenges: Solutions

- Timeline to spend funding is short: Prioritize.
- Securing additional funding: Explore additional grant sources, and apply if applicable.
- Potential staff shortages: Explore additional grant sources, and apply if applicable.
- Production of materials may take longer than expected: Plan and accommodate flexibility.

- Coordinating meetings due to busy and various work schedules and competing demands: Continue to be flexible and utilize conference calls or alternative meeting approaches (such as walking meetings).
- Developing a mechanism to record visits to StoryWalk®: Continued research of options.

G. Evaluation

Goals 1 and 5: Record/log of park and trail audits. Completed updated *Commit to be Fit* Guide, cycling and water trail guides. Number of Guides distributed and restocked.

Goal 2: Completion of StoryWalk®. Number of attendees at StoryWalk® kickoff event. Visits to StoryWalk® (if possible). Number of StoryWalk® books borrowed from the local libraries.

Goal 3: Document number of current and new walking groups/ programs. Develop a log for groups to record numbers of participants.

Goal 4: Number of signs installed.

Goal 6: App(s) completed. Number of persons accessing the App(s).

Goal 7: Benches and circuit training equipment ordered and installed.

Goal 8: Completion of crosswalks.

Goal 9: Number of Walk MD Day events. Number of participants.