

# **COMMUNITY WALKING/WALKABILITY PLAN**

## **Somerset County, Maryland**

### **PART I: VISION**

Somerset County Walk Team's mission is to facilitate access, education and opportunities for walking using existing/future infrastructure, community resources and stakeholders. We envision a community of walking groups, workplaces and individuals organizing routine walks while charting their progress and sharing experiences with other groups in an effort to activate them to come together for walking. Secondly, we see a regular advertised series of walking events that both stand alone and connect with other countywide events that will enhance the visibility and engagement in the activity of walking and healthy lifestyles. Lastly, we strive to create an environment where the citizens of Somerset County take an active role in their own development and motivation as walkers.

### **PART 2: BACKGROUND**

Somerset County is very rural and covers an area of 610 square miles of abundant open space, rural roads, and waterways. The population is 25,928. The County Health Rankings of 2017, place us 22nd out of 24 in health outcomes and 23rd in health risks. Adult obesity rate is over 42%. Almost 1/3 of county residents do not get adequate physical exercise.

Though one fatality is one too many, Somerset County has been fortunate to have only one reported fatal crash in 2016. The five year average compiled from the Maryland Department of Transportation is two fatalities. The same report finds zero pedestrian fatalities since 2014.

The current conditions in the community that affect walking can mostly be summed up by analyzing the sedentary culture of the area. Most people, despite the fact that many areas in the county are walkable (have shoulders or sidewalks, low traffic), choose to stay in their vehicles to get from place to place. Additionally, the overall attitude towards physical activity is passive, especially in certain age and demographic categories. The impetuses for change is obvious - active people feel better, are more involved and make decisions about diet and exercise that benefit their overall health and wellness.

Toole Design Group worked with the Somerset County Health Department and its key stakeholders to create a Walking Plan Assessment in 2014-15. This group reviewed the demographic data, identified barriers, considered a number of strategies related to walking and recommended an integrated process to increase walking that created more places to walk, near and where the people live, work, and play, and inspire the desire to walk. Out of this, 'Trail Mix' was born. It highlights the many points of interest that can be incorporated into walking activities and plans including the Whitehaven Ferry, historic towns, marinas, county parks, Jane's Island State Park, an 18-hole public golf course, and the University of MD Eastern Shore.

The State Highway Administration within the last few years has made significant walkability improvements to our two urbanized areas, the City of Crisfield and the Town of Princess Anne. Princess Anne used the Complete Street Concept when it made its enhancements on the main road that runs through the town and are ADA compliant. These two municipalities will be encouraged to expand the walkability improvements along other municipality streets using grants and low interest loans. Currently there ordinances for snow removal and when properties are sold, the new owners/builders must install or repair the sidewalk in front of their property.

### **PART 3: COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP**

The Somerset County Team is comprised of:

Sharon Lynch, **Somerset County Health Dept.**

Clint Sterling, **Somerset County Recreation & Parks**

John Redden, **Somerset County Dept. of Public Works**

Julie Widdowson, **Somerset County Tourism**

Susan Sterling, **Crisfield Visitor Center**

Karen Riggin, **Somerset County Times and community Advocate**

Garland Hayward, **Princess Anne Town Commissioner & Director of GH Youth Center**

Dawn Whitelock, **Walk Event Coordinator with Recreation and Parks**

Each one of these team members brings a unique perspective to the team both personally and professionally. Several are active walk advocates and leaders in their community. Others have technical expertise in program planning, design, marketing, tourism, and infrastructure. All have a desire to see Somerset county residents become healthier and more active.

### **PART 4: TEAM GOALS**

**The overall broad goals established with Toole Design's help in 2014-15 are:**

1. Get people out walking
2. Inspire the desire to walk
3. Engage everyone to walk and share the message of Trail Mix and walking for pleasure and health.

**To achieve this we will focus on these four (4) specific goals:**

1. **Immediate Goal:** Expand Trail Mix project and launch app.
2. **Short-term Goal:** Develop communication and outreach strategies to offer more walking opportunities and motivation to walk.
3. **Mid-range Goal:** Develop Princess Anne and/or Crisfield into recognized destinations similar to the town of Berlin, MD. This "Coolest Small Town" has become a place where everyone is out and about walking.
4. **Long-term Goal:** Assist with the planning and marketing of the future Rails to Trails hiker/biker trail.

### **PART 5: STRATEGIC PLAN AND TIMELINE**

**Goal #1: Expand Trail Mix project and launch app**

<b>ACTION STEPS</b>	<b>TIME LINE</b>	<b>RESPONSIBILITIES</b>	<b>EVALUATION</b>
1. Launch Trail Mix app at Community Field Day. Have vendor table and actively encourage public to download app	April 21	Walk Committee, asapr marketing firm	# Of downloads
2. Have vendor table and actively encourage public to download app at Princess Anne Streetfest	May 5	Walk Committee, asapr marketing firm	# Of downloads

3. Market new app with media – print and radio, TV, social using TM website and partner sites. Create app promotional printed materials. Market with tourism offices for all visitors.	April 21 – September 2018	Asapr marketing firm, Tourism, Rec & Parks, Health Dept.	# Of downloads # of people who say they saw media # of materials distributed.
4. Using app analytics, gauge use of app. Review with walk team and adjust marketing efforts as needed.	Beginning June 2018 and on-going	Health Department lead and Rec & Park Director	Review of analytics
5. Expand app to include biking and kayaking opportunities. John Redden shared that kayak maps are already being created. Kayak routes also exist for Janes Island and Smith Island. Work with these partners to save time and money.	July 2018 – fall of 2018	Asapr with guidance from Health Department lead and Rec & Park Director.	

**Goal # 2: Develop communication and outreach strategies to offer more walking opportunities and motivation to walk.**

<b>ACTION STEPS</b>	<b>TIME LINE</b>	<b>RESPONSIBILITIES</b>	<b>EVALUATION</b>
1. Meet with the committee to strategize specific action steps for best way to address this goal. Ideas collected to date: a. <b>Indoor walking opportunities</b> - Research locations and develop partners (i.e.: libraries, schools). Encourage worksites to create indoor walking routes for their employees. b. <b>Walk advocates and walk leaders</b> – Partner with state to host regional trainings. Hold a local regional event as well. c. <b>Rx exercise program</b> –Research other counties currently using this and talk to local providers about their interest.	May - September 2018	Walk Team	Decision on steps to address
2. Based on above, develop a communication and outreach plan that includes current activities and possibilities for partnership as well as new activities all designed to get more people walking where they live and work as well as motivators to inspire the non-walker. Include in plan tracking and evaluation components.	June – September 2018	Walk Team	Type of plan
3. Market via a variety of venues, and especially face to face, the walk advocate/leader training. Use state provided materials (as available) and create county specific packets to guide leaders. Host training. Create a network of walk leaders. Use storytelling to	Tentative July – September 2018	Walk Team, community partners	# of people reached # of leaders trained # of and type of venues used to market

motivate others to walk (i.e.: Team members like Karen and Julie).			
4. Implement elements of the communication plan noted in Action Step#2. Target the following: a. Churches b. Historical Societies c. Businesses d. Humane society – develop an ‘Adopt a dog walk’ or host a ‘Salty Dog Theme Walk’ e. Housing Authorities f. Expand current walking tours to include Trail Mix and the app. (such as J. Paden Bus tours. Could he do a walking tour?) Partner with the 2 Princess Anne cell phone walking tours and the Ghost Tours. g. Tourism h. Tie into other activities like the golf course, Jane’s Island, boat tours.	August - October	Walk Team, community partners	# of people educated/reached # of activities and special events planned # of attendees at the events.
5. Use media to assist with communication message targeting walker and non-walkers of all ages. Create ads, purchase media time, develop and print additional materials. Conduct presentations to groups.	July 2018 and on-going	Media partners, Health department lead assisted by walk team	# of people responding to the messages.
6. Assist walk leaders with on-going motivation, training opportunities, ideas and links to other resources, etc. as they develop and implement their respective walk group. Continue to grow the ‘network’.	On-going following the training.	Walk team members, walk leaders.	# of leaders # of walkers in the groups
7. If deemed doable and appropriate, implement Rx and/ or indoor programs (see step #1)	To begin in August 2018	Walk team and community partners	# reached with selected program.

**Goal #3. Develop Princess Anne and/or Crisfield into recognition destinations similar to the town of Berlin, MD. This “Coolest Small Town” has become a place with everyone is out and about walking.**

<b>ACTION STEPS</b>	<b>TIMELINE</b>	<b>RESPONSIBILITIES</b>	<b>EVALUATION</b>
1. Collaborate with tourism, town chambers and councils for ways to include walking as a marketable activity. Ideas such as scavenger hunts or architectural walks.	Spring of 2019	Walk team, town and county government, businesses	# of ways walkability included in activities # of meetings held
2. Conduct walking audits (inviting local officials and the public) and then advocate to local government for walkability improvements, as needed, along municipality streets using grants	Summer – fall of 2019	Walk team, town and county government, businesses, media	# of meetings held # of improvements made.

and low interest loans. Adopt additional local sidewalk ordinances as needed.			
3. Assist with planning of activities to increase walkability	Fall of 2019 - 2020	Walk team, town and county government, businesses, media	# of activities #attended
4. Engage walk leaders and general community for obtain their ideas and input for their respective community and to share walking options and resources	Beginning summer of 2019	Walk team, walk leaders	# of leaders and members of community engaged

**Goal #4: Assist with the planning and marketing of the future Rails to Trails hiker/biker trail**

<b>ACTION STEPS</b>	<b>TIMELINE</b>	<b>RESPONSIBILITIES</b>	<b>EVALUATION</b>
1. Collaborate with Rec & Park director and SHA on progress of trail and how county team can assist. <i>(Project is currently in the permit phase)</i>	Mid to late 2019	Rec & Park director and SHA, Walk team, Et.al.	Results of discussion; Types of assistance given
2. Assist with marketing plan of trail once completed.	Spring of 2020 or 2021	Team Media	Type of methods to be used
3. Market and promote Trail to walk leaders, general population, businesses, tourism, etc. using all available resources. Add section about the new Trail to the Trail Mix phone app.	Spring of 2020 or 2021 and beyond	Rec & Parks, health department, media, etc.	# reached; Types of messaging used; Analytics evaluation of media.
4. Encourage sustainability and local support through “Adopt a section of trail” programs.	Beyond 2021	Rec & Parks and others.	# of programs; # of participants

**PART 6: CHALLENGES**

***“Biggest challenge is hardest solution – getting people moving. We have everything in place.”, team member.***

**1. How to keep people committed to a healthy Walking Lifestyle?**

- \* Maintain adequate outreach
- \* Create actual walking groups and online forums for encouragement. Use social media.
- \* Create individual and team goals – both long and short term – on app and online
- \* Develop and promote alternative indoor walking areas for inclement weather
- \* Encourage walking group leader to host ‘Walk-in-place’ training for trail walking

**2. How to combat Laziness?**

- \* Have spokespeople who have made life changes. Use storytelling.
- \* Solicit groups and organizations who will help encourage clients to get involved
- \* Map out smaller trails, walkways etc. so non-walkers or those in poor health are not overwhelmed.  
Create time distance maps.

**3. How to educate pedestrian and drivers about laws**

- \* Use existing materials and distribute throughout community

- \* Work with 4-H, SADD, Drivers Ed, Library, Senior Groups, etc.
- \* Educate Walking Group Leaders
- \* Encourage Walking Group Leader to host 'Walk-in-place' training for safe walking along trail, sidewalk, street, etc.

#### **4. Financial Issues**

- \* Educate the need for financial assistance for infrastructure - Good lighting, safe walkways, sidewalks and paths.
- \* Need money to educate public on how walking lowers health issues and to raise awareness that healthy lifestyles reduce cost of living.

#### **5. Bugs – ticks and mosquitoes**

- \* Educate people to protect selves by partnering with other health department programs
- \* Advocate to County Mosquito Control and Jane's Island to increase spraying. Obtain spraying schedule and work with them for ways to make changes to benefit walkers and the community. Advocate, educate and link to additional funding.

### **PART 7 EVALUATION**

Evaluation of this program will be on-going and evolving using a variety of tools and methods. Numbers of attendees at events, analytics from social media, the phone app, and the Trail Mix website, reports by walk leaders, visual observation of increased number of people out walking are some of the resources to be used. The walk team is in discussion of how to track the walkers. No concrete decision has been made but options are determine if the phone app can collect info or if an existing program like Stride Kickers is viable or if another tracking system can be created. Evaluation measures to be considered include add a passport, badge, or points challenge with recognition, walk route check-ins. Research Walk to Connect's tracking system.

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