

## **Washington County Walking and Walkability Plan**

This plan was approved 6/13/2018. It will be reviewed and updated at least annually.

### **Vision**

Walking toward a healthier Washington County.

### **Background**

Washington County has a total population of 150,578, according to the 2017 U.S. Census estimates. According to 2016 Census data, 5.8% of the population are under 5 years old, 22.2% are under 18 years old, and 16.6% are over 65 years old. The population is 49.1% female, 83.5% white, 11.4% black, 4.7% Hispanic, and 1.9% Asian. 13.2% are in poverty and 86.9% have a high school diploma. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the county has a total area of 467 square miles (1,210 km<sup>2</sup>), of which 458 square miles (1,190 km<sup>2</sup>) is land and 9.6 square miles (25 km<sup>2</sup>) (2.0%) is water. There are 322.1 people per square mile. The county seat is Hagerstown, which has a population of 40,452 according to 2016 Census data. There are 8 other major towns in the county.

According to the 2017 County Health Rankings, the obesity rate in Washington County is 34%, which is higher than the rate in Maryland of 29%. The physical inactivity rate is 26%, which is higher than the Maryland rate of 22%. The diabetes prevalence in Washington County is 13%.

In 2015, the Surgeon General issued a call to action to promote walking and walkable communities, stating that “being physically active is one of the most important steps that people of all ages and abilities can take to improve their health.” The call to action described some of the benefits of physical activity:

Physical activity can reduce illness from chronic diseases and premature death. Regular physical activity helps prevent risk factors for disease (such as high blood pressure and weight gain) and protects against multiple chronic diseases (such as heart disease, stroke, some cancers, type 2 diabetes, and depression). In children and adolescents, physical activity can improve bone health, cardiorespiratory and muscular fitness, and body composition.

People living with chronic disease also benefit from being physically active. For example, physical activity can lessen the severity of their condition, as well as prevent disease progression and premature death, help manage or reduce symptoms, and improve

mobility.

Among adults, physical activity is associated with improved quality of life, emotional well-being, and positive mental health. Regular physical activity is also important for healthy aging and may delay the onset of cognitive decline in older adults.

In children and adolescents, some evidence suggests that physical activity can lower levels of anxiety and depression. When schools encourage participation in physical activity as part of physical education, recess, classroom lessons, or extracurricular activities, students can also improve their academic performance.

<https://www.surgeongeneral.gov/library/calls/walking-and-walkable-communities/exec-summary.html>

The 2008 Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans recommends that adults get at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic physical activity or 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity physical activity, or an equivalent combination, each week and that children and adolescents be active for at least 60 minutes every day.

There are many opportunities to walk in Washington County. Washington County contains four national parks, six state parks, and 17 county parks. The City of Hagerstown has 21 parks and there are several other parks in towns throughout the county. Throughout these parks, there are at least 33 trails for walking in the county. In addition, the tracks at seven of the public high schools are open to the public for walking.

### **Community Partnerships**

#### ***City of Hagerstown***

<http://www.hagerstownmd.org/531/Walking-Hiking>

Contact: Amy Riley

The City of Hagerstown promotes walking as a healthy lifestyle and a mode of transportation and recreation in Hagerstown. The City is committed to improving and sustaining “walkability” and pedestrian safety through comprehensive programs, plans and policies. We continue to develop walking paths and require sidewalk construction to create a multi-modal transportation system.

The City of Hagerstown encourages those who live and work in the City to use their feet as a low polluting, cost-effective, and healthy way to travel. Over 90% of streets in Hagerstown have sidewalks on both sides, resulting in over 150 miles of sidewalks in the City. The City has an active sidewalk inspection program which inspects sidewalk conditions on a repeating cycle.

One of the most enjoyable places to walk in the City is on the multi-use paths in the City's beautiful parks. Parks that have designated path systems and provide outstanding walking environments!

***Fort Frederick State Park***

<http://dnr.maryland.gov/publiclands/Pages/western/fortfrederick.aspx>

Contact: Jeremiah Corbin and Kaitlyn Mitchell

The Maryland Department of Natural Resources is dedicated to promoting walking to improve the lives of our visitors. Walking and hiking trails allow our visitors to enjoy the outdoors, learn about historically significant events in Maryland's history, and interact with unique natural sites. From programmed to self-guided hikes, there are ways for all Maryland residents and visitors to walk around our parks. For example, the Western Maryland Rail Trail is accessible to all visitors and provides a walking area virtually free of vehicle traffic.

***Washington County Commission on Aging***

<http://www.wccoaging.org/>

Contact: Amy Olack and Stefanie Nelson

The Washington County Commission on Aging, Inc. is the designated Area Agency on Aging for the county, serving over 30,000 seniors, their caregivers and adults with disabilities. We are a cost-effective and trusted resource whose mission is to promote quality aging by meeting the needs, protecting the rights and preserving the dignity of our citizens. The Senior Activities Center is under the Commission on Aging providing activities for seniors who are 55 plus who are independent and have the ability to self-care.

***Washington County Health Department***

<https://health.maryland.gov/washhealth/Pages/home.aspx>

Contact: Mary McPherson

The vision of the Washington County Health Department (WCHD) is "a healthy community for all." Part of the health department's mission is to "promote healthy behaviors." Physical activity is an important factor in promoting health and preventing chronic diseases. Walking as a form of physical activity is safe and beneficial for nearly all people. Promoting walking in Washington County helps to enhance the health of the community.

***Washington County Recreation and Fitness***

<http://www.washcorecf.it.com/>

Contact: Jaime Dick

The Recreation Department provides many programs to the citizens that give them an opportunity to enjoy the exercise of walking. We offer many organized 5k Run/Walks that

support many non profit organizations in the county. We also offer the oldest walking club program in the county at HCC in the ARCC using the 200 meter indoor track facility. The indoor 200 meter track provides a safe environment for the citizens to enjoy walking. The County also has 16 county parks with 660 acres of parkland that are open to the public that citizens may use to walk and exercise.

**YMCA of Hagerstown**

<http://ymcahagerstown.org/health>

Contact: Shelby DeHaven

The Hagerstown YMCA provides programs and services in the area of youth development, healthy living and social responsibility to all members of our community. The goal of the Y is to be a premiere provider of community-based programs and services that meet the needs of people throughout their lifespan. As a cause-driven organization, we believe that a strong community can only be achieved when we invest in our kids, our health and our neighbors. By promoting and improving walkability in Washington County, we are bring a meaningful change to individuals and our community.

**Team Goals**

Goal 1: Engage Washington County residents in using existing parks and trails.

Goal 2: Make downtown areas and areas with community facilities more walkable.

Goal 3: Make walking an easy choice for all ages.

**Strategic Plan and Timeline with Evaluation**

Short-term strategies will be completed before September 30, 2018. Long-term strategies will be started beyond that date. Ongoing strategies will begin before September 30, 2018 and will continue as needed.

Goal 1: Engage Washington County residents in using existing parks and trails.

<b>Objectives</b>	<b>Strategies</b>	<b>Implementation</b>	<b>Evaluation</b>
<b>Objective 1:</b> Increase awareness of existing opportunities for walking	Strategy 1: Promote community events that promote walking	Ongoing: All partners promote community events through social media and/or other	# events promoted by # partners, # attendees of events

		means whenever events are announced	
	Strategy 2: Develop Pathfinder website as a directory of places to walk in Washington County	Short-term: WCHD will develop website by June 30, 2018 and maintain website	Website live, # visitors
	Strategy 3: Use social media and other communications to promote existing walking opportunities	Ongoing: All partners use social media and other communications to promote existing walking opportunities	# communications, # reach
	Strategy 4: Use signage to promote and enhance existing trails	Ongoing: All partners pursue installing and enhancing signage on trails	# signs, # trails

Goal 2: Make downtown areas and areas with community facilities more walkable.

Objectives	Strategies	Implementation	Evaluation
<b>Objective 1:</b> Increase walkability in downtown areas	Strategy 1: Assess current conditions and conduct walk audits	Short-term: Team will conduct walk audits in downtown areas and areas with community facilities	List of walk audits conducted
	Strategy 2: Advocate for potential solutions to address issues	Long-term: Team will analyze each walk audit and generate potential solutions to issues and advocate for those solutions to be implemented	Analysis of each walk audit completed
	Strategy 3: Engage town governments	Ongoing: Team will contact town governments	Each town government contacted

	Strategy 4: Gather and share resources for walkability improvement and maintenance with towns and educate towns on the value of walkability	Short-term: Team will research and compile a packet of resources and share them with each town	Packets compiled, # organizations packets distributed to
	Strategy 5: Locate and share funding opportunities for walkability	Ongoing: All partners look for potential funding sources and share them with the team as opportunities are available	List of funding opportunities applied for and received
<b>Objective 2:</b> Enhance walkability between transit stops and destinations	Strategy 1: Assess the current walking routes to and from transit stops	Short-term: Team will identify destinations near transit stops and conduct walk audits in those areas	List of walk audits conducted
	Strategy 2: Engage Washington County Transit	Short-term: Contact Washington County Transit	Washington County Transit contacted
	Strategy 3: Advocate for potential solutions to address issues	Long-term: Team will analyze each walk audit and generate potential solutions to issues and advocate for those solutions to be implemented	Analysis of each walk audit completed

Goal 3: Make walking an easy choice for all ages.

<b>Objectives</b>	<b>Strategies</b>	<b>Implementation</b>	<b>Evaluation</b>
<b>Objective 1:</b> Educate residents about the benefits of walking for all ages and why being active is	Strategy 1: Use social media and other communications to educate residents	Ongoing: All partners use social media and other communications to educate residents	# communications, # reach

important and how to overcome barriers and educate residents who are inactive how to get started being active	Strategy 2: Promote free apps and other tools that help people be active	Ongoing: All partners use social media and other communications to promote free apps and other tools that help people be active	# tools promoted, # communications, # reach
	Strategy 3: Create one-page print educational materials	Short-term: Team will research and create print materials. Ongoing: All partners will distribute materials where relevant	# materials created, # distributed
<b>Objective 2:</b> Encourage residents of all ages to incorporate walking into their everyday lives	Strategy 1: Promote, support, and expand initiatives that encourage walking in residents' everyday lives such as the Walking School Bus, Walk with a Cop, Healthy Business Challenge, 10,000 Steps program	Ongoing: All partners promote relevant initiatives and identify initiatives that could be expanded. Team will determine how to support or expand those initiatives. For example: Walking School Bus, Walk with a Cop, Healthy Business Challenge	# initiatives promoted, # initiatives expanded
	Strategy 2: Encourage the development of informal trails that are safe and walkable that connect people to recreation areas	Long-term: Team will identify destinations near recreation areas and conduct walk audits in those areas. Team will analyze each walk audit to determine whether the routes are safe and walkable	List of walk audits conducted, walk audits analyzed
	Strategy 3: Assess the current state of walking and	Short-term: Team will conduct survey to assess the current	Assessment completed

	walkability in Washington County	state of walking and walkability in Washington County	
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**Potential Challenges and Ways to Overcome Them**

- 1. Coordinating many different organizations involved
  - a. Maintaining good communication with all partners
  - b. Having a designated representative from each organization
- 2. Funding
  - a. State Department of Natural Resources has funding
  - b. Include funding resources in the packets we compile
- 3. Collecting enough survey responses
  - a. Generate strategies to reach populations we may not otherwise reach