

# Metropolitan Bakersfield General Plan Update Get Moving Kern Talking Points, May 2007

## What is Get Moving Kern?

Get Moving Kern (GMK) is a community coalition made up of individuals and organizations that want to improve the health of children and adults in Kern County by promoting healthy eating and active living.

## Why is GMK involved in the General Plan Update?

Our community is not designed for walking or biking. The community design has taken exercise out of our lives. We spend more time in our cars than walking. It is easier to buy sugary and salty snacks than fresh fruits and vegetables. As a result, our health is suffering. Obesity rates are at an all time high and continue to climb. 67% of adults in Kern and 36.5% of children are overweight. Obesity is linked to heart disease, diabetes, cancer and many other ailments. Education is important, but if the environment does not support access to healthy foods and safe places for physical activity, the education will not go far. We want environments where the healthy choice is the easiest choice to make.

## What is GMK proposing?

GMK is advocating for smart growth. There are ten principles to smart growth and GMK has prioritized three of those elements to advocate for inclusion in the General Plan. The three elements are walkability, reduction in sprawl and redevelopment in existing areas, including infill, and the use of Health Impact Assessments, which includes air quality. Each of the three elements is described below.

1. **Walkable neighborhoods.** Walkable communities are desirable places to live, work, learn, worship and play. Walkable neighborhoods make walking to perform daily activities the easy choice. In addition, walkable neighborhoods promote social connectivity and community relationships. Some examples of walkable communities are:
  - Compact, lively town center or many compact villages around town.
    - Block lengths are short.
    - Mixed-land use, i.e. housing above retail shops.
    - Public restrooms, drinking fountains and sitting places are available.
  - Connectivity to neighborhoods with well-maintained walkways, trails, bike paths and roadways.
    - Sidewalks are five feet wide or wider and well-maintained with planting strips, bike lanes or on street parking to provide a buffer to the street.
    - Trees are planted to provide shade for sidewalks.
    - Bike lanes are found on most principal streets.
    - Streets have good disability access to and from each block in all directions
    - Streets are well lit and safe.
    - Limited use of cul de sacs. Cul de sacs do not encourage walking as streets are isolated. Connected streets with short blocks encourage walking.
  - Low speed narrow streets. People drive slower when the streets are narrow, making it safer for pedestrians.
  - Neighborhood schools and parks are situated where most children can walk or bike to school. Most residents live within 1/4 mile of a park or other well-maintained public space.
  - Land use and transportation.
    - Compact development to increase density.

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- Heritage buildings and places are respected.
- Expand public transportation.
- Most people live within ½ mile (majority within ¼ mile) of 40% of services and products they need on daily or weekly basis.
- Plenty of green and open space.

2. **Redevelopment of existing areas and development of infill to stop the sprawl.** Infill development refers to the planning, design and construction of homes, stores, workplaces and other facilities that make existing cities more livable by utilizing vacant lots. Successful infill development channels economic growth into existing urban and suburban communities and conserves natural resources such as farm land at the periphery of the city. The new housing on the corner of 21<sup>st</sup> and R Street in Bakersfield is an excellent example of redevelopment for the benefit of the community. Some other examples of redevelopment or infill development are:
- Incentives for builders to develop infill or redevelop dilapidated buildings.
  - New development on vacant lots.
  - Redevelopment of underused buildings and sites.
  - Rehabilitation of historic buildings for new uses.
  - Well-maintained parks and public spaces that impart a sense of order and ownership
  - Narrow roads that calm traffic.
  - Streets that encourage walking and biking, see walkability above.

### 3. Use of Health Impact Assessments

#### What is a Health Impact Assessment (HIA)?

A Health Impact Assessment is a tool that can be used to consider the impact that land use planning has on health outcomes. It is a multidisciplinary approach that uses a structured framework and a wide range of evidence or indicators. A Health Impact Assessment is based on a broad model of health in which economic, political, social, psychological, and environmental factors determine population health.

#### Why conduct a HIA?

- HIA can provide decision-makers a broad understanding of health and a wide range of evidence.
- Highlight potentially significant health impacts.
- Assess how a project, program, policy or proposal will affect the most vulnerable.
- Facilitates public participation in decision-making.
- Promote sustainable development – both short and long term impacts are considered.
- Encourage a greater appreciation of public health in the policy-making process.

#### Some HIA questions to consider:

- What are the potential health consequences with new development, specifically how is air quality affected and how will it impact health?
- What are the health consequences with urban refill and new development?
- What elements of a neighborhood design are most cost-effective in encouraging physical activity?
- Are the health benefits and risks distributed equitably or in a way that minimizes current disparities in health risks and conditions with new development?