Building a Healthy City: The Integration of Public Health into Urban Planning and Economic Development in San Francisco

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The San Francisco Department of Public Health (SFDPH) is on the cutting edge of the emerging international movement to better integrate health needs, urban planning and economic development. Since 1999, through the Program on Health, Equity and Sustainability, SFDPH has developed, applied and disseminated research and expertise to assess social and environmental conditions to respond to urban health inequities and to advance a healthy public policy. Selected current and former efforts are highlighted below:

**Health Impact Assessment Tools for Urban Planning**
SFDPH has created several inter-disciplinary applied research tools to improve the consideration of health and health inequities in decision-making. The Healthy Development Measurement Tool is a nationally recognized evidence-based comprehensive evaluation metric to consider health needs in urban development plans and projects. Other tools include the Pedestrian and Bicycle Environmental Quality Indices, Air Quality and Noise Measurement Exposure Models, and the SF Pedestrian Injury Collision Model. SFDPH conducts trainings nationally and locally on its toolkit.

**HOPE SF: Designing Healthy Mixed-income Housing**
SFDPH and the Mayor’s Office of Housing (MOH) are in the early stages of a collaboration to use the Healthy Development Measurement Tool to support healthy design policies in the Hope SF revitalization program. The HDMT will serve to identify health needs and gaps in project design and to evaluate the final project.

**Documenting the Health Benefits of Congestion Pricing**
Congestion pricing can affect health and well-being through benefits on air pollution, greenhouse gases, environmental noise, and traffic collisions, can provide funds for transit and transportation infrastructure, and can increase the frequency of active transportation modes like walking and bicycling. SFDPH is conducting a health impact assessment on a proposed downtown congestion pricing scheme in order to make the health benefits and costs of this proposal more transparent to decision-makers.

**Supporting Resident-driven Community Planning in the South of Market**
SFDPH participates as an active member of the Western SoMa Citizens Planning Task Force—a process that aims to bring a resident led and informed decision-making process to neighborhood planning. As a voting member of and a technical advisor to the Task Force, SFDPH has been able to support and integrate planning policies and actions that promote housing adequacy, pedestrian safety, and environmental quality.

**Peer Reviews: Healthy Planning Research and Tools**
Together with the Healthy Places Coalition, SFDPH hosts bimonthly peer review sessions of “healthy planning research and tools”. The goal of these peer review sessions is to present built environment-related tools and research under development in California, and provide feedback to presenters on various aspects of their work. Thus far, topics presented at the peer review sessions include SFDPHs Neighborhood Completeness Indicator, a framework for defining sustainable food retail, and qualitative data collection and community participation in a community survey in Los Angeles.

**Planning for Complete Streets**
The Planning Department is involved in an ambitious effort to develop guidelines for designing complete streets that support active transportation. SFDPH has contributed design elements and is now supporting the environmental review of the Better Streets Plan. These efforts help ensure attention to safety and walkability and help document the environmental benefits of the plan.

**Evaluating the Health Impacts of HOPE VI Redevelopments**
The UC Berkeley School of Public Health (UCB) is working with SFDPH to conduct a health impact assessment of social and environmental health conditions in SF HOPE VI housing. This assessment will help identify and prioritize health issues and
concerns experienced by HOPE VI residents, with the ultimate goal of advancing policies, programs and funding to improve the health of current and future residents.

**Renovating Urban Parks**
SFDPH is working with the Trust for Public Land to renovate three urban parks. The renovations aim to create spaces for social interaction and to promote physical activity and child development. In addition to supporting the design of parks, SFDPH is also working with the RAND Corporation to evaluate how park improvements change patterns of park use and physical activity.

**Preventing Freight Traffic Health Impacts in the Excelsior**
Working with community residents, PODER, and the Chinese Progressive Association (CPA), SFDPH conducted a retrospective health impact assessment of freight traffic-related air quality, pedestrian safety, and noise assessments in the Excelsior. Community leaders are using this assessment to catalyze city action on re-evaluating freight routes and mitigating their impacts.

**Preventing Exposure to Traffic Pollution Hotspots**
Living near busy roadways increases the hazard of impaired lung development, respiratory disease and cancer. SFDPH working with the Planning Department to develop the country’s first planning rules to protect residential development from the harmful effects of air pollution from traffic, requiring that developers assess traffic-related air pollution hot spots and, if needed, design buildings and ventilation systems to protect indoor air for residents.

**Sustainable Transportation Planning for Treasure Island Redevelopment**
The SF Bicycle Coalition (SFBC) and SFDPH with a grant from CalTrans Division of Transportation Planning have been developing a community-based transportation plan to create a safe walkable, bikeable and accessible Treasure Island. This effort supports the sustainability goals being advanced by the Treasure Island Redevelopment Authority and seeks to meaningfully elicit and respond to transportation needs of Treasure Island residents, employees, visitors and commuters.

**Ensuring Farmers Markets Access for Low-Income Residents**
SFDPH provided technical assistance to all San Francisco farmers markets so that they could make fresh fruits and vegetables more available to Federal Food Program Recipients. Today, all farmers markets are required by law to provide this access.

**Working for Health-Protective Employment Standards**
San Francisco has taken national leadership on economic disparities through increasing its minimum wage, guaranteeing paid sick days, and securing health access for all its employees. In 1999, San Francisco adopted a living wage; in 2003, residents passed Proposition L increasing the minimum wage from $6.75 to $8.50; and in 2006, we guaranteed the right of employees to earn paid sick days. SFDPH was directly engaged in each of these policy efforts with advocates and policymakers, informing the debate through analyses that documented the health impacts of these policies.

**Using the California Environmental Quality Act to Protect Health**
Integrating health concerns into environmental impact assessment takes advantage of statutory requirements under the California Environmental Quality Act to identify, analyze, and mitigate adverse health impacts resulting from a physical change in the environment. SFDPH has successfully worked with the Planning Department in the environmental review of numerous city land use and economic development projects to prevent adverse development impacts on displacement, air and noise pollution exposure, and traffic hazards.

**Collaborative Planning and Evaluation in the Eastern Neighborhoods**
Between 2004 and 2006, SFDPH convened the Eastern Neighborhoods Community Health Impact Assessment (ENCHIA)—a multi-stakeholder assessment to ensure that land use planning occurring in the Mission, South of Market, and Potrero Hill/Showplace Square neighborhoods took into account, protected, and improved community health. SFDPH used the Healthy Development Measurement Tool (www.TheHDMT.org), a product of the assessment process, to evaluate the Planning Department’s Eastern Neighborhoods Area Plans, and findings and recommendations from that evaluation were translated into planning policies and implementing actions in the final approved plans.

For more information on these initiatives please visit www.sfphes.org or contact Dr. Rajiv Bhatia at the San Francisco Department of Health, rajiv.bhatia@sfdph.org.
Drivers for SFDPH Involvement in Healthy City Planning

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Key SFDPH Activities and Milestones in Health City Planning

1999
Conducted a health impacts analysis of a City living wage law

2001
Established community partnerships to improve community food resources and security
Initiated the SF Food Systems project

2002
Built capacity with Mission Anti-displacement Coalition (MAC) members to jointly conduct and utilize health impact assessments on community planning

2003
Researched and provided public testimony on the health impacts of residential development plans and projects through the CEQA process, framing housing affordability, displacement, integration, and neighborhood quality as public health issues (e.g., Trinity Plaza, Rincon Hill)

2004
Formally established the Program on Health, Equity and Sustainability
Planned and initiated the Eastern Neighborhoods Community Health Impact Assessment

2005
Continued to engage with land use policy and project though the CEQA process

2006
Co-sponsored the formation of the California Healthy Places Coalition
Appointed to Western SoMa Citizens Planning Task Force
Initiated Treasure Island Community-based Transportation Planning

2007
Concluded the ENCHIA process and launched the Healthy Development Measurement Tool (HDMT)
Completed applications of the HDMT to the Executive Park Subarea Plan and initiated the application to the Eastern Neighborhoods Area Plans
Co-drafted the Environmental Impact Report for the Eastern Neighborhoods Rezoning and Area Plans
Co-drafted and co-sponsored the California Healthy Places Act

2008
Completed the HDMT application to the Eastern Neighborhoods Area Plans
Created and taught a national HIA training course for the public health community
Sponsored a City law requiring new residential development mitigate air pollution hot spots

Institutionalization of Healthy City Planning in San Francisco

- Creation of the Program on Health, Equity and Sustainability and its Urban Health and Place Team
- Day-to-day working relationships with Planning Department and Redevelopment Agency staff
- Review of health impact analyses in environmental impact report

- Healthy Development Measurement Tool
- Air Quality Measurement and Modeling
- San Francisco Noise Model
- Pedestrian Environmental Quality Index
- Vehicle-Pedestrian Injury Collision Model
- Bicycle Environmental Quality Index
- Retail Food Availability Survey
- Neighborhood Completeness Indicator

- Local planning and building rules to prevent exposure to air pollution hot spots
- Modernization of City noise standards and enforcement rules