

The Mayors Wellness Campaign offers free, or low-cost, tools and strategies like this one to make your community a healthier place to live, work, and play. We encourage you to look through all of the MWC Tool categories.



Environment & Health

Land Use Planning for Sustainable, Healthy Communities

? What Is land use planning?

[Land use planning](#) is the process of determining how land will be used and developed. Local leaders, property owners, and developers can consider things like promoting physical activity, accessibility for people of all abilities, protecting air and water quality, and reducing noise pollution, when undertaking the planning and permitting process. These decisions help make communities healthier places to live, work, and play. They also help older residents stay in their communities.



Stafford Rain Barrel Program

How does land use planning and policies impact community health?

[Social determinants of health](#) are the conditions in the environments where people live, work, and play which impact their health. Many towns across the county have adopted a [Health in All Policies](#) approach to improving health outcomes by including health considerations into decision-making across sectors and policy areas. The goal is to consider how any decisions made may impact the health of a community and its residents.

Municipal leaders play a crucial role in shaping local policies which impact the health and wellness of their residents. For instance, land use designs and policies can improve walkability, safety, and sense of community while decreasing isolation, crime, and stress. By improving [activity-friendly routes](#) to various places in a community, local leaders will not only increase access to grocery stores, health care services, employment, and parks, but will encourage physical activity, which can reduce the risk of chronic and mental illnesses.



FOLLOW THEIR LEAD

Stafford Township has made great progress towards preserving their environment and improving the town's water quality. The Mayor and Township Administrator collaborated with the Township Council and Engineer, residents, Department of Public Works, Rutgers University, and the NJ Office of Emergency Management to develop a Stormwater Management Plan.

This led to the replacement of sewage lines, reduced flooding, enhanced transportation routes, and improved 200 acres of waterway. Stafford has launched stormwater education workshops for residents which highlight how individual actions can contribute to community health and improvement. They have also distributed over 80 rain barrels to residents.



Take Action

Evaluate your current land use policies or development plans and consider the following:

- **Did you reach out to community organizations, leaders, and residents?**

- They can provide important information about the needs of your community as well as what is and isn't working. Due to their work with others in the state or nationally, community organizations and local leaders can contribute innovative ideas and strategies.
- Below are examples of stakeholders to include in the planning and evaluation process :
 - Residents and neighborhood associations
 - Senior groups or senior service providers
 - Churches
 - Local business owners
 - Local non-profits
 - Local schools and colleges
 - Police departments
 - Local hospitals or health care providers

- **Did you discuss how this policy or plan will impact the health of your community?**

- Many environmental factors can affect the health and wellness of your residents, such as walkability, water or air quality, and access to open space. Evaluate whether your land use policies or proposed development plans may cause unintended negative effects now or in the future, or if any changes can be made to improve the environment. For example, does your development plan remove any streetlights or sidewalks? Or can they be added or improved? A smaller scale change such as adding in streetlights or connecting sidewalks can improve safety and encourage physical activity.

- **Did you engage with other departments, committees, and/or state agencies?**

- Changes to the environment involve several departments and teams, including planning, engineering, transportation, and/or environmental boards or committees. Other departments may also be impacted by changes made to the neighborhood environment, such as the municipal recreation director or senior services coordinator. State agencies and local universities can provide support like planning assistance, data, best practices, and funding. Consider establishing a formal relationship or coalition with all involved parties. Ask them to commit to including health considerations in all future planning decisions.



Evesham plants 250 native plant plugs



Evidence-Based Strategies

Need some inspiration? Here are some examples of structural changes, that have been shown to have a positive impact:

- [Enhance streetscapes](#) with greater sidewalk coverage and walkway connectivity, street crossing safety features, increased streetlights or bike lanes, traffic calming measures, and other design elements.
- Temporarily close a street or part of a street to create space for physical activity or other community event.
- Modify local environments to support physical activity or increase access to new or existing facilities for physical activity by subsidizing costs.
- Educate and encourage community members to [participate](#) in local planning and development meetings.
- Create group [walking audits](#) in your community to help educate residents and raise awareness about how community design affects physical activity.
- Create [design elements](#) in parks that make them more welcoming, such as benches, areas for shades, and walking loops.
- Use [low-cost demonstrations](#) such as pop-up retail shops, mini parks, and seasonal event spaces, to get feedback from residents on innovative land use ideas.



Paterson Fitness Zone



FOLLOW THEIR LEAD

The City of Paterson has launched several efforts to improve their community's built environment using a health-centric approach. They partnered with St. Joseph's Health to develop the city's first Fitness Zone in Pennington Park, a dedicated fitness area featuring state-of-the-art equipment and a playground, to encourage residents to focus on their health and well-being and increase outdoor activity in the community.

Paterson also created a Parks Vision Plan, a master plan to renovate all its park and build new playgrounds, with support from a National Recreation and Parks Association grant.



More Resources



Woodbridge Bike Share

- CDC – [Tools for Actions](#) and [Guide to Strategies to Increase Physical Activity in the Community](#)
- Community Planning Toolkit – [Community Engagement](#)
- Community Preventive Services Task Force – [Built Environment Approaches Combining Transportation System Interventions with Land Use and Environmental Design](#)
- [NJ Future](#) – a nonprofit organization focused on promoting equitable growth and redevelopment to foster healthy, strong, resilient communities
- Robert Wood Johnson Foundation County Health Rankings and Roadmaps – [Actions to Improve Health](#)
- Sustainable Jersey – [Actions for Communities](#)



Let Us Help

MWC staff is here to help you get your program up and running. We can help you:

- Create an evidence-based program that fits the needs of your community.
- Develop your volunteer training.
- Create tools to measure the impact of your intervention.



Plainfield Environmental Fair

For more information about the [Mayors Wellness Campaign](#) or assistance with land use planning health considerations, contact the MWC Program Officer at info@njhcqi.org or 609-452-5980.