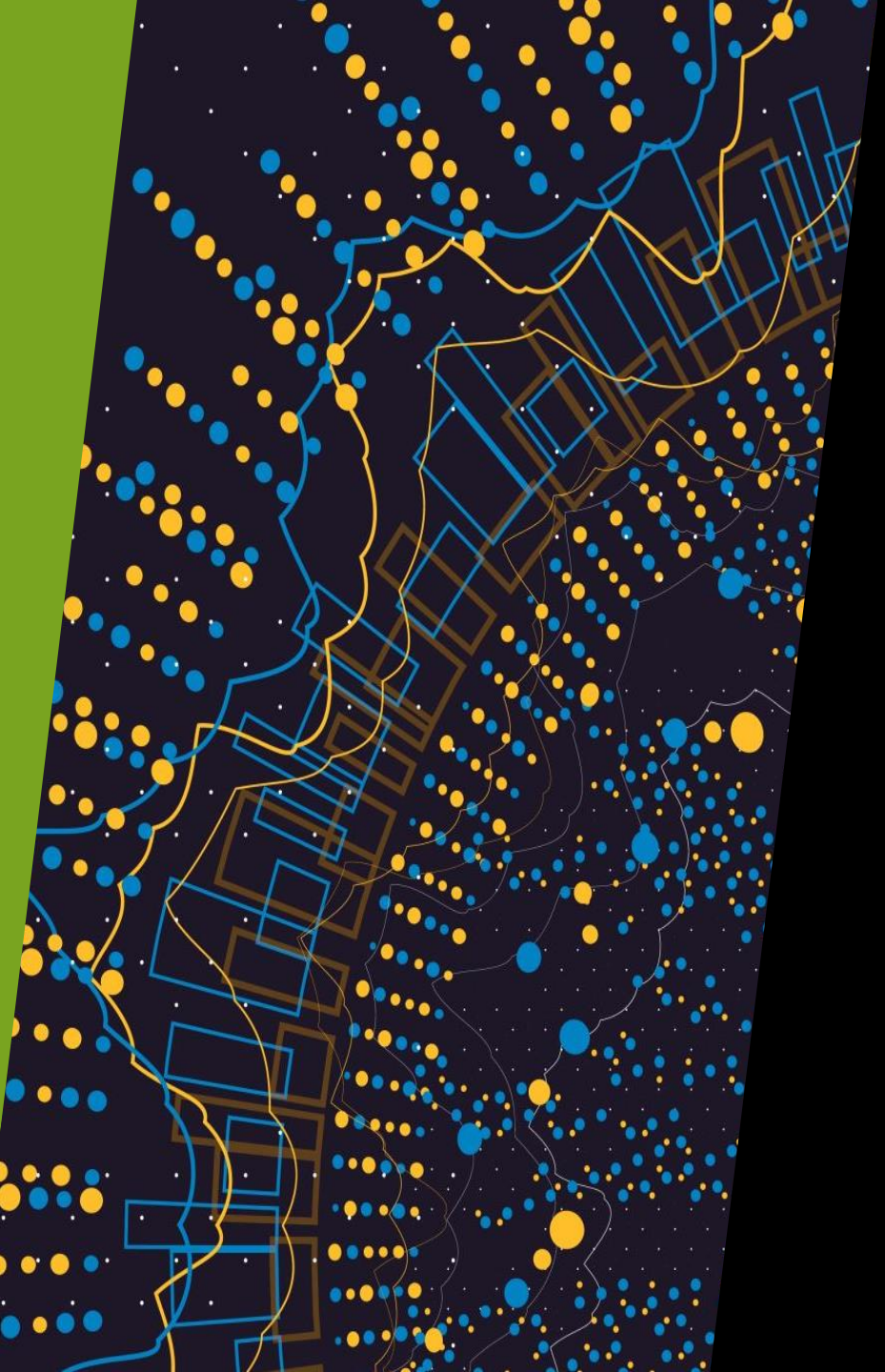


Municipal Planning for Health Equity

Actions to create a healthy community for all

CCRPC TAC, December 5, 2023

Bryan Davis

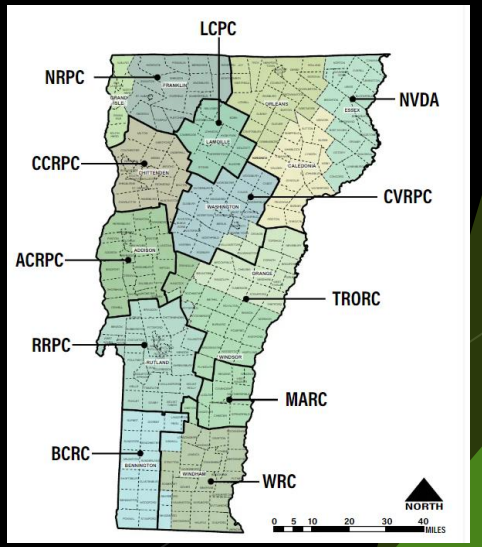
ChangeLab Solutions

AARP Vermont

Giving voice to the concerns and interests of older Vermonters

VERMONT

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH



Health Equity Definition

Opportunity to attain full health potential

No one is disadvantaged

https://www.ccrpcvt.org/our-work/health-equity/

WHY HEALTH EQUITY?

TOOLKIT IMPLEMENTATION

SHARING IDEAS AND EXAMPLES

Health Equity in the Built Environment

ChangeLab Solutions www.changelabsolutions.org

ChangeLab Solutions is a nonprofit organization that provides legal information on matters relating to public health. The legal information in this document does not constitute legal advice or legal representation. For legal advice, readers should consult a lawyer in their state. This document was supported by a grant from The California Endowment and produced in partnership with the California Chronic Disease Prevention Leadership Project. © 2019 ChangeLab Solutions

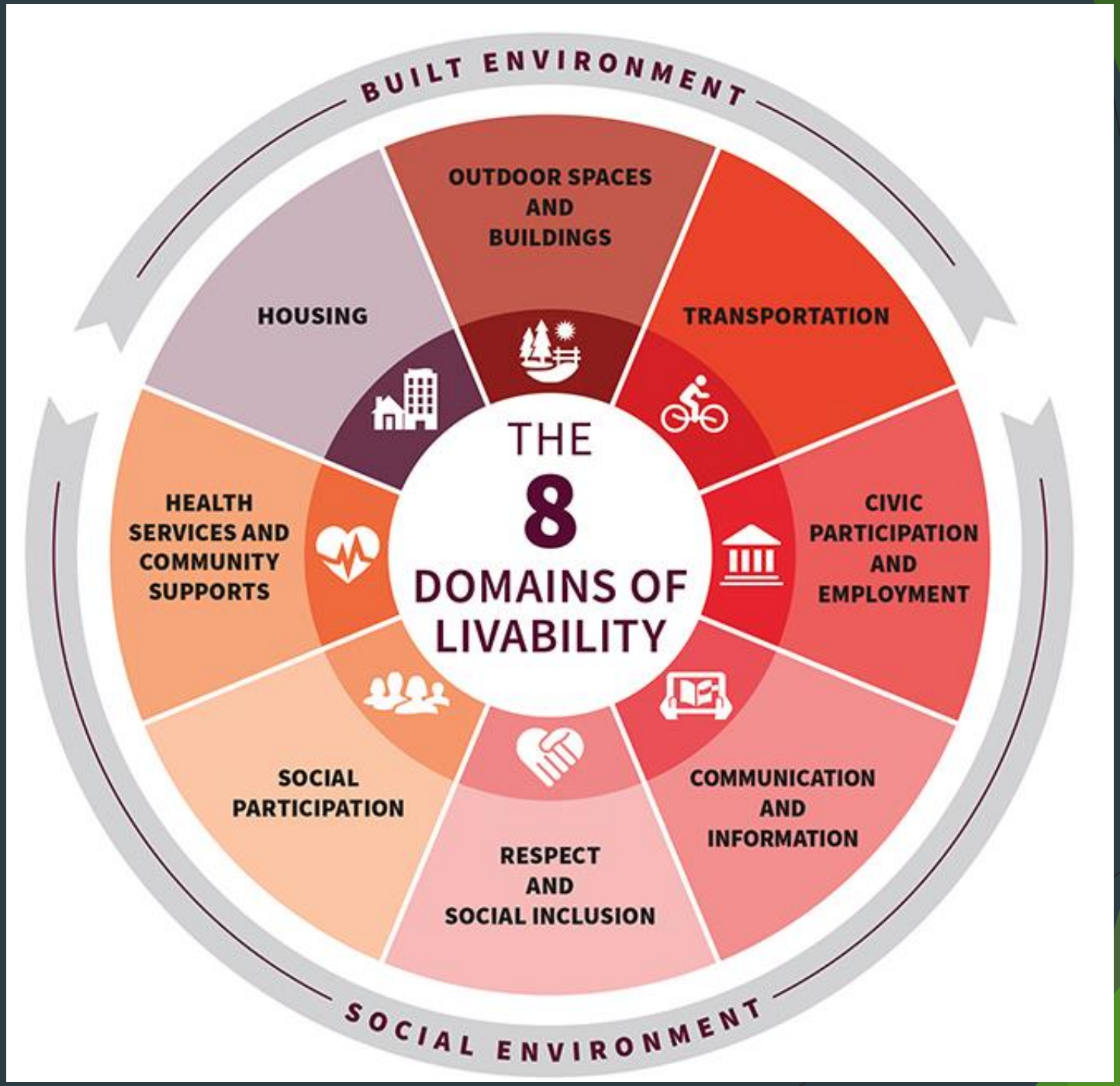
Health Equity in the Built Environment

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
May 3, 2023

Contact: ASH Media
202-205-0143
ashmedia@hhs.gov

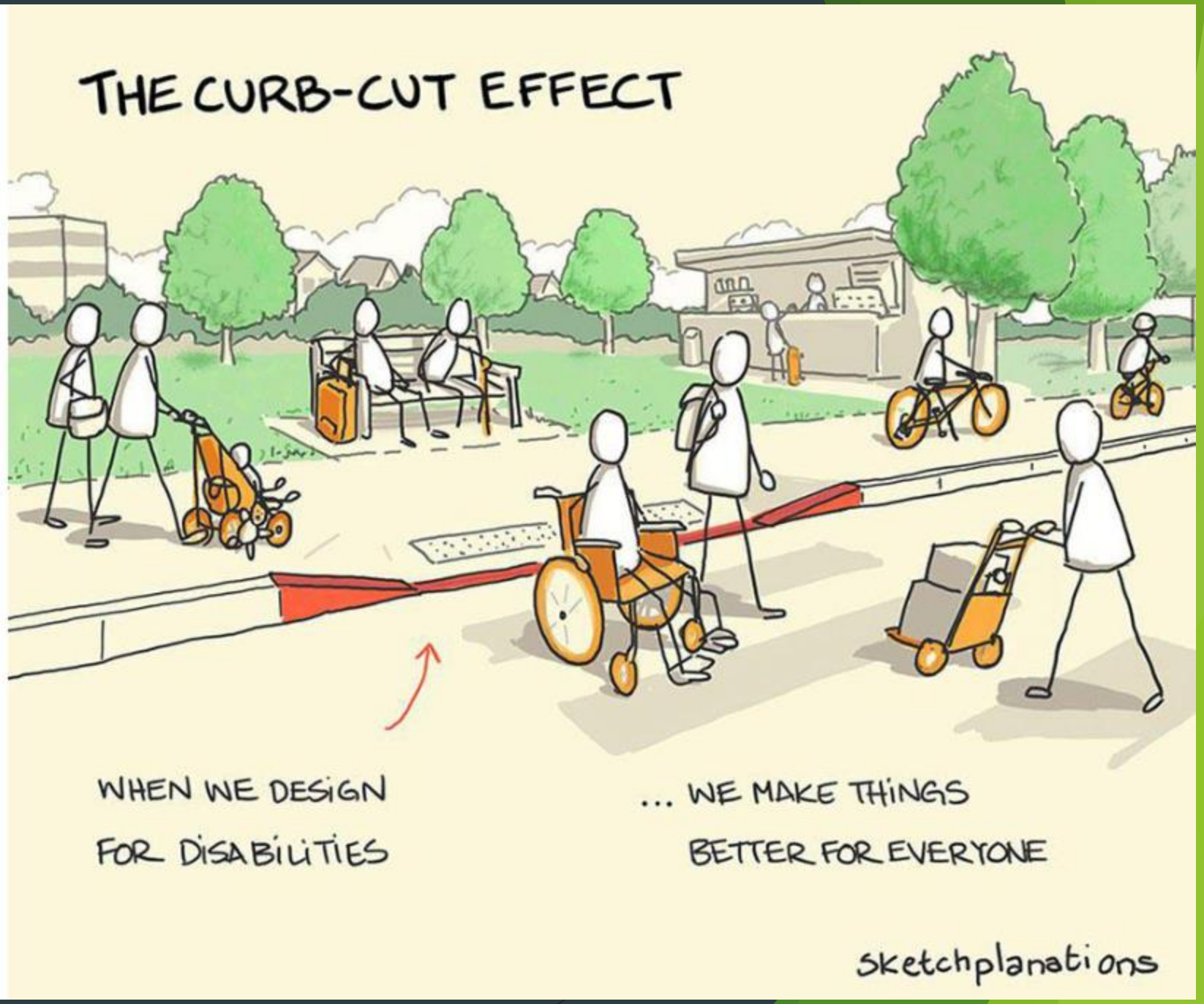
New Surgeon General Advisory Raises Alarm about the Devastating Impact of the Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation in the United States

1. **Strengthen Social Infrastructure:** Connections are not just influenced by individual interactions, but by the physical elements of a community (parks, libraries, playgrounds) and the programs and policies in place. To strengthen social infrastructure, communities must design environments that promote connection, establish and scale community connection programs, and invest in institutions that bring people together.


BUILT ENVIRONMENT
OUTDOOR SPACES AND BUILDINGS
TRANSPORTATION
CIVIC PARTICIPATION AND EMPLOYMENT
COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION
RESPECT AND SOCIAL INCLUSION
SOCIAL PARTICIPATION
HEALTH SERVICES AND COMMUNITY SUPPORTS
HOUSING
THE 8 DOMAINS OF LIVABILITY
SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT

When communities make connections between health and place, they can implement changes that help residents naturally adopt healthier behaviors.

Health Equity Benefits Everyone



Health Equity within a Municipality

TOWN PLAN

MUNICIPAL BYLAWS

TRANSPORTATION PLANS

GRANT WRITING/ PROJECT MANAGEMENT

RECREATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION

Addressing the SDOH Through Planning

Policies

- Area Masterplan
- Transportation Plans
- Comprehensive Plans
- Zoning
- Ordinances & Standards
- Licensing & permits
- Resolutions

Municipal Actions

- Capital Improvements
- Programs
- Incentives

Government Procedures

- Municipal protocols
- Budgets
- Community Engagement
- Evaluation

Implementation Tools

Town and Village Plans

The Plan seeks to manage and direct growth in ways that preserve Cambridge's rural, agricultural character and quality of life **for all residents** while preserving the property rights of the town's landowners.

To provide a healthy and scenic recreation environment **for all**.

To provide residents with services that promote safety, well-being, **and health equity**.

To plan for an efficient **and equitable** system of public facilities and services.

Land Use Plans & Bylaws

Dimensional Requirements

Building heights, setbacks, and lot coverage regulations are often similar between towns, in spite of differences in character. These dimensional requirements should be carefully crafted to reflect the existing built patterns and local goals, and should avoid needlessly restricting desirable housing options.

Parking Standards

The effects of excessive parking requirements on housing availability are often underestimated. Especially in areas that have transit and are walkable to school, jobs, and other daily needs, the cost of each unneeded parking space inflates the cost of housing. (The average cost of a parking space is estimated at about $4,000.) High parking requirements can block new housing options that fit seamlessly into existing neighborhoods, such as ADUs, small infill buildings, and conversions of large houses into more than one residence.

Allowable Uses

Restrictions on the use of property is a central purpose of zoning, but many Vermont towns and villages severely restrict housing other than a single-family home by requiring complex review processes and/or applying onerous restrictions. Small buildings containing two, three, or four dwellings have historically provided housing variety with minimal neighborhood impacts. These buildings can be enabled again through minor changes to local regulations.

Street Standards

Streets should be designed according to the intensity of activity through which the street passes. The capital and maintenance costs of overly wide streets can increase the cost of delivering housing as well creating a long-term drain on municipal budgets. Disconnected street networks hinder walking, biking, and transit, increasing individual household transportation costs.

Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU)

Vermont has progressive ADU provisions that are applied through regulations of individual towns. Local regulations could be improved to encourage creation of more ADUs through minor changes to parking standards and to size and ownership restrictions.

Development Review Process

Layers of regulatory review can aid environmental stewardship and protect local character, but they also add time and cost to the production of housing. Strategic streamlining can retain the important functions of the development review process while eliminating unnecessary barriers to locally desired housing.

Enabling Better Places Guide

Lack of housing, especially affordable housing, in opportunity rich places is a major driver of social and health inequities in Vermont.

Six bylaw components disproportionately impact housing affordability

Encourage land use patterns that are inherently more affordable by nature of cost associated with construction (e.g. shorter access roads, smaller lots, proximity to utilities, transit, walk/bike, services)

10. Does your plan's energy element assess the potential equity impacts of the policies and objectives included to meet standards 6-9?

Such an assessment could consider, for example, what communities will be most impacted by the policy or objective, the distribution of benefits and burdens related to specific actions, whether actions will address existing inequities, or the extent to which communities were or will be consulted in the development of any programs or actions.

Energy Planning Standards

Bylaw Updates

Introduce Health Equity as a community goal:

- Zoning provides the legal framework to encourage healthy uses, activities, or development patterns that can positively impact community health.
- Conduct a health impact assessment when updating the comprehensive plan, a comprehensive zoning reform, or land development processes
- “Sell” residents with placemaking activities that welcome people coming together to envision change
- Place “audits” -- get input on what would you like to see/do that you can’t now (comments about the built environment reveal social attributes that are lacking)

Transportation

Taking a proactive approach to transportation planning is necessary to ensure communities are allowed the power of choice. On average we spend 37,000 hours in a vehicle. The opportunity that local governments have to promote alternative modes of transportation is invaluable. When applicable towns should approach health equity and transportation as one in the same. Looking through that lens will reduce the pressures on at risk/minority communities.

- Bike paths/Enhanced bike lanes
  - Buffered, Contra-flow, and left sided bike lanes
- Accessibility
  - Empower disenfranchised communities
- Walking trails
  - Hand rails
  - Benches/rest areas
  - Multi use paths

People with visual impairment or who use a wheelchair have difficulty connecting with nature. When designing trails consider who in the community faces barriers to access.

Nature for Everyone

Sensory and “Braille trails” enable the visually impaired to walk unassisted. Guided ropes help with footing and signage in braille orients and informs. Paths can be designed for direct sensory experiences – feeling textures, scents, sounds, etc.

Above, a spherical block on a cable alerts a braille trail user in Watertown, MA that there is a bench opposite. *(image credit Robin Lubbock/WBUR)*

Left and right (above).The 600’ long 5’ wide boardwalk at the Barnes Camp Visitor Center in Smugglers Notch allow two wheelchairs to pass each other. Raised outer curbs provide safety and multiple interpretive panels describe the area’s special features. *(image credit LCPC)*

Oakledge for All

https://www.gearx.com/blog/2023/03/28/everyones-wilderness-vermont-adaptive/

Rendering of the completed playground at Oakledge Park

Healthy Communities

Health Equity and Community Design Technical Assistance (TA) Pilot

Milton on the Move

Winooski Parents and Students CO-Op Training

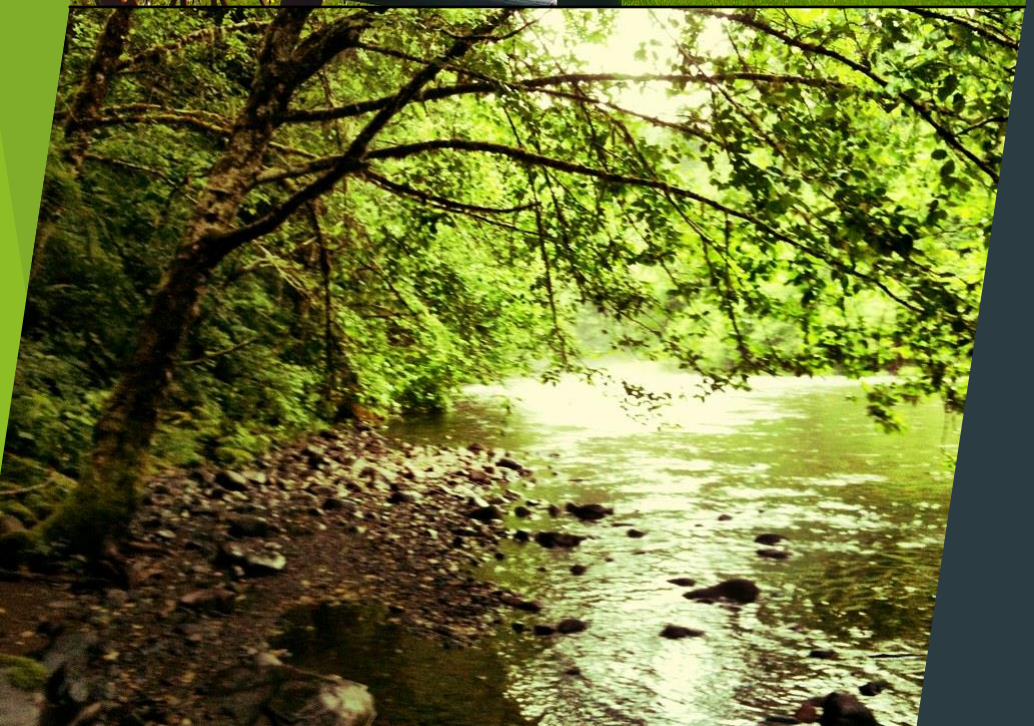
Burlington-One Day in VT

Statewide Implementation Project Examples

- Sidewalk Inventory/Walk Audit
- Shared greenspace landscape design for municipally owned buildings
- Demographic Mapping, grocery store location, vehicle ownership, income, housing availability
- Town Plan revisions
- Unaccompanied Youth Needs Assessment and Wellness Hub Planning Study
- Redevelopment plan for old high school into affordable housing

CCRPC Health Equity Projects

- Equity Map Viewer » Accessed via CCRPC's Title VI or GIS Pages
- South Burlington Climate Action Plan Focus Groups
- Walk Bike Master Plans
- ECOS Regional Plan
  - Equity Assessment for Energy Planning Standards
- South Burlington, Essex, and Jericho Town Plan Updates
- Chittenden County Equity Advisory Committee (EAC)



Next Steps:

- Explore the Toolkit and Resources
- Planning Commission Presentations
- Equity Maps in your Town Plan
- Contact us if your community is ready
- Amanda Froeschle, VDH Healthy Communities Specialist

Sharing Opportunity + Brainstorm Ideas

Health Equity in your community