

Press Release:

Devens Enterprise Commission Adopts Healthy Communities Proclamation

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Recognizing the link between community planning and public health, at its November 7, 2013 meeting, the Devens Enterprise Commission (DEC) unanimously adopted a resolution entitled: "PLANNING FOR A HEALTHIER FUTURE THROUGH THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT AND COMMUNITY DESIGN". This resolution recognizes that what we build is important, but how and where we build is equally important and can directly influence the day to day activities that impact our public health. Research undertaken by the American Planning Association shows that many residents want to be able to live, work and play in a community that provides options to get outside and be more active; they want healthier and more affordable food choices; they want to get around their community more easily without a car; they want more chances to know their neighbors; they want a community that is a good place to live regardless of age, ability and income; and they want to live in a healthy, clean and safe environment. DEC Chairman William Marshall stated "This proclamation fits well with and supports the mission of the Devens Enterprise Commission which is to foster sustainable redevelopment that is beneficial economically, environmentally and socially. Improving public health is a logical extension of our mission."

At the November 7th meeting, DEC Director Peter Lowitt explained that planning originated as a means of protecting the public's health, safety and welfare. The first planning and zoning statutes were geared to providing fresh air and sunlight for New York City tenements in the 19th Century. Lowitt discussed the connection between public health and planning and how this connection is being reinforced today through local planning efforts that integrate development and the natural environment. Multi-purpose trails, open spaces, healthy food choices, sidewalks, opportunities for gardening, exercise and community interaction all help to create meaningful and active spaces and places. Lowitt also quoted a 2013 publication from the American Planning Association "*Planning and Health Resource Guide*" which states: "Community design plays an important role in creating healthy neighborhoods. The way we design and build our neighborhoods can affect our physical and mental health. In this time of rising obesity rates, traffic congestion, long work hours, high stress levels, and fewer opportunities to be physically active, finding creative ways to address these issues is important. We must also consider the changing weather patterns and the possible impact on our way of life. All these factors stress the importance of designing and building healthy and vital communities that promote health."

DEC Environmental Planner Neil Angus stated "This resolution also reinforces many of the DEC's recent regulation changes concerning energy and water efficiency, greenhouse gas mitigation and climate change. Healthy community planning and design principles were also key components of the DEC's Innovative Residential Development regulations adopted this past October." These Innovative regulations incorporated smart growth concepts such as complete streets and more compact, connected, accessible and inclusive neighborhood development options.

Other areas where the Commission's work intersects with planning for healthy communities include the recent work with MassDevelopment installing bike lanes on roads within Devens and creating a street tree inventory and replacement program; working with the US Fish and Wildlife Service to connect Devens trails to the Oxbow National Wildlife Refuge trail network; publishing of a new trails map created in cooperation with the Montachusett Regional Planning Commission (MRPC), and; enforcing truck routes to keep trucks out of residential neighborhoods.

Building on the healthy communities theme, the DEC is working on improving transit and multi-modal connections with surrounding communities and has also brought on board an intern from the Harvard Graduate School of Design, Sang Cho, who is working with the Commission to further integrate healthy community concepts into its planning and redevelopment efforts.

Full text of the resolution is available on-line at: www.devensec.com/news.html