

Eau Claire Comprehensive Plan 2015

Community Health Assessment



City of Eau Claire Wisconsin

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Community Health Assessment

The purpose of the Health Chapter of the *Comprehensive Plan* is to help improve human health relative to the built environment. Health is defined as a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.

With an eye on policies that promoted, hindered or overlooked health in the built environment of Eau Claire, City staff performed a baseline analysis and rapid health impact assessment screening process on the *Comprehensive Plan* and related plans. This background work was presented to representatives of the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute. The Institute responded with policy research and approaches about what staff and the chapter's advisory committee might consider in the plan.

Working with the Advisory Committee and citizen participants, six themes emerged:

- Active living
- Food and nutrition
- Land use
- Safety and crime
- Drug abuse
- Environmental exposures

These themes align with the focus areas of the *Community Health Improvement Plan* of the Eau Claire City-County Health Department and with the State Health Plan, *Healthiest Wisconsin 2020: Everyone Living Better, Longer*.

Need for this Chapter

Numerous U.S. cities are adding a specific chapter or stand-alone plan to address public health in the built environment, in an effort to make communities healthy, livable, increase quality of life and to reduce deaths, injuries, chronic disease, obesity, asthma, and rising healthcare costs. Public health and planning professionals, along with other concerned groups such as hospitals and health insurance companies, are working together to tackle these issues in a greater collaborative fashion. The complexity and interrelatedness of the physical and social-economic factors that effect health in societies and communities demand this integrated approach. Thus, a high emphasis in this chapter is placed on collaborative work and not just the onus being placed on government intervention.



Health is maintained by daily activity, which city design can help or hinder.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) says treatment for people with chronic diseases such as heart disease, diabetes, arthritis, and cancer accounts for more than 75 percent of the \$2 trillion spent annually on medical care in the United States. Obesity in particular is a major driver of multiple chronic disease outcomes. Obese persons are more at risk for Type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, certain cancers, asthma, arthritis, high blood pressure, and high cholesterol levels. Obesity is related to hypertension, depression, and poor reproductive outcomes, including infertility and stillbirth. The annual economic cost of obesity-related medical expenses for Wisconsin is estimated at more than \$1.5 billion. Thirty-one percent of Wisconsin children ages 2 to 4 are reported as being overweight or obese. In 2012, 28 percent of Eau Claire County adults were considered obese.

**Table 12-1
Percent of Wisconsin Adults with Lifestyle Health Risk Factors**

Health Risk Factors	Percentage
Obese: Body Mass Index (BMI \geq 30)	28
Overweight (includes obese)(BMI \geq 25)	64
Diabetes	7
Current smoker	21
High blood pressure	29
High cholesterol	36
Lack of physical activity (lack of exercise)	43
Less than 5 servings of fruits or vegetables/day	77

A poor diet and lack of physical activity are two of the greatest risk factors contributing to this epidemic. So what can be done? While individuals can make healthier lifestyle choices to significantly reduce their risk for disease and poor health outcomes, other strategies are clearly needed. Since the physical environment is a determinant of health, acting at a city or neighborhood level influences large populations. City policies that shape the built environment either play a role in encouraging or hindering physical activity, eating well or meeting other basic health and safety needs.

Planning Process

Instrumental in making the case to create a health chapter for the *City of Eau Claire Comprehensive Plan* was the initial work of a community group whose goal was to promote health in the built environment by improving policy. Eau Claire ACHIEVE’s (Action Communities for Health Innovation and EnVironmental ChangE) work was funded by a 2009 grant from the US Centers for Disease Control (CDC).

During 2010 and 2011, the group assessed the community’s physical activity, nutrition, tobacco use, chronic disease management, and leadership levels using a CDC tool called Community Health Assessment and Group Evaluation. The results described policy scores, actual built environment conditions, and recommended improvements.

In 2012, the City's Plan Commission began the official process in creating a Health Chapter by forming an advisory committee to help provide public input. More than 70 citizens representing health professionals, community groups, builders and designers were invited and met four times during the fall and winter months of 2012 and 2013.

The first meeting occurred on September 18, 2012. Lance Bernard, a planner with the Minnesota Department of Health, spoke about the importance of including public health in municipal comprehensive plans. The meeting provided education on the linkages between health and the built environment and helped begin the process.



During the second meeting, held on October 18th, the committee and members of the public identified issues germane to the chapter's expressed purpose. During the third meeting the committee and participants began to outline policy responses. A preliminary plan was then created and reviewed at the final public meeting, which was held on January 31, 2013.

Throughout the process, the Plan Commission reviewed and provided direction on the issues, policies and drafts. The City-County Board of Health officially endorsed the chapter on May 15th. After a public hearing on July 1st, the chapter was approved by the Plan Commission. On October 22, 2013, the City Council adopted the chapter.

Initial Implementation Efforts

Since the final approval, implementation efforts have focused on collaboration and advocacy, and projects.

Collaboration and Advocacy

Of first importance was to present the City's planning goals to the **Eau Claire Healthy Communities Council** so that a strategic alliance and stronger awareness of this interrelationship could be formed. This has been accomplished.

The most direct connection under this community council was adding a planning voice to its **Chronic Disease Prevention Action Team**. Work has centered around the team organizing a "BE (Built Environment) Fit Forum" to address what can be done to improve human health relative to the urban form, whether through walkable and compact mixed use developments, complete streets, workplace wellness initiatives, access to quality parks and more. The effort was very intentional in bringing together stakeholders from the medical and development community to raise awareness and support for the healthy community design initiative.

Greater alignment has been achieved with the **Eau Claire City-County's Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP)** and the current Eau Claire and Chippewa Counties, Marshfield

Clinic, Mayo Clinic Health System, Sacred Heart and St. Joseph's Hospitals, and United Way of the Greater Chippewa Valley **joint community health assessment**.

As it relates to the food section of the chapter, the City supported the Wisconsin Partnership Program (WPP) grant award proposal by UW-Extension, UWEC Department of Nursing and Feed My People Food Bank to understand and improve the limited access to adequate and **nutritious food for low income residents** in Eau Claire. The City currently has three USDA defined food deserts, meaning low access to supermarkets with low means of income in those particular census tracts. The grant was successfully obtained and current efforts are to build a coalition of stakeholders to implement stigma and physical environment change.

The 2014 **Randall Park Neighborhood Plan** has recommendations creating a neighborhood task force to look into several issues of health concern, whether housing or crime related, and to build upon this focus during the update to the *Comprehensive Plan*.

Worked with the **Aging and Disability Resource Center** of Eau Claire County to promote development of more dementia-friendly communities.

Work has also been done at the state level with including many policy strategies of the health chapter into the **DNR's Green Tier Legacy Communities Program**, of which the City is a member. Staff also spoke at the annual meetings of the Wisconsin Public Health Association and the Wisconsin chapter of the American Planning Association.

Lastly, the chapter won the 2014 **American Planning Association** – Wisconsin Chapter's Innovation Award and was one element in the City's successful All-America City Award designation.

Projects

Currently the City's **site plan ordinance** is being reviewed and enhanced for pedestrian and bicycle improved access from the public sidewalk / trail to front entrances of private buildings. This last connection is often missing in developments.

Completed a **Quiet Zone Study**. Currently converting a portion of the Union Pacific branch line through the city into an official quiet zone where train locomotives are required to not disrupt the public by blowing their horns before grade-crossings. See the Transportation Assessment for more information.

Addition of new **bikes lanes** on Menomonie St. and sharrows on W. Hamilton Ave., Melby St., Vine St., Rudolph Rd., and Brackett Ave. to promote physical activity.

Installation of more **way-finding signage** at city entrances and through the community to reduce confusion and stress in the desire to find various community destinations.

Efforts are underway to add a potential **community garden** at Fairfax Park.

The City created a **farm-2-work program** for city and county employees.

The Chamber of Commerce in partnership with Eau Claire Healthy Communities Council won a technical assistance grant from the State Department of Health Services to increase **workplace wellness training and programs**.

The City's 2013-2017 **Parks and Open Space Plan** was completed.

A **health impact assessment research project** was underway in 2014 by a Master's Degree student from the University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee School of Public Health. The subject is the West Bank Redevelopment District. The student is researching existing health considerations and future cause and effect scenarios. A survey of academic literature of evidence-based science on similar land use cases will be compiled also to help inform possible future best practices.