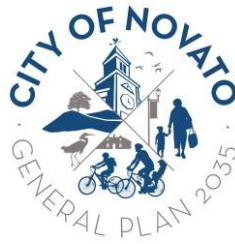


# City of Novato General Plan 2035 Policy White Paper



## Healthy Eating Active Living Updated June 24th, 2015



## **Healthy Eating Active Living Building a Healthy Community**

Healthy, livable, thriving communities provide many opportunities to lead an active lifestyle and connect with neighbors and other community members, where residents can live a happy, healthy life, which is free from chronic disease, social isolation, and negative environmental concerns. To achieve this ideal healthy community, many cities are looking for ways to improve the health of residents, reduce high rates of obesity among both adults and youth, and create an environment where the healthy choice is the easy choice.

### **White Paper Purpose**

The purpose of the General Plan White Papers is to provide initial direction on certain policy questions to aid staff in the preparation of the Draft General Plan, which will then be evaluated in the environmental impact report (EIR) prepared for the General Plan. As such, Commission recommendations and Council direction are preliminary, and will be reconsidered upon review of the Draft General Plan and EIR.

### **Background**

#### **Obesity Trends**

Poor or inadequate nutrition and lack of physical activity are the root causes of the obesity epidemic in America, and can lead to a number of preventable but chronic diseases like diabetes, heart disease and asthma. A national obesity epidemic has developed over the last thirty years<sup>1</sup>, and Novato is not immune. In order to reduce the prevalence of obesity and enhance all of our residents' health in Novato, the healthy choice must be the easy choice, with plenty of opportunities to be physically active in our daily lives and with easy access to fresh, healthy food.

According to the World Health Organization, health is a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease and infirmity. To achieve this comprehensive concept of health, the health benefits derived by improved active recreation opportunities and access to places to be active must be emphasized. Research suggests that transportation planning and land use policy have direct impacts on a community's health. Striving to create a physical environment that provides convenient and enticing opportunities to walk, bike, and be active is key to achieving success and accomplishing this goal.

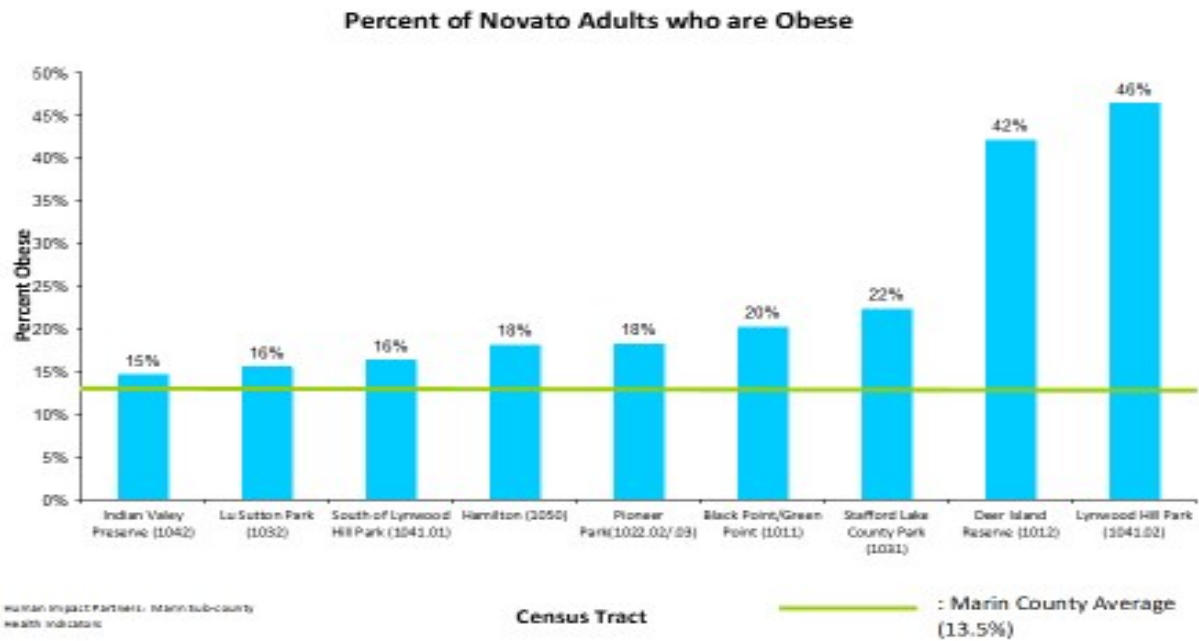
According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, approximately 17% (or 12.7 million) of children and adolescents in the United States aged 2 - 19 years are obese. More than one-third (34.9% or

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<sup>1</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Definition of overweight: an adult who has a Body Mass Index (BMI) of 25 – 29.9. Definition of obese: an adult who has a BMI of 30 or higher. Retrieved from <http://www.cdc.gov/obesity/data/adult.html>

78.6 million) of U.S. adults are obese. Obesity-related health conditions include heart disease, stroke, Type 2 diabetes and certain types of cancer, some of these include the leading causes of preventable death.

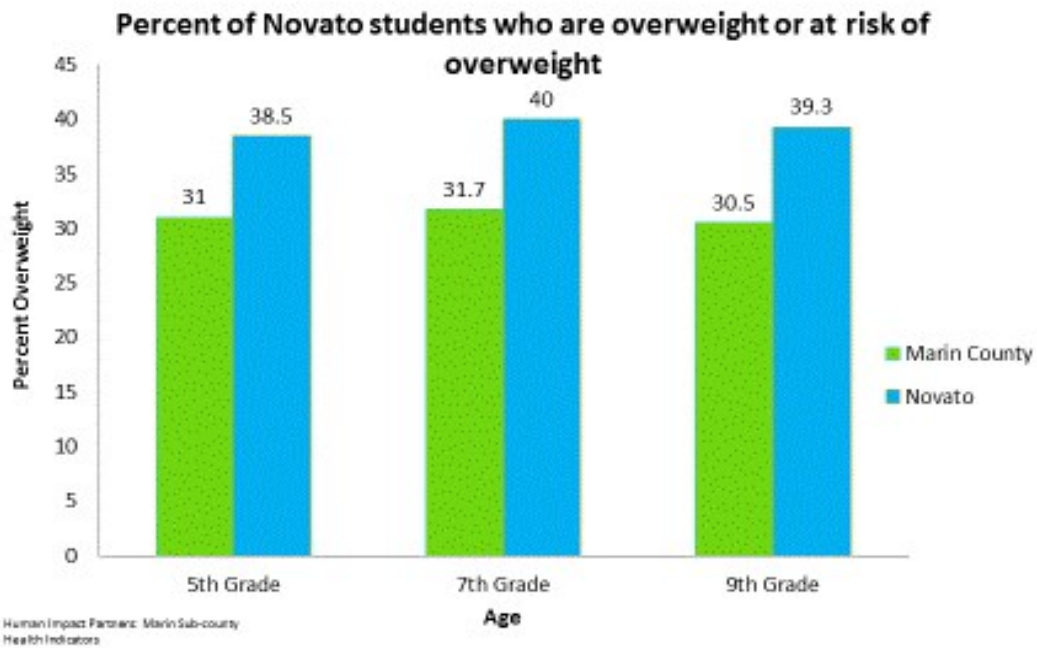
While obesity rates in Marin County are lower than the national average, obesity rates for adults in Novato are higher than the county average, throughout all areas of town. Adult obesity rates in Novato range from 15% to 46%, while the County average is just 13.5%<sup>2</sup>.



Novato’s youth are also overweight or at risk of being overweight<sup>3</sup>. Nearly 40% of Novato’s 5<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grade youth are overweight.

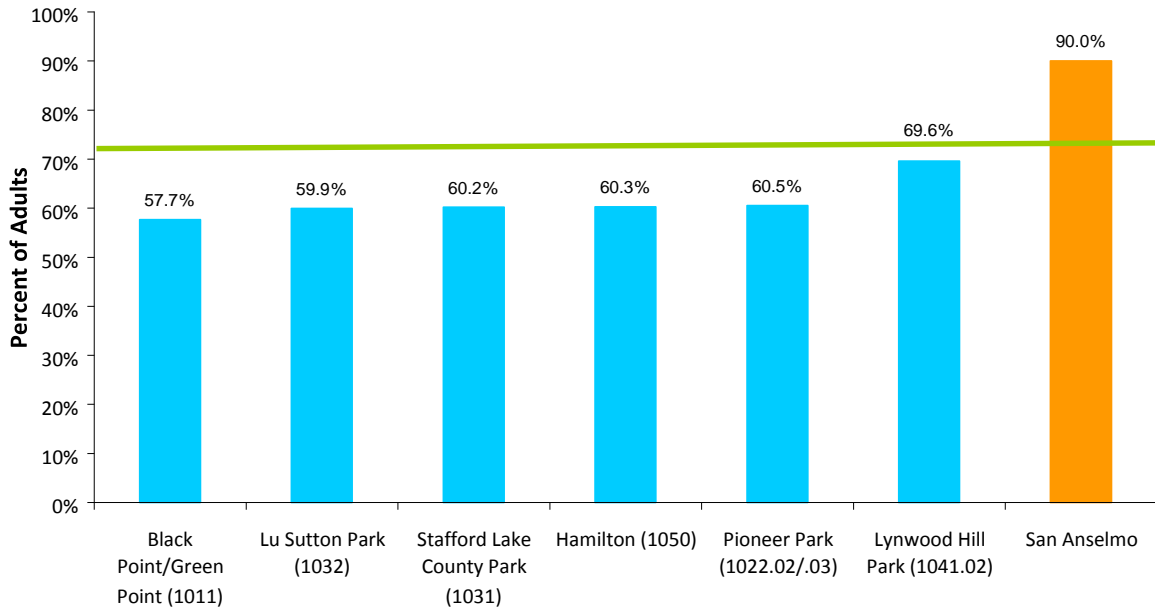
<sup>2</sup> Human Impact Partners. (2012). *Marin County Sub-County Health Indicators*.

<sup>3</sup> According to the Centers for Disease Control, BMI is used to determine childhood overweight and obesity, and BMI is calculated using a child’s weight and height. A child’s weight status is determined using an age and sex specific percentile for BMI, rather than using the adult BMI categories. Overweight for children is defined as having a BMI at or above the 85<sup>th</sup> percentile, and obese is defined as a BMI at or above the 95<sup>th</sup> percentile for children of the same age and sex.



Many of Novato’s adults are not physically active on a regular basis. In most areas of town, less than 60% of adults get moderate physical activity in a week, whereas in the neighboring town of San Anselmo, 90% do. According to the Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans, most health benefits occur for adults who get moderately intensive exercise thirty minutes per day, five days per week. For youth, the recommendation is sixty minutes or more per day of moderate to vigorous intensity exercise. Included in this should be muscle and bone-strengthening activities that help to develop physically strong and healthy children.

## Adults who Reported Engaging in Moderate Physical Activity in the Past 7 Days

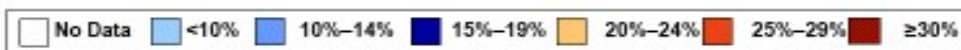
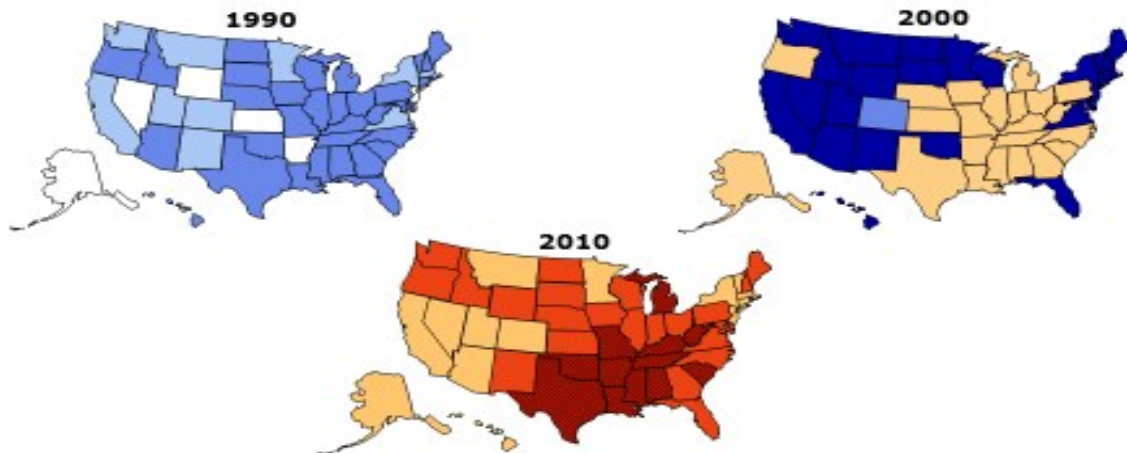


Human Impact Partners: MarinSub- **Census Tract** : Marin County Average county Health Indicators (70.6%)

The progression of the epidemic can be clearly seen in the *Obesity Trends Among U. S. Adults* table below.

## Obesity Trends\* Among U.S. Adults BRFSS, 1990, 2000, 2010

(\*BMI ≥30, or about 30 lbs. overweight for 5'4" person)



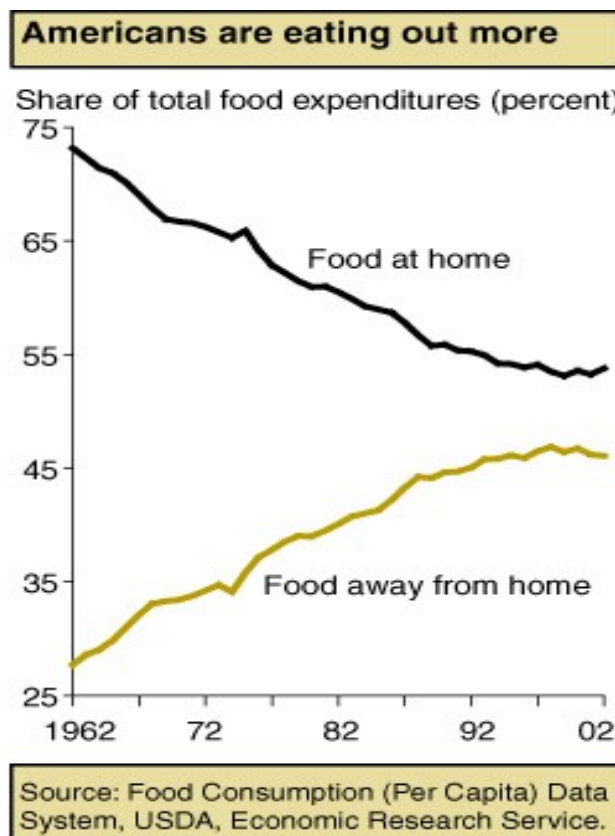
Source: Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, CDC.

Health impacts associated with obesity place a financial burden on families, employers, and the community due to increased health care costs. Obesity is the biggest cause of disabilities, lost productivity, and depression and more money is spent on obesity related health issues than health care dollars spent due to smoking. Obesity and physical inactivity cost California an estimated \$53 billion annually.<sup>4</sup>

The question that staff has to ask in order to make any progress in improving this health crisis is, what has changed over the last thirty years to cause the national obesity epidemic?

### Nutritional Trends

In addition to a significant change in eating behaviors of individuals, the food environment has changed over the years to encourage higher caloric intake. Convenience has become a way of life for many individuals and families, with a dramatic rise in consumption of foods eaten away from home. The rise in obesity has been caused by many factors, among them the increased number of fast food establishments in the U.S., the prevalence of large portion sizes when dining out, and the tendency to select more calorie-dense, nutrient-poor foods when dining out. In general, food eaten while dining out has higher calories and more sodium, fat and sugar than food that individuals might prepare at home by using fresh and natural ingredients (not prepackaged and processed meals).



<sup>4</sup> Chenoweth & Associates, Inc. (2009). *The Economic Costs of Overweight, Obesity, and Physical Inactivity among California Adults*, a study for the California Center for Public Health Advocacy.



Each day, one in four Americans visits a fast food restaurant. In 1972, we spent \$3 billion a year on fast food; today we spend more than \$110 billion. Novato is home to 20% of Marin County's fast food restaurants (approximately 40), so access to fast food is easy for residents. Fast food nutrition is limited and usually lacks fruit and vegetables, but is not lacking in calories, sodium, fat and sugar. Between 1960 and 2007, the average dinner plate expanded in size by 36 percent. Parallel to increased portion sizes, between 1987 and 2010, the number of Americans diagnosed with diabetes almost tripled to 20.9 million people.<sup>5</sup>

Sugar sweetened beverages (SSBs) are the largest source of added sugar and a significant contributor of calories in the American diet today. SSBs have few, if any, other nutrients. SSBs include soft drinks, sports drinks, fruit drinks, energy drinks, sweetened milk or milk alternatives and any other beverage to which sugar has been added. In 1995, per capita consumption of SSBs was 50 Kcal/day representing 2.5% of total calories for adults. By 2010, consumption had increased to 224 kcal/day representing 11% of total calories. The highest consumers of SSBs are teens aged 12 to 19 years old with 13% of calories coming from SSBs.<sup>6</sup>

There are several social and environmental factors linked to the purchase and consumption of SSBs. These factors are advertising and promotion, increased portion sizes, fast food consumption, and increased access to SSBs in the home.<sup>7</sup> High consumption of SSBs has been associated with obesity and other health conditions like diabetes and cardiovascular disease.

### **Trends in Amount of Physical Activity**

According to the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan, children are spending half as much time outside as they did twenty years ago, and much more time doing inside activities. The average American child spends approximately 7.5 hours per day in front of a screen and not being active. Inactivity coupled with inadequate nutrition are both factors in reducing life expectancy. These types of behaviors lead to chronic health conditions and are creating what may become the first generation to live shorter lives than their parents.



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<sup>5</sup> Chenoweth & Associates, Inc. (2009). *The Economic Costs of Overweight, Obesity, and Physical Inactivity among California Adults*, a study for the California Center for Public Health Advocacy.

<sup>6</sup> The Centers for Disease Control. (2010). *Guide to Strategies for Reducing the Consumption of Sugar Sweetened Beverages*.

<sup>7</sup> California Park & Recreation Society and California Center for Public Health Advocacy. (2014). *How Sweet it Isn't*.

## Mobility Trends: Communities Have Been Designed for Cars, not People on Foot or Bike

Half of all trips taken in the U.S. are three miles or less, yet most of us drive, even when our destination is close. Only 3% of commuting trips in America are by bicycle, compared to almost 60% in the Netherlands.<sup>8</sup> Bicycling has been increasing in popularity, and experience shows that bicycle-friendly features in a community increase safety for all road users, including those in a motorized vehicle. There are other benefits, too, from being a bike friendly community, which will be mentioned later in this paper.

After driving, walking is the most popular means of travel in America, with 10% of all trips occurring by foot. Eight of ten Americans prefer being in a community that offers sidewalks and good places to walk. Six in ten prefer a neighborhood that features a mix of houses, shops and services within a walk versus one that requires a car for every errand.<sup>9</sup>

Studies have found that people who live in neighborhoods with sidewalks are 47% more likely to be active at least 39 minutes per day.<sup>10</sup> Sidewalks play a vital role in community life. A community full of active streets where sidewalks allow residents and visitors to easily move around, enhance connectivity and serve as public spaces where people can socialize, helping to build a strong sense of community pride and unity. Safe, accessible, well-maintained sidewalks and pathways that connect a community are a fundamental community investment that enhances public health and maximizes social capital.



Most streets in the U.S. have been designed for fast moving cars, not people on foot or on a bicycle. Streets and parking now take up 25 – 50% of all public space in cities.<sup>11</sup> According to the 2014 report, *Dangerous by Design*, our roads are especially hazardous for children, low-income people and older adults. By 2015, baby boomers will represent 45% of the U.S. population. Recent studies show that baby boomers (those born 1946 to 1964), are much less healthy than prior generations. According to the American Heart Association, the average American over the age of 65 suffers from multiple chronic diseases: 72% have hypertension, 51% have arthritis, 31% have heart disease, 24% have cancer, and 20% have diabetes. Also, 40% of baby boomers have some form of cardiovascular disease, like Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary

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<sup>8</sup> American Association of Retired Persons (AARP). (2014). *AARP Livability Fact Sheets, Bicycling*. Retrieved from <http://www.aarp.org/livable-communities/info-2014/livability-factsheet-bicycling.html>.

<sup>9</sup> Sallis J., et al. (2009). *Neighborhood Environment and Physical Activity Among Adults in 11 Countries*. American Journal of Preventative Medicine, Vol. 36, No. 2.

<sup>10</sup> National Complete Streets Coalition. (2014). *Dangerous by Design*.

<sup>11</sup> *Strategies for Enhancing the Built Environment to Support Healthy Eating and Active Living*. (2008). Prevention Institute.



Disease or emphysema. Two in five baby boomers are obese and half of Americans age 55 to 64 have high blood pressure, which is a major risk factor for both heart disease and stroke.

Communities that strive to become more walkable and bikeable often concentrate on things like architecture, mixed-use development, and wider sidewalks. People with disabilities, however, face unique challenges in trying to navigate public spaces, issues that are usually not as well understood or considered. Despite the progress that has been made since the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was enacted in 1990, challenges still remain and any discussion about making a street, neighborhood, or community more walkable, needs to engage people with disabilities.



According to a report prepared by the Maine Development Foundation, “walking improves community interaction as people are more likely to talk with neighbors and shop in local stores when they are walking through a community”. It also provides easy, inexpensive and low-impact exercise that can improve the overall health of community residents. Walking instead of driving also protects environmental quality. Reducing vehicular emissions benefits plants, watersheds, and the health of wildlife and people alike.”

Walkable communities also provide a number of economic benefits. Housing values are higher where it’s easy and safe to walk. Walkable communities attract “New Economy” workers. Collaborative Economics studied the relationship between the physical design of communities and the elements of the new service oriented, knowledge-driven economy. This new economy is characterized by smaller, decentralized firms, and thrives on land use patterns, with city centers, corner stores and walkable downtowns, where interaction is promoted and is key.

Easy access to and abundance of trails can help people make the choice to get out and walk as part of their daily lives. Neighborhood connections to trails, awareness campaigns that include maps, and information about access points and trail difficulty, can play an important role in alerting people to the close proximity and abundance of local trails in our community and motivate them to get outside and exercise. Nearly fifty percent of the land in Novato is open space, covered with public use trails of all types, that support walking, biking and horseback riding, all great health enhancing physical activities!

## Healthy Aging

According to the Centers for Disease Control, older adults are among the fastest growing age group, and the first “baby boomers” (adults born between 1946 and 1964) turn 69 in 2015. More than 37 million people in this group (60 percent) will manage more than 1 chronic condition by 2030. Older adults are at high risk for developing chronic illnesses and related disabilities. These chronic conditions include: Diabetes, arthritis, heart failure, and dementia. A healthy diet and exercise can help to prevent or delay some of these.

According to the Aging Action Initiative (April 2015), Marin is the oldest county in the Bay Area and we are aging more than one-and-a-half times as fast as the rest of the state. By 2030 more than 33% of Marin citizens will be over 60 years old and about 14% will be over 75.



[According to the World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#), an age-friendly community is one in which services, settings, structures and policies support and enable older adults — and people with varying needs and capacities — to remain healthy, active and engaged. An age friendly city is committed to improving the physical and social environments to facilitate the independence of seniors and to foster neighborhood cohesion.

An age-friendly Novato would consist of environments that provide opportunities for healthy living, supports vibrant neighborhoods and fosters community engagement.

A number of specific elements help to make a community more age friendly. Walkability is one component that if communities make safe, well lit, inviting places to stroll, seniors may venture out on foot more. Ample seating along the way even adds to the experience and may allow a senior to enjoy a walk, if they know they can sit and rest along the way.

Age friendly parks can play an important role in providing opportunities for social interaction, relaxation, and both passive and active exercise. The key is to encourage and then have seniors actively using parks and open space.

In 2015, the City is completing an update to the American with Disabilities Act Self-Evaluation and Transition Plan, which includes conducting an audit of parks and recreation amenities for the first time since the inception of the ADA in 1992. In

addition to outdoor facilities, like parks and ball diamonds, recreation buildings and other city buildings were evaluated for compliance with the ADA. Any deficiencies discovered become part of a 12 year long transition plan to improve compliance. Improving access to parks and facilities, makes it easier for not only seniors, but everyone, to use these highly valued community assets and hopefully remain active longer.

Social capital has been defined in many ways, but essentially means the trust and connectedness people feel with their neighbors and the extent they feel part of the community where they live. Trust and social connections helps encourage seniors to participate in the life of their community and develop friendships that can reduce the feeling of isolation and provide the support they need to remain physically and mentally healthy.

### **Healthy Eating Active Living (HEAL) Cities Campaign**

As Novato looks to the future with a vision of a healthy community, fostering a culture of health means that every city decision, every design, every project, and every policy is considered with health in mind. Key questions to ask are: How does this enhance the health of our residents? Does this project or policy demonstrate our commitment to better health? Does it put people first and consider the needs of youth, seniors and the disabled population in our community?

Novato joined the Healthy Eating Active Living Cities Campaign in 2012, the first step to demonstrating our commitment to improving the health of all Novato residents and of working harder to ensure there are lots of opportunities for active lifestyles and eating healthy, fresh food.

The HEAL Campaign focuses on three policy areas that were selected by city officials from across the state of California. These three priority policies are: Land Use, Healthy Food, and Workplace Wellness.

1. **Land Use and the Built Environment.** Cities' land use planning, zoning, and infrastructure investments can not only have a positive effect on health but can also foster a greater sense of community and keep some of our most vulnerable populations engaged, active and healthy from age 8 to 80.
2. **Healthy Food Access.** Access to healthy food is an important tool in obesity prevention. By providing our residents with healthy, affordable, easily accessible alternatives to foods with high caloric content and little nutritional value, cities can lead by example in the fight against obesity. Cities have planning, economic development, and public relations tools for attracting and supporting healthy food retailers, farmers' markets and community gardens.
3. **Employee Wellness.** Cities can reduce the burden of worker healthcare costs by helping workers overcome obesity and overweight. Activity breaks, nutrition standards policies for vending machines and city-sponsored meetings, and walking groups, are all important strategies to ensure a happier, healthier and more productive workforce.

## How the Built Environment Affects Our Health

New attention and importance is being placed on the built environment and its significant impacts on creating healthy places and healthy people. The “built environment” encompasses places and spaces created or modified by people including buildings, parks, and transportation systems. The built environment is structured by land use rules, as well as by economics and design features. Research is increasingly demonstrating links between specific community factors, such as the availability of parks, accessibility of healthy and affordable produce, and the “walkability” of neighborhoods, and the choices people make in their daily lives.<sup>12</sup>



There are a number of important characteristics of a healthy community.

### Active Transportation and Public Transit

Being able to walk to services, public transit, shopping, schools and parks and recreation facilities is key to supporting health through maintaining healthy weight, and reducing the risk of chronic disease. A city can facilitate healthier mobility choices by connecting roadways to complementary systems of paths to create a seamless network of accessible trails, sidewalks, and bikeways that provide safe connections between community destinations, like schools, parks, stores, and neighborhoods.

A promising public transit practice in Marin is the Marin Access transit ambassador program. A trained volunteer ambassador helps transit riders learn and experience the transit route(s) by accompanying a rider, so that any bus changes or stops can be easily navigated and learned about before attempting to travel solo.

### Activity-Friendly Parks and Recreation Environments

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<sup>12</sup> Pedestrian Federation of America. (1995). *Walk Tall: A Citizen’s Guide to Walkable Communities*. Emmaus, Pennsylvania, Rodale Press.

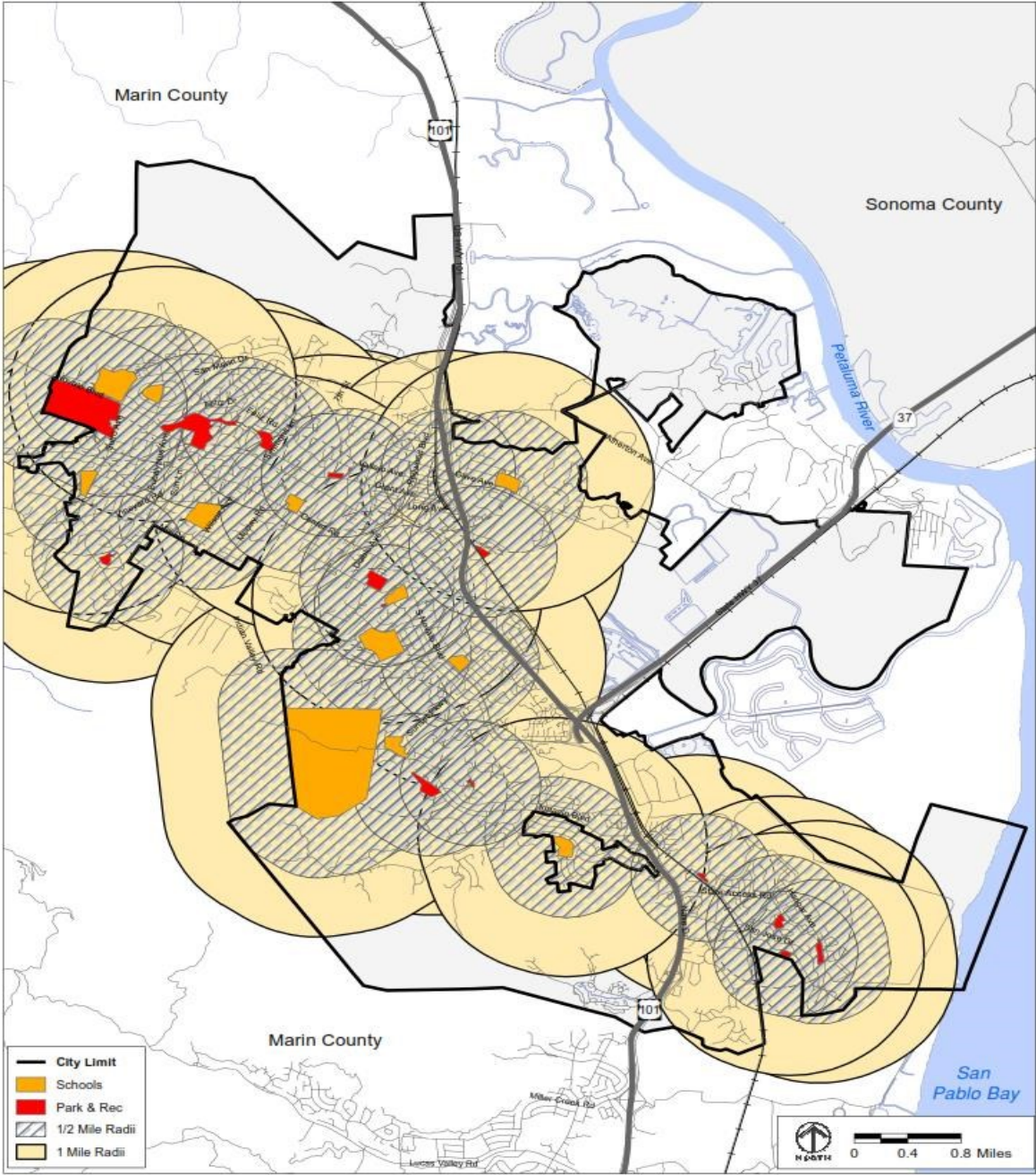
Cities can provide local parks, playgrounds and recreation facilities throughout town so access is easy and close by. The idea of pocket parks, which are small parks nestled snugly in neighborhoods, is a current trend, so that getting outside and active is easy and convenient.



Novato has 17 City parks or indoor facilities and 13 schools that provide active recreation opportunities. Figure A, below, maps these facilities, including a half-mile walking and a one-mile biking radius around each, indicating that all areas of Novato have easy access to active recreation facilities, with the exception of the Bahia and Partridge Knolls neighborhoods.

Figure A: Active Recreation Facilities Map





Additional active recreation opportunities exist in Novato's many open space areas, where public access trails for hiking, biking and horseback riding are abundant and use is free.

**List of Active Recreational Areas with 1/2 mile and 1 mile Radii**

**Parks and Recreation Facilities**



Arroyo Avichi Park
Hamilton Amphitheater Park
Hill Recreation Area
Hillside Park
Josef Hoog Park
Marin Highlands Park
Marion Recreation Area
Miwok Park
Novato Skate Park
O'Hair Park
Olive Tot Lot
Pioneer Park
Slade Park
South Hamilton Park
Stafford Grove Park
Thigpen Sports Courts

**Schools**

Hamilton School (K-8)	5530 Nave Dr.
Loma Verde Elementary (K-5)	399 Alameda De La Loma
Lu Sutton Elementary (K-5)	1800 Center Rd.
Lynwood Elementary (K-5)	1320 Lynwood Dr.
Olive Elementary (K-5)	629 Plum St.
Pleasant Valley Elementary (K-5)	755 Sutro Ave.
Rancho Elementary (K-5)	1430 Johnson St.
San Ramon Elementary (K-5)	45 San Ramon Way
San Jose Middle (6-8)	1000 Sunset Pkwy
Sinaloa Middle (6-8)	2045 Vineyard Rd.
Novato High (9-12)	625 Arthur St.
San Marin High (9-12)	15 San Marin Dr.
College of Marin, Indian Valley Campus	

To create a family-friendly city, a new report, *Using Behavioral Economics to Create Playable Cities*, suggests that instead of setting spaces aside for play, why not integrate them into the streets, sidewalks and bus stops people use every day? Adding playground equipment to a bus stop, for example, is a relatively easy way to enhance existing infrastructure to encourage more outdoor play.

Cities can encourage smaller housing developments to provide recreation and open space for active recreation and ensure that their development has great connectivity to sidewalks, bike paths, and trails nearby.

Cities providing abundant sports opportunities for youth, benefit the entire community by keeping kids engaged in positive activities and away from crime and risky behaviors. Sports can help create healthier youth, who are resilient, responsible, and perform better academically, and that develop into productive adults who lead an active, healthy lifestyle.

Childhood sports participation is a significant predictor of young adults' participation in sports and physical fitness activities. Adolescents who play sports are eight times as likely to be active at age 24 as adolescents who do not play sports (Sports Participation as Predictors of Participation in Sports and Physical Fitness Activities in Young Adulthood, Perkins, 2004).



### **Complete Neighborhoods**

Cities can create “complete neighborhoods”, which are neighborhoods where one has safe and convenient access to goods and services that are needed in daily life, usually without vehicle use. Complete neighborhoods can include grocery stores and other commercial services, public schools, public recreation facilities, parks and trails, and other civic amenities, in addition to a variety of housing options. A key element of a complete neighborhood is that it is built at a walkable and bikeable human scale, and meets the needs of people of all ages and abilities.



Adequate lighting, the right type of landscaping, and ensuring that the space is enlivened with activity add to the safety and feeling of being safe in a public space.

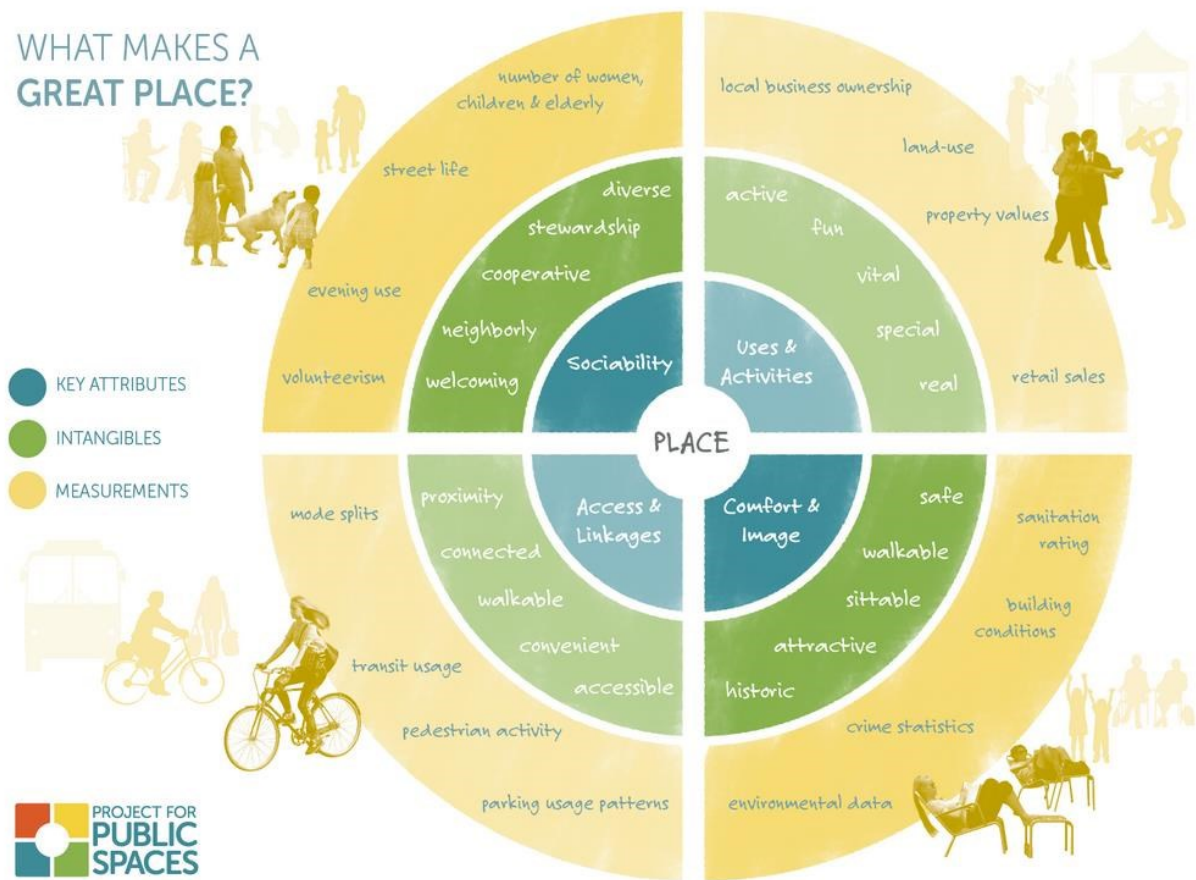
Communities should make the healthy choice the one that is SAFE – safe, accessible, fun and easy.



### **Environmental Benefits**

There are co-benefits to planning a HEAL-friendly built environment that are certainly worth mentioning. The reduction in greenhouse gas, for example, is a tremendous environmental benefit that accompanies increased amounts of walkers and bikers and fewer cars being driven. With the addition of more complete neighborhoods, there will be a decline in car use, traffic congestion, and vehicular accidents. These environmental benefits also coincide with significant economic benefits; as people walk and bike more often, they will drive less which means they will be using less gasoline.

## WHAT MAKES A GREAT PLACE?



### Access to Healthy Food

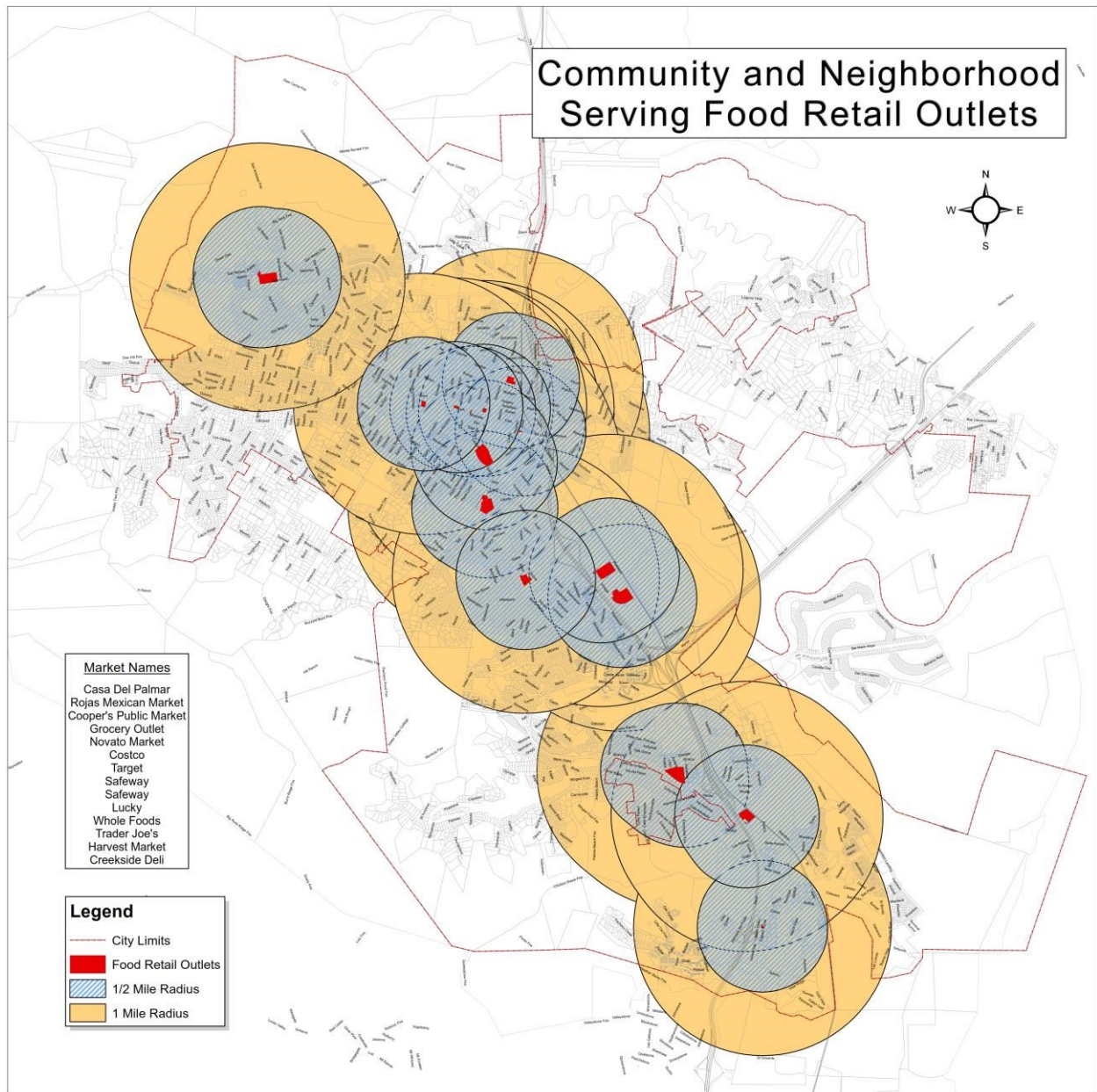
A lack of access to fresh, healthy foods can contribute to poor diets and higher levels of obesity and other diet-related diseases. One in three youth (between the ages of 2 and 19), are overweight or obese, and may experience higher rates of chronic diseases like diabetes and heart disease. Let's Move! Cities, Towns and Counties was launched as a nation-wide initiative to address the childhood obesity epidemic. The health impacts of poor diet are costly. In the U.S., it is estimated that healthier diets might prevent \$71 billion per year in medical costs, lost productivity and the value of premature death.<sup>13</sup>

Novato currently has 13 grocery stores that sell meat, fruits and vegetables and dry goods, ranging from small ethnic markets to supermarkets to bulk retailers like Costco. Figure B indicates the location of these grocery stores within both half-mile (walking distance) and one-mile (biking distance) radii. The distribution of existing grocery outlets provides access to healthy food choices from all Novato neighborhoods, with the exception of Bahia, Partridge Knolls, and the western portion of Ignacio Valley.

<sup>13</sup> Frazao, Elizabeth (1999). *USDA High Costs of Poor Eating Patterns in the U.S.*



**Figure B: Food Retail Outlet Map**



The new United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) food icon, called MyPlate, illustrates the Guidelines' recommendation that we fill half our plate with fruits and vegetables. Cities can assist with educating and motivating residents to adhere to this guideline every day by creating or supporting a strong network of community gardens, particularly in areas with multifamily housing, where access to outdoor growing spaces is limited. Providing healthy food and beverage options at all public events, in sports field snack shacks, and at fundraisers, will make healthy food and drink more obvious and available. Any food purchases, concession contracts, or vending agreements should adhere to some standard for healthy food and beverages at all public facilities.

The 2010 California Obesity Prevention Plan, *A Vision for Tomorrow, Strategic Actions*, identified specific strategies to reduce sugar sweetened beverage (SSB) consumption:

- a. Adopt a Healthy Food and Beverage Policy that requires that 50% of beverages sold in city vending machines meet specific nutrition guidelines. Beverages that meet nutrition guidelines include: water, 100% fruit juices with no additives, non-fat, 1% and 2% non-flavored milk, plant-derived milk (i.e. soy, rice, others), artificially sweetened, calorie reduced beverages that do not exceed 50 calories per 12-ounce serving, other non-calorie beverages. Include in the policy, healthy food and beverage guidelines for meetings and events conducted by the City and/or offered in City facilities.
- b. Limit marketing of sugar-sweetened beverages and minimize marketing's impact on children.
- c. Provide education to increase awareness of the need to choose more healthful drinks and provide free water at all facilities, events and meetings.
- d. Establish standards for food and beverages available at government run recreation facilities, parks, and other public facilities.

Beekeeping is another method of helping to propagate a healthy food culture and increasing access and education about the importance of healthy foods. According to the USDA, bees pollinate 80 percent of all of the flowering crops in the country, which accounts for one-third of everything that is eaten in the United States. This statistic has received national attention in the past year due to the drastically declining number of bees and bee colonies found around the world. The reasons behind the disappearance of bees are still being researched, but leading experts attribute the phenomenon to the use of pesticides, parasitic mites and viral and bacterial diseases. Although there is still question about the root cause, most everyone agrees on a cure: beekeeping. Residents, community members and local businesses can help increase the population of bees and their pollination efforts by raising their own bees. Cities can help support these efforts by educating the public about the importance of bees, and also giving preference to businesses and other development projects that include beekeeping practices.

Beekeeping isn't just a benefit to the food industry or another method by which we can increase access and availability of healthy food, beekeeping has an irrefutable economic co-benefit as well. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration states that bees are responsible for pollinating approximately \$15 billion in added crop value each year. The FDA also calculated that in 2013 honey bees were responsible for making 149 million pounds of honey, which is currently selling for an average of \$6.04 a pound. In addition to honey, bees are also responsible for making beeswax, which is used for making candles, art materials, polishes, cosmetics and is a common binding agent used in the pharmaceutical industry.

Developing a healthy food environment can be done using a number of strategies, including: farmers' markets and farm stands, grocery stores, healthy corner store conversions so they carry a wider variety of healthy food, community gardens, beekeeping, farm-to-institution – local farms' food to institutions such as government, corporations, hospitals and colleges. Novato public schools already have a farm to table program in place.

Access to affordable healthy food and drink is not always easy, particularly for our youth today. Thankfully, the Novato Unified School District is a leader in ensuring that the food and drink provided and available during the school day on school campuses is healthier fare, where there is little sugar, there are low fat



options, and no junk food is on the menu. Salad bars are becoming the norm, and education about the importance of health and nutrition of school children and their parents is a priority.

Additionally, cities can play a key role in creating education campaigns to heighten awareness in programs and target groups (particularly ones who serve youth) so that choosing healthier food and beverages becomes the preferred choice. There are many non-profit youth and adult sports organizations that can assist with educating and motivating our youth and adults to choose healthier food and drink options that are better for their health.

### **Employee Wellness**

To stem rising costs from healthcare utilization, injury and lost productivity, many cities are implementing employee wellness policies and no-cost and low-cost health incentives. Healthy Eating Active Living city polices to build a healthy workforce could include: passing an employee wellness resolution; creating policies to include health and activity breaks during the day; and instituting healthy snack choices and meeting and event nutrition and healthy drink guidelines.

### **Opportunities for Fostering a Culture of Health Now**

#### **Novato's HEAL Action Plan and Play Streets Event**

In the spring of 2014, City staff, working with a Novato Chamber of Commerce Leadership Novato team, conducted two workshops with Novato stakeholders from the medical field, nonprofit health and fitness world, Marin County Health and Human Services Department, and youth and senior serving organizations, to assess Novato's current health condition, and then prioritize ways we could improve it. As a result of stakeholders input, priorities were identified, and now a HEAL Action Plan is being developed that will focus city resources on assisting with the creation of a new community garden, will create Novato's first Play Streets (closure of a street to do active recreation, walking and biking, with no cars allowed), and other efforts to foster the creation of a culture of health.

As a result of these workshops, a Novato HEAL Resource Collaborative was created to monitor the City's efforts in creating and implementing the HEAL Action Plan, scanning the landscape for current trends, needs and gaps, and being an active member of a collaborative effort focused on improving the health of all Novato residents and reducing obesity in our community.



## **POLICY OPTIONS**

### **1. Healthy Eating Active Living Strategies and Policy Recommendations to Build a Healthy Community**

- A. Support policies, projects, programs and regulations that improve community health, wellbeing and physical activity.
  - Work with the Marin County Health and Human Services Department to track community health information to help inform health policies and initiatives.
- B. The City should model and promote healthy eating and active living practices.
  - Provide education to increase nutritional awareness in City facilities and programs.
  - Establish standards for food and beverages available at City facilities and events.
  - Provide easy access in City parks and facilities to water, including bottle-filling dispensers.
  - Implement an employee wellness program.
- C. Host a HEAL Booth at Farmer’s Market and other events focused on health or physical activity, to share information and heighten awareness.

### **2. Complete Neighborhoods**

The Land Use and Community Identify Elements in the Novato General Plan will include policies which:

- A. Encourage creation of “complete neighborhoods” with safe and convenient access to goods and services, usually without the need for vehicle use.
- B. Promote mixed use and pedestrian-oriented development, supporting a village concept = housing and daily living activities are close enough to walk or bike to, where neighbors can easily interact with one another and services and shops are a short walk or bike ride away.
  - Prepare commercial and mixed-use design guidelines to encourage building exteriors, massing and outdoor spaces that contribute to a pedestrian-friendly, safe, inviting environment.
  - Include active living principles in preparing new multi-family and commercial design guidelines which will evaluate new developments based on promotion of active recreation and use.

### **3. Complete Streets**

The Circulation Element will include policies and programs resulting from the Complete Streets White Paper, which will be reviewed by the Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee, the Planning Commission and City Council. These policies and programs will call for:

- A. Design principles to accommodate pedestrians, bicyclists, seniors, and the disabled in street improvements,
- B. Enhancing the connectivity of bicycle paths, sidewalks, and trails, and
- C. Improving safety for pedestrians and bicyclists.

### **4. Access to Recreation**

- A. Provide local parks, playgrounds and recreation facilities throughout town so access is easy and close by.

- Evaluate new developments to maximize on-site recreational space or access to active recreational opportunities in the area, including trails.
  - Develop a park site in the Bahia neighborhood for active recreation.
  - Seek public access to the recreational facilities at the Fireman's Fund (American Assets) site through future redevelopment of the property.
  - Consider the creation of a linear park within the median of North Redwood Boulevard.
  - Consider the expansion of the Novato City Green, including enhancement of Sherman Avenue, to accommodate a wide range of community events and activities.
- B. Create convenient and safe opportunities for physical activity for all residents.
- Experiment with short-term closure of streets to create community health and recreation events.
- C. Expand community access to indoor and outdoor public and private facilities through joint use agreements with the school district and other community partners or development opportunities. Encourage the establishment of commercial recreation facilities to address unmet needs and expand the number of high quality recreation opportunities in Novato, that are well maintained and safe.
- D. Official public trails are located throughout Novato and our immediate vicinity in our abundant open space areas and public parks, and they provide an important active recreation opportunity that is free. City support of trails and ongoing collaboration with the Marin County Parks and Open Space District to coordinate and connect existing and new trails, and create a non-motorized network of paths for active recreation, should remain a priority.
- E. Maps and trail awareness campaigns can increase community knowledge, interest, and use of the many public trail assets Novato has. Accessible trails can be included on the maps so seniors or disabled individuals are aware of the variety of recreation opportunities that exist and that they can also enjoy.

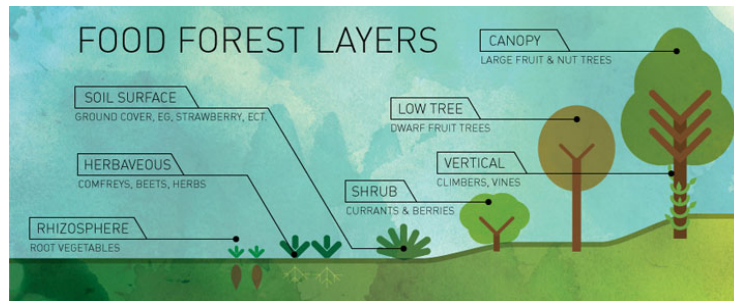


- F. Consider expanding nighttime active recreation opportunities outside, by providing safe, lighted fields for sports and community active recreation uses, thereby, expanding hours where youth, adults, and seniors can be active.

## 5. Access to Healthy Foods

- A. Provide convenient locations to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables throughout the community.
  - Promote the location of local-serving grocery stores in neighborhood shopping centers, particularly in under-served areas.
- B. Protect existing community gardens and support creation of new ones.
  - Amend the Zoning Code to streamline the process to create new community gardens.
  - Prepare and maintain a map of City properties that might be suitable for creation of community gardens by community groups.
  - Map existing school community gardens
- C. Encourage the success of existing and the creation of new farmers markets in convenient locations throughout the City.
- D. Explore opportunities on unused/underutilized city owned land for food forests.  
 A food forest as defined by the Permaculture Research Institute is typically comprised of seven layers, the uppermost layer being the canopy layer. The canopy layer is comprised of tall trees —

typically large fruit and nut trees. Between the tall canopy layer trees, there is a layer of low growing, typically dwarf fruit trees. A dwarf fruit tree can be up to 12' tall, so don't think these are necessarily *very low* trees! Nestled between all the small trees are the shrubs – which are well represented by currants and berries. Filling the remaining space are the herbaceous layer, these are the culinary and medicinal herbs, companion plants, bee-forage plants and poultry forage plants. Any remaining space is occupied by ground cover plants. These form a living mulch that protects the soil, reduces water loss to evaporation, and prevents weeds growing. While that might seem like a lot of plants in one space, we still have one more to fill, the upright vertical space. This is filled by climbers and vines, which can be run up trellises, arbors, fences, trees or any other vertical support. This category includes grapes, climbing beans, many berries, passionfruit, kiwi fruit, climbing peas, and many other species that love to climb. A food forest can help to expand access to healthy food on public land.



Seattle's Food Forest

- E. Educate local non-profits, through written materials, workshops, and flyers, about the importance of providing healthy food and beverage options to their employees, clients, and at all events they produce, sponsor, or participate in.
- F. Encourage employers to develop an employee wellness program that has a strong healthy eating focus and extend invitations to them to join with city staff for workshops, talks, and educational sessions regarding healthy eating and wellness.



- G. Consider amending the Zoning Ordinance to provide allowances for beekeeping.
- H. Investigate healthy food incentive programs for restaurants, like the United States Healthful Council’s REAL Certification program, which is a nationally recognized mark of excellence for food and food service operators committed to holistic nutrition and environmental stewardship. This is a voluntary, third party certification program like LEED.



- I. Investigate recognition programs that reward restaurants, concession operators, and groups for their efforts to enhance access to health food, support farm to table efforts, and expand community garden opportunities for residents.
- J. Research and share nutritional guidelines with concession stand operators including nonprofit sports snack shacks and commercial concession operators and share these guidelines with parks and recreation facility renters, private clubs, and nonprofit athletic groups, who can influence the healthy food choices of event attendees, spectators, and patrons.

Every City can influence the health of it’s residents by creating an environment that supports health with walkable, bikeable and safe sidewalks and parks, abundant recreation opportunities, including sports, hiking, and more, and by having a health priority focus, so when projects, policies and programs are considered, they are viewed in terms of how it can improve and enhance health.