

Active Transportation in South Dakota: A Better Way to Get Around Town

A unique healthy community design collaboration between the South Dakota Department of Health, South Dakota State University Landscape Architecture Design students, and the City of Huron focused on strategies including active transportation, walkable downtowns, and cultural investment.

Summary

Through this unique collaboration and pilot program, SDSU Landscape Architecture Design students under the direction of Professor Donald Burger conducted built environment assessments of the city of Huron to provide the catalyst for community improvements to the connectivity and overall walkability of Huron. Active transportation encourages the integration of physical activity into daily routines such as walking or biking to destinations such as work, grocery stores, or parks. **Making physical activity part of daily living increases physical activity levels in communities for better health outcomes.**

Challenge

With a recent influx of the Karen community (political refugees from Burma) whose primary mode of transportation is walking and biking, Huron City Planner Ralph Borkowski was challenged to provide safe, accessible and attractive pedestrian areas to encourage active transportation of all residents. Borkowski convened Huron stakeholders to join the conversation with SDSU students to share a vision for improving community design in Huron to create more vibrant, walkable neighborhoods.

Solution

The Huron stakeholders represented sectors including school, city, public works, tourism, parks and recreation, transit, law enforcement, historical preservation and more. The stakeholders provided their specific sector issues, challenges and hopes for the project to educate and inform the SDSU students. The students in turn asked questions and gathered feedback for their research prior to conducting the assessments. Following several on-site assessments in various neighborhoods, parks, and main street areas, the students spent the semester analyzing the data and preparing final reports and recommendations for Huron, culminating in a final presentation to stakeholders.

Timeline

Oct 2012 - Dec 2012
Community application and selection process
SDSU planning

Jan 2013 - May 2013
Huron stakeholder meeting, SDSU assessments, analysis, and preparation of final reports
Presentation to community stakeholders

August 2013
Ralph Borkowski and Donald Burger present project to Chronic Disease State Partners

Oct 2013 - Dec 2013
Community application and selection process
SDSU planning

January 2014
6 month follow-up with Huron and SDSU

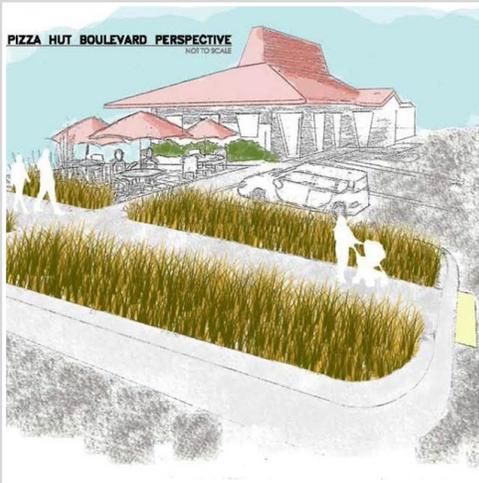
Jan 2014 - May 2014
Mitchell/SDSU/DOH collaboration



Results

Key recommendations for Huron addressed six overarching variables: (1) Community & Policy Development; (2) Cultural Investments; (3) Parks System Development & Enhancement; (4) Active Transportation Infrastructure; (5) Continuing Bike Share Program; and (6) Additional Funding Sources & Initiatives. Professor Burger facilitated the assessment model, final recommendations and overall student learning experience.

As a result of the final recommendations and published SDSU Landscape Architecture Program report by Professor Burger and students, *Active Transportation Recommendations for Huron, South Dakota*, the city of Huron has renewed its discussion of enhancing main street boulevards through the addition of street trees and green spaces. Positive feedback from elected officials on the final report and presentations provided promising political investment for future action on the final recommendations.



As of January 2014, the city of Huron continues to discuss the final SDSU recommendations and how to incorporate and fund projects into the Huron Master Plan.

Overall, this collaboration has the potential to create policy, systems and environmental change in Huron as the final recommendations are acted upon over time.



Source: Active Transportation Recommendations for Huron, South Dakota, SDSU Landscape Architecture Program, In cooperation with the SD Department of Health

Successes

Through this collaboration, the SDSU Landscape Architecture students received real-world experience in their field of study and the city of Huron received quality, no-cost built environment assessment and professionally prepared recommendations and reports for their community to use for years to come. This success story showcases how communities can connect with university students in a creative partnership providing benefits to all parties involved.

Communities can facilitate big changes in Healthy Community Design by taking small steps toward creating more livable, vibrant communities. Walk audits or walkability assessments are a doable first step for communities to create advocacy and educate stakeholders on more long-term healthy community design policy work. Securing long-term funding and commitment, educating community stakeholders and leaders, and involving multiple partners is essential for success.

Resources

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Local Contacts

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Donald Burger, Professional Landscape Architect
Assistant Professor of Landscape Architecture
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Get Involved!

The South Dakota Department of Health provides technical assistance to communities interested in improving the built environment to support more active transportation and encourage physical activity. In addition, the Active Transportation Advisory Team, a state-wide multi-disciplinary team of representatives from many healthy community design sectors, offers expertise to communities.