Executive Summary of a Health Impact Assessment (HIA) of Park, Trail, and Green Space Planning in the West Side of Greenville, South Carolina

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South Carolina Institute of
Medicine & Public Health

What is a Health Impact Assessment (HIA)?

Increasing evidence indicates that our health is not determined solely by our behavior, choices, and genetics. Health is determined by many different components including socio-economic status and where a person is born, lives, and works. The built environment is increasingly recognized as an important determinant of health behavior, including physical activity. In order to ensure improvements in public health, health should be considered in non-health related projects, programs, plans, and policies. Non-health related organizations that influence health include, but are not limited to, those related to transportation, housing, agriculture, and education (National Research Council of the National Academies [NRCNA], 2011). The concept of bringing health to the forefront and strengthening the consideration of health for policies in other sectors is best defined as a Health in All Policies (HiAP) approach. HiAP is a strategy that "focuses on particular social determinants of health through integrated policy response across relevant policy areas with the ultimate goal of supporting health equity" (European Portal for Action On Health Inequalities [EPAOHI], n.d., Definition, para,1).

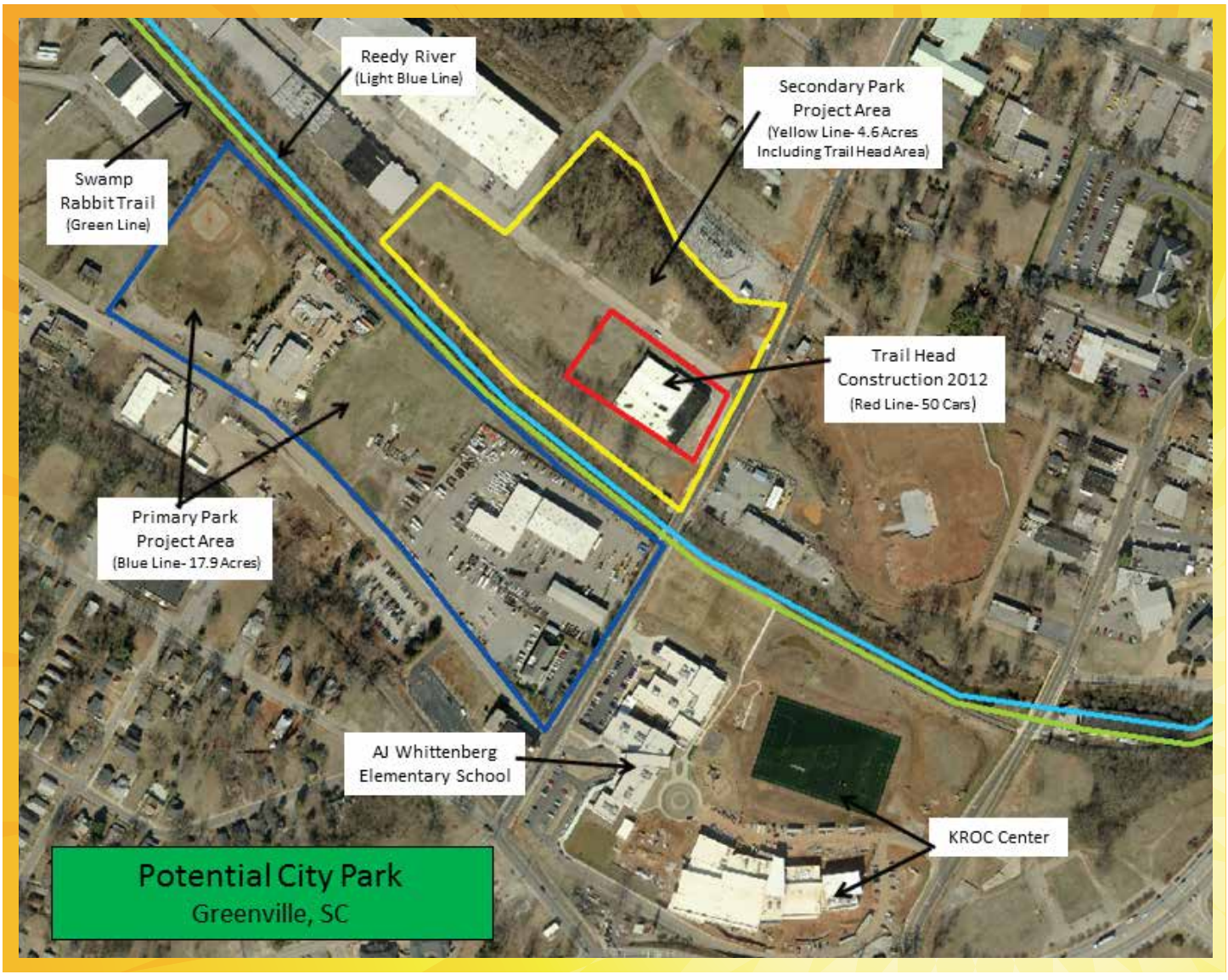
"When you are talking about health impacts, you are talking about making decisions that will impact my grandchildren and the world they live in."

– Lillian Brock Flemming, City Council District 2, Vice Mayor Pro Tem Greenville City Council and HIA Advisory Committee Member

HiAP is often implemented through a Health Impact Assessment (HIA). An HIA is a systematic assessment that combines scientific data, professional expertise, and stakeholder involvement to determine the effects that a potential policy, plan, program, or project might have on the health of a particular population (NRCNA, 2011). The HIA provides information to decision-makers that can help minimize the anticipated adverse health effects and maximize positive health outcomes. It can be utilized across a number of sectors and applied at the federal, state, tribal, and local levels (NRCNA, 2011). HIAs consist of six steps: screening, scoping, assessment, development of recommendations, reporting, and monitoring/evaluation.

Background

In March of 2012, the South Carolina Institute of Medicine and Public Health (IMPH) was awarded one of two national demonstration grants from the National Network of Public Health Institutes (NNPHI) and the Health Impact Project, a collaboration of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the Pew Charitable Trusts,[1] to conduct a comprehensive HIA. IMPH developed a partnership with the City of Greenville, South Carolina to conduct the HIA on the potential effects of expansion and/or addition of parks, trails, and green space in Greenville's west side. The HIA will contribute to the city's decision-making for a larger planning initiative, "Connections for Sustainability: Linking Greenville's Neighborhoods to Jobs and Open Space," which is a comprehensive planning process for three economically depressed neighborhoods in the west side of Greenville: West Greenville, West End, and Southernside. The planning process includes considerations related to the built environment, transportation and connectivity, affordable and quality housing, and the expansion and addition of a park, trails, and green space. The HIA took place between May and December of 2012. During this time, the City began a planning process for a community park as a possible re-use of property currently used to house the Public Works department, which is sited in a flood zone. The map below demonstrates a potential outline of the park's boundaries.



[1] The opinions expressed in this report are those of the HIA Advisory Committee and do not necessarily reflect the views of the National Network of Public Health Institutes, the Health Impact Project, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, or the Pew Charitable Trusts.

Individuals were invited to be part of the Advisory Committee because of their knowledge, expertise, and commitment to helping the community. Their involvement came through participation in three advisory committee meetings, which is where all decisions regarding the HIA's scope, assessment, recommendations, and priority setting were made. The committee members also had the opportunity to attend four workgroup meetings with the project team that centered on specific phases of the HIA: scoping, assessment, recommendations, and reporting. Key partners in the Advisory Committee included representatives from the City of Greenville, local non-profit and advocacy organizations, public health representatives, health care providers, and west side community members.

The primary goal of the HIA, as defined by the Advisory Committee at its first meeting, is to outline the anticipated positive and negative health impacts of the development of parks, trails, and green space in Greenville's west side. One of the major components of this development includes a potential park; much of the Advisory Committee's discussion focused on how the potential park could be developed in a way to promote physical activity, increase social cohesion, improve economic stability, and increase access to healthy food. Anticipated positive impacts of the development will be supplemented with recommendations about how to maximize these impacts; anticipated negative impacts will be supplemented with recommendations related to mitigating these impacts.

Findings and Recommendations

Recommendations of the HIA Advisory Committee are for the consideration of the community members, the City, and its consultants as they work together to complete the comprehensive planning on the west side. The HIA Advisory Committee feels that the components and design of the potential park, trails, and green space in Greenville's west side should be informed by the community's residents through the public input process the City of Greenville has planned. The decisions about what to include in the park and how the park should be designed will be determined by this process.

The HIA Advisory Committee aims to maximize the health benefits of the potential development of a park, trails, and green space in the west side and to minimize any adverse affects of the development.

Based on community input and existing research regarding the primary ways in which community health would be impacted by the this development, the HIA Advisory Committee focused its assessment and recommendations on the following health determinants, ranked according to the anticipated significance of impact:

Priority A	Priority B
– Physical activity **– Social cohesion/capital** **– Community and family economic stability** **– Food access**	**– Individual and community safety** **– Air and water quality**

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY *(Priority A)*

Summary of findings: Research shows that medical costs related to obesity account for almost 10 percent of annual medical costs. It was predicted that by 2008 these costs would be about $147 billion (Finkelstein, Trogdon, Cohen, & Dietz, 2009). Those who are most at risk for obesity and related diseases are minority groups, individuals with a low income, those with low education levels, and individuals living in rural communities (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2012a; Weight of the Nation, 2012). Physical activity is beneficial to controlling weight, but even without weight loss, physical activity can improve health by lowering the risk for heart disease, stroke, and type 2 diabetes (CDC, 2012b). Increasing access to opportunities for physical activity in communities can provide the potential for positive health benefits and reduce obesity and chronic disease (County Health Ranking and Roadmaps, 2012; Transportation Research Board [TRB], 2005). Parks can provide a no- or low-cost option for physical activity in low income communities by providing a walking destination and facilities for recreation, organized sports, and exercise activities. Individuals are more likely to use a park if it is close to where they live.

RECOMMENDATIONS: Overall, the Advisory Committee recommends that the park, trails, and green space planning maximizes ways to promote physical activity while preventing recreational injuries. Specific recommendations related to promoting physical activity while preventing recreational injuries include:

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY RECOMMENDATIONS

Key Factors in Promoting Physical Activity[2]	Advisory Committee Implementation Suggestions
Provide opportunities to walk and bike to and from the potential park	• Provide connections such as new trails, sidewalks, and bicycle lanes for community members to access the potential park and the Swamp Rabbit Trail to maximize utilization and promote active transportation. • Minimize possibilities for recreational injuries through signage and community education.
Provide opportunities for physical activity at the potential park	• Provide opportunities for physical activities for all age groups at the potential park (children, adolescents, adults, and older adults). • Build a walking trail around the perimeter of the potential park. • Provide a parking facility for bicycles, a bicycle share or lending program (with helmets), and bicycle safety education classes; provide education for cyclists, pedestrians, and motorists on the rules of the road. • Include recreation space and sports fields with no-cost programming for children's sports at the potential park. • In the potential park design, include one or more basketball courts and open grassy areas and play fields where exercise programs could be held. • Consider building a splash pad/spray ground at the potential park for children to promote physical activity and prevent use of the river.
Provide ample shade at the potential park	• Plant trees throughout the potential park to provide shade in order to encourage physical activity during hot months and reduce the incident of illnesses related to the heat. • Provide a shaded play structure for children at the potential park (shade from trees can reduce the temperature of outdoor play areas for children by 8 to 10 degrees).

[2] The considerations and factors in promoting physical activity listed in this table are demonstrated by research to be beneficial in increasing physical activity. For references please refer to the full report available at www.imph.org.

SOCIAL COHESION/CAPITAL *(Priority A)*

Summary of findings: Social capital is the degree to which individuals feel that they belong to a socially cohesive community, participate in activities, and utilize community resources (Ross, 2007). Social capital and cohesion impact health in numerous ways. Research has demonstrated that individuals with high levels of social cohesion live longer and experience improved mental and physical health (Jackson & Sinclair, 2012; Ross, 2007). While numerous variables can influence opportunities for social cohesion in a particular area, one of the necessary precursors is physical space for people to be able to come into contact with each other. Providing meeting and event space creates opportunities for increased social interaction, which creates an overall more cohesive community.

RECOMMENDATIONS: The Advisory Committee recommends designing the potential park, trails, and green space in a way that maximizes social cohesion and social capital, mental health, and overall well-being for community residents. The potential park should be designed to meet the needs and aspirations of the residents of the west side community. More specific considerations related to the potential park and promoting social cohesion include:

SOCIAL COHESION/CAPITAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Key Factors in Promoting Social Cohesion/Capital[3]	Advisory Committee Implementation Suggestions
Provide opportunities for interaction between community members	• Consider including a community garden in the potential park. A community garden within a park is shown to be an inexpensive way to bring healthy food to communities, increase physical activity, decrease obesity, and increase social relationships among neighbors. • Include event space, such as an amphitheater, within the potential park. • Provide recreation space and sports fields as part of the potential park. • Provide picnic shelters and adequate, accessible restrooms and water fountains in the potential park. • Develop a programming plan with something for every age group at the potential park. • Design the potential park to be handicap-accessible and provide an outlet to re-charge electronic handicapped chairs.
Provide safe paths and signs to encourage utilization of the potential park	• Provide connections within the west side to the potential park site. This can include sidewalks, trails, and/or bicycle lanes. A park will not benefit community residents unless they can safely access it. • Provide signage pointing to the potential park from various points in the community; add in symbols and/or languages other than English to overcome language barriers.
Provide opportunities to strengthen the relationship between the potential park and the surrounding community members	• Look for ways to integrate the history and culture of the community into the design of the potential park. • Encourage a partnership with local artists to design something unique to the potential park, and encourage residents to paint a mural at the potential park.
Provide opportunities to improve the mental health of community residents	• Design places within the potential park for relaxation and meditation, such as an open green space with benches and swings.

[3] The considerations and factors in promoting social cohesion/capital listed in this table are demonstrated by research to be beneficial in increasing social cohesion/capital. For references please refer to the full report available at www.imph.org.

"Where inequality exists, where poor children grow without adequate nutrition, with no access to a park for playing little league, where the youth are in the dawn of life, the poor are in the pit of life, and the elderly are in the dusk of life… Our children are the true measure of our wealth, and we must do what we can to see that children can reach their potential."

– Mary Neal, West End Community Member and HIA Advisory Committee Member

COMMUNITY AND FAMILY ECONOMIC STABILITY

(Priority A)

Summary of findings: Poverty is a leading cause of poor health. The west side community has a low socio-economic status, with 40 percent of families and individuals living below the poverty level (American Community Survey [ACS], 2005-2009). The poor tend to have worse health and die at a younger age, in part due to a higher than average rate of child and maternal mortality, higher levels of disease, and limited access to health care as compared to those with a higher income (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2003).

Areas for recreation, such as open space and trails, increase property values and tax revenues for the surrounding residential properties (Reed, 2012). High-quality parks also encourage economic development and attract homebuyers by increasing residential property values up to 15 percent, meaning increased wealth for homeowners and revenues for cities (City Parks Alliance, n.d, "Significant Savings", para, 3). However, 62 percent of residents in the west side area rent their homes (ACS, 2005-2009), so concerns exist about involuntary displacement if property values increase. Displacement has a number of health consequences, including stress and anxiety as well as the potential for homelessness (ACS, 2005-2009). This same economic development can also lead to new businesses and jobs in the community, which would help to alleviate the levels of poverty and unemployment; in the west side, there are census tracts with unemployment as high as 26 percent (South Carolina Department of Employment and Workforce [SC DEW], 2012).

RECOMMENDATIONS: Overall, the Advisory Committee recommends ensuring that the potential park, trails, and green space be implemented in a way that maximizes community and family economic stability for residents. Suggestions related to the potential park for improving the economic stability of the community are:

COMMUNITY AND FAMILY ECONOMIC STABILITY RECOMMENDATIONS

Key Factors in Promoting Community and Family Economic Stability[4]	Advisory Committee Implementation Suggestions
Encourage opportunities to expand on current assets and economic opportunities in the community	• Design the potential park in such a manner that it can easily be expanded in the future. • Capitalize on recently added assets in the west side area, such as the Kroc Center and A.J. Whittenberg Elementary School, to spur economic development in the west side as part of the comprehensive planning process as a method to provide jobs to those in the community. • Create an emphasis in the Request for Proposals (RFPs) for construction and other work related to development in the west side that encourages use of minority owned businesses and workers from the community.
Provide opportunities for affordable housing	• Through the west side Comprehensive Plan, to be developed in 2013, the City of Greenville, in partnership with the residents of the west side, should include a plan to make adequate affordable housing stock available in the community and minimize displacement, evictions, and foreclosures in the event that property values increase as a result of the potential park and other redevelopment in the community.

[4] The considerations and factors in promoting community and family economic stability listed in this table are demonstrated by research to be beneficial in increasing community and family economic stability. For references please refer to the full report available at www.imph.org.

"I have lived in the west Greenville area over 60 years, the majority of my life. It would be nice to have a health food store in my community or a large grocery store to keep the people healthy."

– Mamie L. Davis "AKA" Flamey, West Greenville Community Member

FOOD ACCESS *(Priority A)*

Summary of findings: In Greenville's west side, there are only three grocery stores, but 24 fast food restaurants. Research shows that providing access to healthy and affordable foods is an important contributing factor for decreasing cancer and chronic diseases, including hypertension, stroke, and cardiovascular disease (Ross, 2007). Farmer's markets and community gardens can serve as avenues to increase a community's access to healthy and affordable food. Either or both can be easily constructed and do not adhere to strict land use requirements; they can be tailored to the needs and desires of the community.

RECOMMENDATIONS: Overall, the Advisory Committee recommends creating the potential park, trails, and green space in a way that increases access to healthy foods in order to decrease rates of overweight and obesity and help control chronic disease for the residents of Greenville's west side. A consideration for the potential park related to access to healthy food is:

FOOD ACCESS RECOMMENDATION

Key Factor in Promoting Access to Healthy Food[5]	Advisory Committee Implementation Suggestions
Provide access to healthy and affordable food sources	Consider including a community garden and/or farmer's market in the potential park (possibly in rehabilitated warehouse space) or a mobile food truck that could provide fresh produce to the community.

[5] The factor in promoting food access listed in this table is demonstrated by research to be beneficial in increasing food access. For references please refer to the full report available at www.imph.org.

The Advisory Committee also made recommendations related to promoting individual and community safety and maintaining and improving air and water quality.

INDIVIDUAL AND COMMUNITY SAFETY *(Priority B)*

Summary of findings: Studies show that an individual's fear of crime can be associated with increased stress and a lack of physical activity (Ross, 2007). Research finds that women (27.5 percent) and men (25.2 percent) from low-income areas considered safety issues a barrier to physical activity (Ross, 2007). Access to parks and recreational facilities can reduce crime, and safer neighborhoods encourage more physical activity (Sherer, 2006).

RECOMMENDATIONS: The Advisory Committee recommends the creation of the potential park, trails, and green space in a way that promotes individual and community safety in order to maximize use of these potential resources. Considerations for the potential park related to promoting individual and community safety are:

INDIVIDUAL AND COMMUNITY SAFETY RECOMMENDATIONS

Key Factors in Promoting Individual and Community Saftey[6]	Advisory Committee Implementation Suggestions
Provide opportunities to increase safety and the perception of safety to encourage utilization of the potential park, trails, and green space	• Adopt relevant Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles in and near the potential park and trails (including lighting, signage, and landscaping strategies). • Implement a maintenance plan once the potential park is built. • Plant trees rather than bushes to maintain visibility and line of sight. • Educate community members about personal safety through signage, newsletters, and neighborhood meetings.
Limit access to the river to decrease risk of drowning	• Design the area near the river to discourage people from entering the river (plants, signage, etc.). • Provide opportunities to observe the river from afar (for example, a bridge or benches near low-lying vegetation).
Provide opportunities for parking near the potential park that are away from pedestrians and cyclists	• Construct the parking lot for the potential park and nearby crosswalks in a way that motor vehicles are aware of pedestrians and cyclists (there should be no roads within the park, and engineering should be focused on the pedestrian and cyclist). • Post new, lower speed limits by the park.

[6] The considerations and factors in promoting individual and community safety listed in this table are demonstrated by research to be beneficial in increasing individual and community safety. For references please refer to the full report available at www.imph.org.

AIR AND WATER QUALITY *(Priority B)*

Summary of findings: The vacant buildings in and around the space being examined for a potential park, trails, or green space may need to be removed. This could temporarily increase the potential for particulate matter, which could increase the risk of asthma, bronchitis, and lung disease. Demolition can also increase the amount of loose soil, which can lead to an increase in water run off and decrease in the quality of the water.

RECOMMENDATIONS: The Advisory Committee recommends that the potential park, trails, and green space be constructed in a way that maintains or improves air and water quality. Considerations for the potential park related to maintaining or improving air and water quality are:

AIR AND WATER QUALITY RECOMMENDATIONS

Key Factors in Improving and Maintaining Air and Water Quality[7]	Advisory Committee Implementation Suggestions
Provide opportunities to maintain air and water quality during construction	• Develop a mitigation plan for temporary increases in particulate matter during construction (contractors should be asked to do this as part of the bidding process).
Improve air and water quality in the long term	• Design the potential park and trails to minimize the increase in loose soil and implement mitigation strategies for runoff. • Keep existing trees and plant new trees in the potential park. • Utilize plants that are indigenous and do not require fertilizer. • Add a bus stop near the potential park so that people can utilize public transportation to get to the park.

For the full report, please visit the Publications page at www.imph.org.

[7] The considerations and factors in improving and maintaining air and water quality listed in this table are demonstrated by research to be beneficial in improving and maintaining air and water quality. For references please refer to the full report available at www.imph.org.

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South Carolina Institute of
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