

# Healthy Environments Partnership (HEP)

## FOCUS GROUP SUMMARIES

June 2006



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[www.hepdetroit.org](http://www.hepdetroit.org)

## What is HEP?

The Healthy Environments Partnership (HEP) <http://www.hepdetroit.org/> has been working together since 2000 to understand how the environment affects risk of heart disease and obesity. HEP is a project of the Detroit Community-Academic Urban Research Center. The partners involved in HEP include: Brightmoor Community Center, Friends of Parkside, Detroit Department of Health and Wellness Promotion, Detroit Hispanic Development Corporation, Henry Ford Health System (AIM HI), Rebuilding Communities Inc., Southwest Solutions, University of Michigan Schools of Public Health, Architecture and Urban Planning, and the Institute for Social Research.

## What was the purpose of the focus groups, and who participated?

In January and February 2006 the Healthy Environments Partnership conducted a series of eight focus group discussions with Detroit residents. The purpose of the focus groups was to better understand ways that neighborhoods can impact physical activity, the foods eaten by community residents, and other factors associated with risk for heart disease. Two focus groups were conducted on eastside Detroit, two in northwest Detroit, and four in southwest Detroit (two of the southwest focus groups were conducted in English and two in Spanish). Each of the focus groups was approximately one and a half hours in duration and had between 6 and 12 participants. The racial and ethnic composition of the focus groups was reflective of the Detroit communities involved.

Participants in these focus groups were asked to discuss the places that community residents use for various kinds of physical activities in and around their neighborhoods, and the kinds of food people have available to them in their neighborhoods. They were asked in particular about their thoughts on new paved trails or pathways that are being developed in several Detroit neighborhoods to provide new spaces for physical activity among neighborhood residents.

## What did Detroit residents have to say about physical activity in their neighborhoods?

Following is a summary of major themes from the focus groups. In most cases, key points are summarized as bullet points. Quotes from focus group participants are included in some instances, indicated by "quotation" marks and *italicized* text.

## *What kinds of physical activities do people in your neighborhood do outdoors?*

### **Walking or jogging**

- Walking children to school
- Walking dogs
- Mostly children walking, not adults  
*"I go to the mall and walk. I used to walk in my neighborhood but there are too many dogs. I would love to (be able to) walk in my neighborhood."*

### **Gardening or landscaping**

- Shovel snow, cut grass, take out the garbage
- Help neighbors-rake leaves. *"There are lots of seniors- we help neighbors that are closed in."*

### **Sports**

- Biking
- Basketball
- Tennis
- Soccer *"You see more soccer because people enjoy it and it distracts them from the routine of work."*
- Football
- Ice skating



## *What kinds of things can discourage residents from physical activity in the neighborhood, or from using parks, pathways or other recreational facilities?*

### **Lack of safety or security**

- Insufficient lighting
- Stray or loose dogs
- Dangerous areas  
*"I will not let my kids go to the parks near the trail.", "The wooded areas are dangerous. Why take the risk if you don't have to?", "People just don't feel secure enough to go out."*
- Unable to rely on police for safety: not present, too slow to respond, not available

### **Poor condition**

- Deteriorated sidewalks

### **Lack of cleanliness**

- Places that are not clean: trash
- Stray or loose dogs *"Animals cannot come and relieve themselves on the path."*
- Toxic water/industrial waste of the river makes it too dangerous to send children there to play.  
*"Sometimes there can be smell too, but it's a lot better than 10 years ago."*

### **Lack of facilities**

- Closing of local recreation centers
- No equipment: Youth play basketball and football in the street parks don't have swings, just chains
- Parks are too far away, no transportation

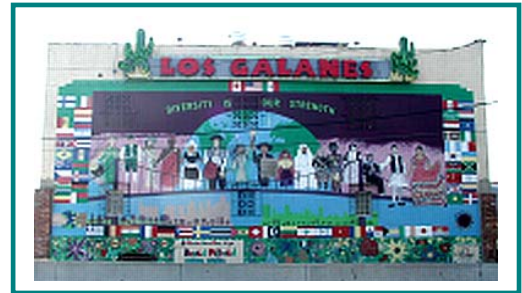
### **Traffic**

*"So much traffic- cars driving up and down the streets real fast. Especially in the summer..."*

## *What kinds of things might encourage people to walk or do other activities in the neighborhood, or to make use of new paved trails?*

### **Safety and security**

- Good lighting
- *"I think security has a lot to do with our physical activity in the neighborhood."*
- *"Definitely better to use parks and recreation centers during the day and in groups."*
- Police on bikes patrolling up and down
- Responsible citizens to do citizen's patrols
- Emergency phones
- Make it open and secure
- Immigrants need to feel safe  
*"They don't want to walk outside- they're afraid the border patrol will pick them up. They feel vulnerable."*
- Control dogs on leashes; no stray dogs on trails.
- Have a bike path separate from a walking path (for safety)
- Less traffic



### **Activities**

- Activities for youth and general population
- Supervision of children's activities
- Events, like AIDS walks, marathons
- Consider zoning the areas around the paths for licensed vendors & other businesses
- Entertainment – music, dancing

### **Equipment and facilities**

- Equipment, like monkey bars, swing sets, basketball rims, teeter totters
- Graffiti wall for youth to draw on
- Restrooms, water fountains, benches, sitting areas
- Smooth concrete, well maintained pathway

### **Local involvement/ place to bring people together**

- Let the youth decorate the pathway
- Have a contest to name the pathway
- More people present *"If I saw more people walking I would be more involved."*
- *"We have more segregation and polarization... (the pathways will) bring people together. That's powerful!"*

### **Clean & Attractive**

- Clean, maintained parks
- Pleasant flowers, nice sidewalks
- Clean, trash cans emptied
- Pick up dog droppings



### **Awareness/ promotion**

- Mailings of local activities
- Leaflets about programs
- *"Notify people that the greenway is coming and that they need to help us keep it up."*

### **Accessible**

- The trails or parks should be easy to get to
- More trails all over the neighborhood; having the pathway connect to other areas of the city is a good idea.

## *What would make it easier for neighborhood residents to eat a healthy diet?*

### **Information/education**

- Nutrition classes in every language
- Cartoon pamphlets/comic strips to promote healthy eating
- Childcare available at places that provide nutrition education
- Bring parents to the schools to teach how to prepare healthy foods
- WIC, recreation centers, stores and schools can provide resources for eating healthy foods

### **Demonstrations**

- Food demonstrations and tasting with recipes and healthy food samples
- Train the workers in the stores how to prepare foods in a healthy way

### **Local stores that carry good quality foods**

- More fresh food at neighborhood markets; more variety at reasonable prices
- Better quality food in shops
- Grocery stores that are easy to get to *“(We need) a supermarket honey. Someplace other than the corner store where they charge you 10 times what it costs anywhere else.”*, *“In my community, there is no grocery store. Can’t eat right if there’s not good produce-easier to get a box of mac and cheese.”*
- Reasonably priced health food store in walking distance

### **Eat in places that are healthier**

- *“Tell the fast food places to serve healthier food”*
- Eat at fast food places less often
- Eat at home more often

### **Grow foods locally**

- Start a community garden in the neighborhood
- *“Partner with urban gardening organizations in the city – put community gardens in pathways - that’s building community.”*
- Offer tax breaks for having a vegetable garden
- Start small vegetable gardens at home
- Involve children
- *“When children participate and see how things are growing, it can encourage them to consume (vegetables).”*



## *How will this information be used?*

The information will be used in HEP’s work with community-based organizations, community residents and others to identify changes in the built environment (e.g., trails, pathways, parks, etc.) that encourage residents to be more physically active and to develop other community level strategies to improve heart health for residents in eastside, northwest, and southwest Detroit.