About the Built Environment

Q: When people refer to the built environment, what are they talking about?
A: In technical terms, most people refer to the built environment as everything around us that is man-made (versus natural environment). Every day, we see things being built around us. Some things we like and others we don’t.

Q: What does the built environment include?
A: Positive examples of built environments can include walking trails, greenways, baseball and soccer fields, outdoor exercise facilities, public parks, street lights, designated bike lanes, community gardens, safe crosswalks at busy intersections, and maintained sidewalk systems that encourage walking, exercise, connectivity and social interaction.

It is also important to note that sometimes improving the built environment is achieved by “not building” something. For example, stopping the addition of more lanes to major highways that increases car traffic and promotes sprawl can be seen as examples of positive built environment initiatives.

Q: What does it mean to improve our built environment?
A: Improving our built environment is not just about designing new things like trails, greenways and parks. These are a means to return to a better way of life — and connecting to a very distinct way of life for North Carolinians. It’s how we’re connected to our family, friends, neighbors, church members, work, schools and the great outdoors that is North Carolina. These are things that are good for our health — from being around the people and places we love to being active and doing the things that get our hearts pumping. It’s less about what our communities look like and more about what we are able to do in them: how we get together with members of our faith communities, how we talk to our neighbors in the evenings, how we pass the time with our families on the weekends, how we take our children to school and playgrounds, and how we travel to work day in and day out. These are all part of our built environment. And we have the opportunity to shape it.

Q: What is Active Transportation?
A: “Active transportation” is any form of transportation that helps us be physically active while getting from one place to another. It generally includes walking, bicycling and using public transportation.

Q: What is a Complete Street?
A: According to the definition from the National Complete Streets Coalition, a “complete street” is one that is safe for all users, specifically pedestrians, bicyclists, transit riders, people with disabilities, older adults, children, automobiles, trucks and other commercial vehicles. Complete streets typically feature sidewalks, wide lanes for bicyclists, curb ramps, crosswalks, prominent crossing signals at intersections and road designs that encourage slower motor vehicle speeds.
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q: What are some of the benefits to a healthy built environment?
A: Towns and cities across North Carolina have been planning and implementing improvements to their built environment and are seeing benefits:
  • Greater health benefits for the community
  • More opportunities for active transportation
  • Less traffic congestion
  • Less pollution
  • Increased property values
  • More attractive and safer areas to engage in physical activity
  • Greater business opportunities
  • A greater sense of community
  • Tourism opportunities

Q: Why can’t we use our local school’s playgrounds and fields when school is not in session?
A: It can be frustrating to have recreational facilities close by but not have access to them. While many schools have gymnasiums, athletic fields and tracks, a lot of them are hesitant to make them available to the larger community. Some are concerned about liability issues, while others are concerned with cost, staffing and upkeep. There are resources to help you address this though. Joint Use Agreements can help open doors and create a collaborative win-win relationship between schools and your community.

About the Campaign

Q: What is the Shape Your World Campaign?
A: Shape Your World is a statewide movement of North Carolinians who are committed to creating a safer, healthier and more connected built environment in their communities. Our campaign mobilizes people across the state to get more involved by asking all North Carolinians, from small towns like Ahoskie to larger cities like Charlotte, to:
  • SEE the world around them in a new way;
  • CONNECT with the issue personally; and
  • ACT to shape a better, built environment.

Q: What do you expect to happen as a result of the Shape Your World Campaign?
A: We hope to inspire a statewide movement among North Carolinians by encouraging people to get involved and make a difference in our communities by developing healthier built environments. Over time, we hope the local efforts lead to policy shifts at the state level.

Q: How long is the campaign expected to last?
A: The campaign is funded through 2011. It is our expectation that Shape Your World will run much longer as we explore public and private partnerships to ensure its sustainability. Most importantly, Shape Your World is created to empower citizens to take ownership and be the leaders of this movement in the years ahead.

Q: Who is the campaign trying to reach?
A: North Carolinians who want to be involved in making our environments safer, healthier and more connected over the long haul. People who care deeply about and are engaged in their communities. They believe strongly enough that they can make a difference and that are willing to write a letter to the editor, attend a planning commission meeting, vote, or even just forward a blog post about important issues.
Q: How will this campaign improve the lives of North Carolinians?
A: What we build reflects what we value. As citizens, when we stand up and have our voice heard it can mean safer places for our kids to play, more opportunities for us to bike or walk from place to place, and more attractive towns for our businesses to prosper. Most importantly it means making it easier for us to connect to those people, activities and places that make living in North Carolina so special.

Q: How will this campaign change North Carolina?
A: It will make residents of the state healthier. It will allow residents to connect more easily to each other because their communities will be designed in a way that makes those connections more accessible. Ultimately, North Carolinians will become more active because we will have more opportunities and options to do so.

Q: How will this campaign help me change my neighborhood? My town?
A: Shape Your World is here to provide the inspiration, connections and tools for you to take a more active role in your community.

Q: When and where can I expect to see the campaign?
A: An interactive and comprehensive website, www.ShapeYourWorldNC.com, will share campaign information with citizens, media and policy makers, and provide them with the tools and resources to start shaping their worlds. Print ads will appear primarily in local newspapers, but the campaign will also be featured in North Carolina issues of major national magazines, such as Newsweek, Sports Illustrated and Time. There will also be an online advertising component, with ads and interactive features appearing on a wide variety of news and lifestyle websites. Outside of these realms, Shape Your World will be promoted at several events throughout North Carolina. Visit the Connect section of www.ShapeYourWorldNC.com for details.

Getting Involved

Q: How can I get involved?
A: Asking the question is the first big step. Shape Your World is designed as a movement for citizens of North Carolina to have a voice in how their communities are developed. When you visit www.ShapeYourWorldNC.com you will find a variety of tools and resources that make getting involved easier. If you want to see what changes in the built environment mean, we’ll point you to success stories around the state; if you want to write a letter to the editor, we’ll give you examples; and if you want to attend a planning board meeting, we’ll show you how to find one. These are just a few ideas. There are many ways to get involved.

Q: Why should citizens get involved? What are they expected to do as a result of the campaign?
A: Playgrounds, bike paths and sidewalks don’t build themselves. If we want our communities to be safer, healthier and more connected, we need to take action. We want North Carolinians to:

- SEE the world around them in a new way. We want everyone to stop and think about how our communities are designed and to realize that we have a voice in how they get built, developed or changed.
- CONNECT with the issue personally. The benefits of a better built environment are many. It means a safer community for our kids, a healthier lifestyle for our families and closer relationships with the people and places we care about.
- ACT to shape a better, built environment in their communities. Every citizen has a voice and a stake in this issue. By speaking up at a local planning board meeting, starting or signing a petition, writing a letter to the editor or local policy makers, we can make sure that our voices are heard.
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q: Who would I contact if we need sidewalks or bike lanes in my town?
A: Many communities have volunteer pedestrian and bicycle advisory committees whose role is to advise local elected officials about active transportation. These groups are often involved in transportation planning and priority-setting. Your town/city planning department (or town manager in smaller communities) can connect you with any related advisory committees. In North Carolina, only municipalities and the NC Department of Transportation build and maintain roads, so reaching out to your town’s planning staff or manager about the transportation planning process is a good first step.

Q: My town doesn’t have funding to make improvements. Are there places I could look to find funding to help us out?
A: There are a number of local, state, federal and private funders who support the planning, construction, right of way acquisition and maintenance of bicycle and pedestrian facilities. Here are just a few.
• Blue Cross Blue Shield Foundation
• Clean Water Management Trust Fund
• NC Department of Transportation
• NC Health and Wellness Trust Fund
• Parks and Recreation Trust Fund
• Small Cities Community Development Block Grants

Our Partners

Q: Who is behind this effort?
A: Shape Your World is the product of years of work by numerous partnerships and coalitions across North Carolina including: the Healthy Environments Collaborative, which includes the NC Departments of Transportation, Commerce, Environment and Natural Resources, and Health and Human Services, UNC-Chapel Hill School of Government; Eat Smart, Move More North Carolina; UNC Gillings School of Global Public Health; multiple local municipalities; Active Living by Design; Lights, Camera, Active!; and the North Carolina Cooperative Extension.

Q: Are political parties involved? Or politics?
A: No. While this issue does involve policy change, especially at the local level, having healthy, connected communities is something all political parties can support. We want policy makers to take a critical look at the issues involved because this will involve policy change.

Q: Where does my state representative or senator stand on this issue?
A: Visit www.ncga.state.nc.us/GIS/RandR07/Representation.html and search for your state representative or senator. You can search for him or her by zip code, voter registration, county and district. Once you’ve identified your representative or senator and have their contact information, contact their office to find out where they stand on the issue.

Our Funding

Q: How is the campaign being funded?
A: The North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services received start-up funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, by way of a $3 million federal American Recovery and Reinvestment Act grant. Of that grant, approximately $1 million is being spent to develop, implement and evaluate Shape Your World. Future funding for Shape Your World will come from public and private partnerships. Better built environments lead to better health, safer neighborhoods and stronger communities.
Q: Are taxpayers’ dollars being used to fund this campaign? If so, what makes this a good use of these resources during these difficult times?
A: Yes, our taxpayer dollars are being used to fund this campaign. But for a cost of 30 cents per North Carolina resident, we are giving all North Carolinians the tools necessary to have greater influence in how their communities are being built. This can lead to better health, safer neighborhoods and stronger communities for all of us.

Q: How will the success of the campaign be measured?
A: We want to be accountable to the resources that are being put into this campaign. As a result, we’re building metrics into every aspect of our efforts so we can know what’s working and why, and what’s not and how we can improve it. But the ultimate measure of success will be if people have been inspired to get involved and take action. Is a woman in Cary attending her first planning board meeting? Are residents in Raleigh coming together to get bike lanes built? Can parents in Winston-Salem point to a playground and know that their kids can play there because they made it possible? This is what success will feel like.