

Chapter 19:

Building Healthy Places with People and for People: Community Engagement for Healthy and Sustainable Communities

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IF YOU WANT TO BUILD A SHIP, DON'T DRUM UP PEOPLE TO COLLECT WOOD
AND DON'T ASSIGN THEM TASKS AND WORK, BUT RATHER TEACH THEM TO LONG
FOR THE ENDLESS IMMENSITY OF THE SEA.

Antoine de Saint-Exupery, French Novelist

I. KEY POINTS

- ▶ Community engagement is a critical element of successful efforts to improve the built environment because it:
 - ensures that the needs and concerns of community residents are adequately understood and incorporated into projects/plans
 - builds local capacity (of residents, government and organizations) to develop shared solutions; ongoing community cohesion and social capital
 - provides an opportunity to build stronger partnerships among residents, business owners/operators, public agencies, etc.
 - can result in a stronger, better outcome for built environment efforts
- ▶ Improvements to the built environment can facilitate social connections and increase opportunities for social interaction, leading to greater community ownership, deepening opportunities for engagement and instilling a sense of pride for physical improvements.
- ▶ A range of mechanisms can be employed to engage community residents and/or representatives of the community; the technique must fit the purpose.
- ▶ Disenfranchised communities must have a genuine voice in the planning and implementation of projects. Community engagement provides a mechanism for cultivating this voice and maximizing the likelihood that the outcome reflects its input.

II. LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- ▶ Define community engagement and understand the various ways it can happen
- ▶ Describe why community engagement is important to creating healthier built environments
- ▶ Understand how to facilitate successful community engagement to build healthy communities

III. INTRODUCTION



Over a 25 year period, residents of the El Sereno community in Los Angeles have opposed efforts of investors seeking to build luxury homes on the area known as Elephant Hill. After years of community organizing—canvassing door to door, developing a broad-based coalition and mobilizing supporters to attend public hearings—residents declared victory after the City Council agreed to settle a lawsuit with the developers by buying the 20-acre site for \$6 million to

create a future park. Residents are glad that a chunk of one of Los Angeles' last undeveloped hillsides will remain open space in this park poor, working-class Latino community. Opposition efforts reignited in 2004 not only to preserve open space, but also to encourage public safety and counter threats to gentrification. Elva Yañez, the El Sereno resident who led the most recent efforts to preserve Elephant Hill, hailed the settlement as a victory for environmental justice: "After a long and hard fought struggle, the residents of this community have been afforded the environmental protections that are rightfully theirs. We are pleased that this poorly planned project is not moving forward and environmental justice has prevailed." [Contreras & Sanchez, 2009; Yañez, personal communication, 2010]

Organized, engaged community members, like the El Sereno residents described above, have the potential to create healthy and sustainable built environments. Direct organizing, public education, policy advocacy, and litigation are among a wide range of tactics stakeholders can employ. Community engagement can positively influence how streets are designed, where retail outlets are located, what services and products are available, how dense new developments will be and to what extent infrastructure, such as affordable housing, parks or public transit, will be available and accessible to residents.

Community engagement is an effective mechanism for creating lasting health improvements and an essential ingredient for those working to create healthy and sustainable communities [Minkler & Wallerstein, 2005; Fawcett & Roussos, 2000]. It is the basis for a healthy democracy, in which all people have a meaningful voice in shaping the places where they live, work, play and learn. This

chapter seeks to lay out the basics of community engagement as it relates to the built environment, explore when and why community engagement should be used, and provide useful tools to support community engagement efforts with the goal of creating healthy, sustainable and equitable built environments.

Despite the positive influence that community residents can have on the nature and impact of projects in the built environment, land-use and transportation decisions have not always been developed considering the needs and expectations of community members. Gentrification, displacement of jobs, and environmental injustice are among the community ills that result when the input of community residents is neglected—whether purposefully or unwittingly. Policymakers and practitioners have responsibility to solicit and incorporate community input in their transportation, land use and design efforts.

IV. WHAT IS COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT?

A simple definition of **community engagement** is when all people within a defined community have meaningful opportunities to provide input on a project or process. In terms of the built environment, community engagement enlists the perspectives, talents, and skills of members of one or more communities to articulate their needs, concerns, visions and expectations in ways that result in better, healthier outcomes and more livable environments for residents. Recognizing community engagement as a pillar of effective public health action, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s Committee on Community Engagement defined community engagement as “the process of working collaboratively with and through groups of people affiliated by geographic proximity, special interest, or similar situations to address issues affecting the well-being of those people,” concluding that: “It is a powerful vehicle for bringing about environmental and behavioral changes that will improve the health of the community and its members” [CDC Public Health Practice Program Office, 1997].

Engagement can happen in many ways: through quasi governmental entities such as volunteer planning commissions; non-governmental organizations such as community health councils; and community-led processes such as door-to-door surveys. Through engagement, stakeholders

learn information, provide valuable input and data, offer solutions, question assumptions, and communicate with neighbors. Although not fully addressed here, related concepts of community organizing and empowerment, as reflected in the opening El Sereno example, are vital, long term strategies that can strengthen community cohesion and support community social networks, therefore building social capital [Prevention Institute, 2003]. Community cohesion and social capital are valuable indicators of health and quality of life. Effective organizing often entails stakeholder training and capacity building that then leads to collective action to undo environmental injustices, promote a shared vision of the community and/or establish context-sensitive planning solutions. At its strongest, community engagement begins by building relationships early in planning processes, providing consistent opportunities for community input, offering ongoing mechanisms for decision-making by community participants and demonstrating tangible ways in which community input influences outcomes. While important, one-way delivery of information, such as a presentation of a specific plan, should not be mistaken for community engagement. Depending on the purpose of the project, its duration and available resources, community engagement will look different from place to place and project to project, but in general all community engagement shares the goal that public participation will

TABLE 1. Examples of community engagement mechanisms relevant to the built environment

Government/ Quasi-Governmental	Non Governmental/Community- Based Organizations	Community-Based/Resident
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning Commission • Zoning Board • City Youth Commission • Government sponsored resident groups (e.g. Neighborhood Councils) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotores (Community Health Workers) • Church groups • Youth Councils • Leadership Team (E.g. environmental / health leadership teams) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Meetings • Stakeholder Groups • Focus Groups • Community Key Informants

help to shape the results of a plan or project in ways that improve its utility or worth to the affected community. Community engagement around built environment concerns and issues can utilize formal structures or ad-hoc groups to seek involvement (Table 1). Such collaboration, when done mindfully, will ensure that health improvement efforts are viable and sustainable, as they fully integrate the needs and concerns of the community into both the process and solutions [Minkler & Wallerstein, 2005]

V. HONEST AND EFFECTIVE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IS CRITICAL

Community residents are sensitive to false attempts at engagement. Researchers promising to bring data have failed to deliver and developers have held public meetings just to say they have sought input despite project approvals being imminent. For these reasons, community engagement should be done with great care. If done poorly, it can undermine future efforts at community involvement and diminish the credibility of

those leading the effort. If most of the decisions are already made, or there are not meaningful opportunities for input, it is better not to waste people's time. Insincere engagement is destined to bring about a negative response. Rather than have a chance to contribute their ideas, community members are solely put in the position of opposing things that they do not want to see in their communities. Thus, such process is inherently rooted in conflict, and is not conducive for the formation of authentic community engagement.

Community engagement can be challenging. Anyone who has ever tried to bring a group of people together to weigh in on an issue, share ideas or build consensus knows that processes for engagement can be time consuming, at best—and downright frustrating, at worst. It is critical to make a clear assessment of what the organization is trying to accomplish and why and how community input is needed. Each successful community engagement effort requires time, resources, commitment, honesty, and skill.

Community Engagement Considerations

- ▶ Am I aware of how my agency/ department is currently perceived within different sectors of the community?
- ▶ Am I aware of past similar projects in the community? Were they overall positive or negative experiences for the community?
- ▶ Do I have relationships with key community based organizations that have earned trust of community members?
- ▶ Does my project have the resources to appropriately engage community members in culturally relevant ways?
 - Racial and Ethnic and Cultural Diversity
 - Different Abilities (People with Disabilities)
 - Age Ranges (Youth and Seniors)
- ▶ Does my project have a mechanism to include community-based data in the planning? Do the relevant funders/ partners understand that we seek community-based data that is just as important and relevant as the scientific data of the traffic engineers, planners and others?
- ▶ Does the project include an information feedback-loop that is linguistically and culturally appropriate so that the community can learn exactly how their voices were heard and included into the plans / projects?

VI. WHO GETS ENGAGED? AND HOW?

“NEVER DOUBT THAT A SMALL GROUP OF THOUGHTFUL, COMMITTED PEOPLE CAN CHANGE THE WORLD. INDEED, IT IS THE ONLY THING THAT EVER HAS.”

-Margaret Mead

Once it is agreed that community engagement is important to achieving goals, the project managers and community representatives must next define who to engage and the specific terms of engagement. How long? At what frequency? For what purpose (e.g. to build capacity, to foster community trust), by which processes (e.g. through focus groups, community mapping), and with what outcomes in mind? There are different levels of engagement and any effort must meet people where they are given that the aim is legitimate representation.

Community engagement, in today's built environment context, is rooted in a long history of community involvement in local decision-making processes. While this engagement is key

to our history, research tells us that community engagement has often been a contentious process. Some communities have a history of being empowered and having political and social clout to get their needs met, while others have mixed histories of disengagement and a lack of resources and/or respect from local leaders. The engagement of some communities can come at the expense of other less engaged—or less powerful—communities. The expression NIMBY (Not In My Back Yard) refers to the attitude held by some more empowered communities who insist that ‘undesirable sites’ go to ‘others backyards,’ resulting in the establishment of toxic waste sites, halfway houses and other less desirable facilities in disenfranchised communities.

Even for those individuals empowered to engage, participation may not come naturally. For example, in early New England towns, despite popular folklore of strong civic culture where citizens willingly engaged in public policy debate and decisions, the community members in several towns were levied fines if they did not attend

Engaging Communities Through Trusted Organizations

Case Example 1: Latino Health Access, Santa Ana, CA

Latino Health Access (LHA), a community based health organization renowned for its use of the promotora model of community development, has been at the forefront of community engagement in the built environment, namely, the struggle to increase open space in their city. Here, a small group of community residents were concerned that their children did not have sufficient, safe open spaces for play. The mothers approached the agency's Executive Director, Dr. America Bracho in 2003. They shared their concerns for open space with her based on the trust that agency had developed while working in the community since the mid-1990s. What was unique about the LHA approach—that makes it a model for sustainable community engagement—is what Dr. Bracho did next: she hired them. The women began first as volunteers with the agency, integrating into the agency's norms and community-based approach. Over time, they were trained in the promotora model of health promotion—neighbors helping neighbors. By the late 2000's, two of these concerned mothers were full-time paid staff at LHA. This case was highlighted in a 2009 PBS Special with Bill Moyers in which Dr. Bracho and one of the mothers-turned-staff, Irma, were featured for their work in trying to secure a community pocket-park for a park-poor neighborhood in Santa Ana. Another key item to consider comes to us from political science theory; this is the notion that ‘bureaucracies deal best with other bureaucracies,’ not necessarily with individuals. This is critical to note because it is part of the success of the LHA model. LHA is a community-based institution. It has the trust of the community and the public officials, and, most importantly, can be accountable to both. As a result of this organization—and thousands of community based agencies like it nationwide—community residents have a clear “in” that enables them to use LHA as a vehicle to engage with other bureaucracies (e.g. school district, redevelopment agency) in built environment decisions.

town meetings [Dow, 1893; Zimmerman, 1999]. Moreover, today, scholars note declining citizen engagement in advanced industrial democracies overall [Putnam, 2001; Wattenberg, Martin & Dalton, Russell (eds), 2002]. Meaningful community engagement in built environment decisions is complicated; it is not simply a matter of rallying individuals to congregate for the pursuit of a common good.

Community residents, particularly in disenfranchised communities, may have numerous reasons to resist community engagement efforts. They may have memories of inadequate community engagement efforts that undermined their trust; they may lack

confidence in government or others seen as ‘officials’ or ‘outsiders;’ they may feel undervalued or unwelcomed in engagement processes because of language or other barriers to full participation. Moreover, they may be too busy to participate because of work or other life demands. For these and other reasons, trusted institutions matter to successful community engagement efforts (See Text Box: Santa Ana).

The Margaret Mead quotation that opens this section is particularly salient to working in historically low-income or disenfranchised communities. Civic engagement has been on the decline across all income levels, and barriers are even greater in communities where basic

TABLE 2. Sample Types of Engagement Activities by Primary Purpose of Activity

Activity	Purpose of Engagement Activity				
	Data collection & assessments of built environment (know-ledge, perceptions)	Data collection & assessment of social/cultural environment	Capacity building	Foster partnership & trust with community	Long term maintenance and organizing
Interviews with community	X	X			
Focus groups	X	X			
Community forums	X	X		X	
Testimony at public meeting and hearings			X		X
Walkability assessments, corner-store assessments, park audits	X	X	X		
Community Mapping	X		X		
Ongoing meetings			X	X	X
Charrettes (collaborative sessions with key stakeholders to promote shared ownership over solutions)	X	X			
Virtual networks			X	X	X
Photo-voice	X	X	X		
Community based participatory research	X	X	X	X	X
Resident participation on commissions, boards, councils			X	X	X
Fund positions within organization (e.g. Promotores)			X	X	X
Build/Nurture Coalitions and Networks			X	X	X

employment, health and family needs are an ongoing struggle. In these communities, a small number of committed people are crucial. Often people seeking engagement may feel they need large numbers of community folks to ‘show’ at events, but this can be hollow. Meaningful cultivation of key people that know the community is often more useful in the long run. Community engagement processes should not be stalled by trying to reach a large quantity of participants, but instead should welcome the quality of fewer participants that can do the work. There are several key ways to gain insights from the broader community: resident groups, community based organizations and coalitions, paid or volunteer community workers (promotores), neighborhood associations and others.

Different mechanisms for community engagement will work in different communities. The techniques used depend upon the purpose, timeframe, resources and goals; there is not a single effective model that will work in every case. The community engagement literature reveals a diversity of tactics for enlisting participation. Table 2 provides several types of engagement activities and the purposes to which they are most well-suited.

VII. DOES COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT MATTER TO BUILDING HEALTHY PLACES?

Decisions about land use, transportation, zoning and community design not only influence population-level exposure to toxins, but they also influence the degree to which health-promoting resources—such as safe parks and open space, healthy food options, and public transit—are available to community residents. At the same time, a diverse literature from sociology, planning, public health and psychology suggests the important role of community engagement in shaping the built environment, maintaining safe communities and improving quality of community life, as well as fostering community trust. Emerging research suggests a link between community design, real and perceived violence, and healthy food access and safe spaces for physical activity [Cohen, Davis, Lee & Valdovinos, 2010]. When people do not feel safe, they are less likely to visit neighborhood parks or let their children walk to school. Community engagement not only reshapes the physical aspects of a community, but also alters the social landscape by creating strong bonds among community members, thus potentially contributing to an increase in healthy eating and active living. For these reasons, community engagement is vital to the viability and longevity of efforts to build healthy places.

What is Photo-voice?

Photo-voice is a community engagement activity which uses photography to empower residents in expressing their views and opinions. Residents, including youth, take pictures of their neighborhoods. Through both the process and outcomes of this digital story-telling, community members develop a narrative of their physical and social environments. Photo-voice is a method to foster connections with residents while simultaneously highlighting community perspectives, which can be presented to policy-makers as visual data of the physical and social realities of the neighborhood’s environment.

Professionals working to create healthy and sustainable communities will derive value from community engagement because:

- It builds broad and diverse participation in efforts to make community improvements
- It provides a mechanism for collecting community-based data to complement traditional sources of data
- It marshals one of a community's greatest assets—the people—to create healthy environments
- It engages community members in the innovation required to tailor solutions to local communities
- It enlists participation from community stakeholders who can be determined and persistent in pursuit of positive improvements
- It is a core piece of cross-sector collaboration and can open the door for other sectors, like public health, which increasingly understands the role that the built environment plays in shaping health
- It acknowledges that built environment changes, while necessary, are not sufficient for improving community conditions
- It forms the social connections required to protect, maintain and further improve community environments
- It decreases the likelihood of projects being derailed because of lack of early participation
- It increases the potential that a project will be context sensitive and embraced by the community
- In sum, it makes the project better and the community better

The Importance of Engagement to preserve natural habitat in rural environments

Case Example: Teton Valley, Idaho

Teton Valley Trails and Pathways (TVTAP) represents 500 active residents working to shape Teton Valley, Idaho (just west of the Grand Tetons) in order to preserve the available physical activity opportunities. TVTAP members are concerned that without policy controls, new development efforts could encroach on natural resources and reduce opportunities for residents to be physically active. The Valley is experiencing an influx of young families and visitors who create a demand for recreational facilities such as bike paths and bike lanes. TVTAP recognizes a need to balance development concerns with environmental, economic, and social norms that have shaped the Valley for so long. TVTAP first came together out of an effort to add a bike lane to a busy highway in the Valley. Reminiscing on their initial success, Executive Director Tim Adams, says, "It all started with a small group of people realizing they could really make a difference." Now, TVTAP has expanded its work, taking on activity-friendly land use in and around the valley. The organization enlists community residents in advocacy by inviting residents to provide public comment on new development plans as they come up for review, and supporting members in consistently attend City Council meetings when new land use ordinances are being discussed. TVTAP also has an active Board that helps to facilitate community dialogue and action. Through their advocacy efforts, TVTAP members have learned to seize opportunities by infusing their voices into regional planning and development processes. They have found that bringing trails and pathways into planning discussions early on is critical. It is much easier to develop correctly the first time than to undo developments that have not considered the needs of bicyclists and pedestrians. One of TVTAP's most significant accomplishments was spearheading the passage of multiple city ordinances to require that all new development projects integrate with existing pathways or trail systems. Building on that work, they are now working to make the city ordinance a countywide mandate so that new developments throughout the county will support physical activity [Aboelata, Adler-McDonald, Ashley & Sims, 2004].

VIII. TOOLS TO SUPPORT COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT FOR HEALTHY & SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

Efforts to ensure healthy, equitable and sustainable improvements to the built environment can utilize a number of existing tools and policies to foster community engagement. A small sample of these tools and purposes is listed below. Each of these tools has been applied in diverse community settings across the US.

IX. COMMUNITIES OF TIME AND SPACE: WHY BUILT ENVIRONMENT EFFORTS MUST CONSIDER HISTORICAL CONTEXT TO MOVE FORWARD

Engaged residents may at times resist new efforts to modify the built environment. Airport and university expansion efforts, projects that utilize eminent domain authorities, and efforts to develop natural habitats are among those which can spark legitimate resistance among active and engaged

community residents. NIMBYism (Not in My Back Yard) refers to resistance from residents who reject changes to the built or natural environment which will have an impact on them—even if the changes are health-promoting. In Seattle, WA, for example, residents have contested Department of Transportation efforts to convert abandoned rail corridors into walking and biking paths. Residents fear that these changes will reduce their property values or increase transients near their homes. To counteract the NIMBY sentiment, [the Department] “brings testimonials from other people who’ve had trails built near them, show real-estate advertisements which routinely boast ‘proximity to trail’ and try to give presentations that will help people overcome their fears” [City of Seattle, WA Department of Transportation, 2010].

Contentious efforts may be one reason planners and developers have shied away from community engagement processes in the past—hoping to usher

Community Engagement for Building Social Capital



Case Example: Stamford, CT

An effort to redevelop a blighted section of the Mill River Parkway in Stamford, Connecticut exemplifies the importance of community engagement, trust, and resident capacity building. Intent on making the parkway more walkable and bikeable to encourage activity among residents and more accessible to commuters from midtown, the Mayor’s office joined with staff from the health and planning departments to identify promising improvements. Through a resident survey, they were surprised when they discovered that the Westside residents were wary, if not resistant, to government-led efforts to ‘improve’ their community. Longtime residents of the area had experienced “systematic removal under the auspices of urban renewal...worse than gentrification...knocking down homes, destroying communities and replacing them with corporate office towers, a large shopping mall and freeway off-ramps,” and were therefore skeptical about the impacts that proposed efforts would have on their homes and their lives. When a community survey revealed that residents did not prioritize physical improvements, but elevated issues of community leadership and capacity building, health and planning leaders had a difficult decision to make: should they go ahead with redeveloping the Mill River Parkway? Or should they honor community requests for leadership to spur greater physical activity in the area? Government leaders made the decision to stand behind the residents’ requests by establishing a community based committee and funding community capacity building. They established a second community-based committee that would provide input on physical changes to the parkway. According to the Health Director, one of the most important results was “the renewed sense of trust that has been fostered through this process.” [Aboelata M, et al. *Prevention Institute*, 2004]

TABLE 3. Selected Examples of Tools to Support Community Engagement in Built Environment Efforts

Tool	What is it?	Purpose
Community Benefit Agreements [Gross, LeRoy & Janis-Aparicio, 2005]	A legally enforceable agreement that allows community residents to engage in negotiations with developers to ensure specific concessions, contingencies or benefits accrue to the community in exchange for being able to develop in a community	Can assure more equitable development, local jobs, affordable housing, community open space or any other community needs result from the development
Affordable Housing Policies [US Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2010]	State or local policies that can provide affordable housing units—those which do not require residents to spend more than 30% of their annual income on housing provide assistance to low income people to rent, buy or fix their homes	To encourage mixed income housing and discourage displacement, gentrification or homelessness for middle and low income families
Land Trusts [PolicyLink, 2001]	In this context, an agreement in which one organization, such as a non-profit or a land conservancy maintains ownership of a piece of land to benefit the community	Fosters mixed-income communities and discourages displacement, gentrification or homelessness for middle and low income families
Inclusionary Zoning [HousingPolicy.org, 2010]	Make a certain percentage of housing units in new residential developments available to low- and moderate-income households. In return, developers receive non-monetary compensation in the form of density bonuses, zoning variances, and/or expedited permits that reduce construction costs [PolicyLink, 2001]	Fosters mixed-income communities and discourages displacement, gentrification or homelessness for middle and low income families
Resident-based Land Use, Transportation or Art Commissions [City of Minneapolis, MN, 2010; City of Seattle WA Department of Transportation, 2010]	Local law can define the composition and purpose of local commissions. They can provide input on street design, safety, aesthetics, accessibility and a wide range of planning and transportation projects	To enlist community participation to improve the quality of projects
Tool for Health and Resilience in Vulnerable Environments (THRIVE) [Prevention Institute, 2003]	An online tool comprised of 18 community factors related to health and safety, divided into four inter-related clusters of People, Place, Foundation of Opportunity and Health Services.	To provide a framework for community visioning and prioritizing of tangible actions at the community-level that can reduce inequities in land use and built environment decisions

plans and projects through without the time-consuming and laborious efforts often required to truly engage community stakeholders. However, community engagement is part of a comprehensive approach to planning, creating and maintaining healthy communities where residents can thrive. It should therefore not be skipped for expediency as communities carry with them the legacy of both positive and negative experiences over time.

As the Stamford example shows, altering community conditions, particularly in low-income communities of color where experiences—or memories—of displacement, gentrification and deterioration exist requires involvement and engagement by community residents. As noted in *A Time of Opportunity: Local Solutions to Eliminate Health Inequities*: “The process of inclusion and engaging communities in decision making is as important as the outcomes, which should directly meet the needs of the local population” [Cohen, Davis, Iton, Rodriguez, 2009, p.6].

Land-use and planning approaches to smart growth, transit-oriented development, inclusionary zoning and affordable housing are geared toward promoting health and environmental sustainability. Yet, in practice these strategies can be just as damaging to health and quality of life as the policies and practices of redlining and segregation that preceded them, if there are not systems in place to ensure community voice and participation. For example, if most of the families in an area cannot afford the so-called affordable housing, then the value of this policy is negated. Similarly, efforts to renew many urban communities are well-founded on a vision of eliminating sprawl and promoting walkability and bikeability. But without attention to involvement of the residents who live in our nation’s urban core, they will be displaced and disenfranchised by health-promoting improvements. Therefore planning and development projects that are truly interested in promoting health and equity must provide assurances to the community; they must

also deliver actual results to current community members, and not simply fuel gentrification. These outcomes can include tangible resources to communities, agreements about how their decisions will be respected and incorporated, community-based participatory research and requirements that plans, findings and information will be shared in transparent and timely ways.

X. CONCLUSION

Neither easy nor straightforward, community engagement is well worth the additional resources and effort. Once a project or plan to create healthy and sustainable communities is completed, it is community ownership that will contribute to the lasting success, ongoing maintenance, or evolution of a specific effort. Community engagement—often required by planning and development agencies and housing authorities—not only creates a foundation for sustaining improvements, but it also reinforces and *supports healthy democratic processes*. Effective projects must be rooted in communities and recognize the historical legacy of community experience so that improvements benefit the people who live there, rather than contributing to future cycles of displacement and gentrification. Community engagement is currently built into many development and planning processes that take place in the public sphere, and when successful, it should improve the process and the outcome of healthy community efforts. When done in a meaningful way, it can have far reaching impacts for the built environment and for community stakeholders.

Today’s striking inequities in health, safety and quality of life underscore the vital importance of being proactive in improving the built environment, particularly in low-income communities and communities of color, where issues such as safety, climate change and chronic disease are particularly challenging. It is in disenfranchised communities that community engagement can be a particularly salient strategy for building social capital and deepening the collective capacity for long-

term change. Community engagement in built environment efforts provides a necessary vehicle for mobilizing community stakeholders who can effectively translate and tailor strategies to work in their own communities. All professionals

working in communities have an obligation to strengthen collaborative efforts, as they are essential to community empowerment and self-determination—key ingredients for healthy, sustainable and equitable communities.

XI. DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Select a built environment project in your community. In what ways would community engagement help achieve better outcomes?
What are the challenges to successful community engagement and how can these be overcome?
2. In what way are the challenges and strategies different in disenfranchised communities than in empowered ones—and is it equally (or more) important to work in these communities?
3. What do the provided examples demonstrate about factors that contribute to successful community engagement projects? What lessons can be taken from these cases?
4. What are some strategies that can be used to ensure community engagement efforts are sustainable?
5. What policies, tools or strategies can be used to counteract potentially negative impacts of changes to the built environment?

GLOSSARY

Community Engagement: when all people within a defined community have meaningful opportunities to provide input on a project or process.

Gentrification: socio-cultural changes to a community, which stem from when higher-income people purchase homes or move into less prosperous communities. This leads to increased property values in those communities, and, as these rates rise, the lower-income residents who live in those communities are forced to leave.

NIMBY (Not In My Back Yard): the attitude held by some more empowered communities who insist that ‘undesirable sites’ go to ‘others backyards,’ resulting in the disproportional establishment of less desirable facilities in disenfranchised communities.

Promotora model: The Promotora (community health worker) model enlists community members to act as liaisons between their community and organizations seeking to facilitate community engagement. Because of this unique, dual role, promotoras are able to act as the bridge between organizations and the communities themselves. Promotoras mainly work through community presentations and home visits, but also incorporate specific strategies aimed at impacting community norms and practices into their approach. For example, in order to better reach community members, promotoras specifically integrate places that are already frequented by community members into their locations.

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