

Editors' Note

**Active Living, the Built Environment,
and the Policy Agenda**

In recent U.S. health policy debates, two discoveries commingle: (1) recognition that social determinants may shape health outcomes more powerfully than the familiar health services and programs that health care budgets conventionally fund and (2) the unwelcome arrival of an alleged epidemic of overweight and obesity (to which poor eating habits and sedentary lifestyles seem to contribute importantly) that not only boosts the incidence of diabetes, hypertension, and kindred conditions but may even give this generation the unhappy distinction of living shorter lives (on average) than its forebears. (This verdict is by no means unanimous. Strong food for skeptical thought includes Campos 2004 and Oliver 2005.) These coincident discoveries imply that policy makers and public health aficionados ought to take a broader view of the determinants of health in general and pay more attention to causes of and cures for unhealthy living in particular. To address directly one important determinant—the extent of opportunities for active living, that is, for incorporating such fitness-enhancing activities as walking, biking, and exercise more easily into the routines of daily life—the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) created the Active Living Research programs in 2000 and 2002.

The premise of these programs is that educative public health interventions are a laudable but inadequate means of promoting health and that the built environment is an important but neglected social determinant of health. The designers of the program contended that (1) patterns of metropolitan and community development in the United States encourage

Americans to spend ever more time in cars and ever fewer hours walking, biking, or otherwise engaged in moderate physical exercise; (2) the spread of sedentary lifestyles aggravates threats to health such as obesity, diabetes, and hypertension; and (3) communities (and of course the regions, states, and federal authorities beyond and above them) might improve the health of their residents by building opportunities for active living back into the built environment. The program's creators harbored no illusions that active-living projects would reverse suburban sprawl, low-density land use, or other deep-seated impediments to walkable, bikeable communities. The point, rather, was to create options for citizens who recognize the risks that inactivity poses for their health and quality of life and who may be inclined, given an appealing opportunity, to get up and about more often.

Origins of Active-Living Programming

In 1996, the Surgeon General's report on physical activity and health established the multiple health benefits of physical activity and contended that thirty minutes of moderate physical activity several days per week could help to prevent a range of diseases. The prospect that increased activity could improve the health of the public spurred RWJF to explore grant making that might work to reverse notable recent declines in physical activity in the course of everyday life. For example, one major reason why people drive more and walk less is that development decisions and transportation patterns encourage the former and discourage the latter. The foundation's multimillion-dollar Active Living portfolio aimed to increase understanding of the policy and other forces that shape the built environment and to alter them to support the rise of environments that are more friendly to physical activity. Active Living by Design (ALbD) funded twenty-five communities, the activities of which will continue until (and in some cases after) grant funds end in 2007.

Active Living by Design and its portfolio partners—the Active Living Resource Center, which encouraged community groups to promote active living; Active Living Leadership, which worked to engage local public officials; and Active Living Research (ALR), which carefully examines and measures the design features of communities and charts their connections to levels of physical activity—aimed to build and accumulate evidence on how the built environments of a range of communities shaped physical activity; to build the capacities of communities to move toward more activity-friendly environments; and to cultivate public

attention to and public champions for such endeavors. As the articles in this issue show, occasions to promote active living span a wide range of issues, which often do not turn on consideration of health promotion per se. The policy changes to which the active-living partners aspired frequently implicated local, regional, state, and federal entities and seldom came quickly or without conflict.

Eight of the nine articles in this issue were funded by ALR (the exception is the piece by Brown and Kraft on the Celebrate Fitness program) in hopes of moving active-living studies closer to constituting a research field. The articles, like ALR itself, illuminate how community features and health-promoting behavior interact and how the built environment can be made more hospitable to physical activity. By showing how communities of differing sizes and shapes mobilize to pursue change, these articles highlight ways and means for moving research evidence into political and policy practice.

Policy Aims, Political Agendas

Amid the many lessons these cases convey, this introduction concentrates (as befits *JHPPL*) on patterns of interplay between politics and policy, with at least glancing attention to the occasional law. To discern the political challenges confronting the promotion of active living, one need only recall the policy diagnosis that guided the invention of the ALbD and ALR programs in the first place. The norms of community development in the United States tend to treat active living as, at best, an afterthought. No one opposes it or denies the importance of promoting it in principle, but active-living policies rarely rise above the lower rungs of the political agendas of the public authorities and private stakeholders whose decisions shape the character of the built environment.

This diagnosis raises three big political questions. First, how does active living gain a foothold on the policy agenda (i.e., come to be valued as a priority that at least ought to be factored into policy trials and trade-offs)? (The classic account of such agenda setting is Kingdon 2003.) Getting on policy agendas means little per se, however; this condition can be and often is met by rhetoric and lip service. The second question, then, asks how might active living rise enough to induce those who superintend key agendas to invest substantial political capital in advancing it? Still, because political capital is necessary but insufficient to assure the successful formulation and implementation of active-living policies, one must ask, third, how do such initiatives make by their way, by law, regu-

lation, or otherwise, into policy and achieve some (apparent) durability? The articles surveyed here illuminate these salient questions and therefore should be useful to analysts of active-living policies and of health promotion more broadly.

Agenda Politics: Entry-Level Position

Metropolitan and community development tends to roll merrily along as a product of the priorities and preferences of developers, realtors, transportation engineers, zoning officials, school boards, and city halls, shifting public-private partnerships in which roles and powers of protagonists vary markedly with time and place. In these venues, the dominant considerations tend to be private profit, the generation of jobs and tax revenues, and safe and efficient movement of vehicles along roadways. These general objectives imply, in turn, a more specific set: offering people the kind of housing they want (single-family homes with garages, on sizable lots with yards, in communities fairly homogeneous in class and racial composition); luring middle-class and business taxpayers to one's jurisdiction (the better to fund the education, safety, and other services residents demand); and building roads that honor the canons of transportation planners (i.e., roads that are abundant, fast, and safe). In this context, invitations to residents to burn calories by walking, biking, hiking, or otherwise engaging in physical activity are generally off, or far down, the policy agenda. How, then, do they get on it?

In some cases, money talks clearly and distinctly. For example, one compelling reason why active living rose on the agendas of nine Native American tribal youth councils is that RWJF's Celebrate Fitness program gave them grants specifically to address it. Sometimes community leaders and organizations set about building trails and other fitness-enhancing projects that gain strength from a mix of motives — aesthetics, environmental protection, and allegiance to active living, for instance — of different force in different sites.

The answer that best typifies the majority of cases sketched in this issue, however, is “largely as a by-product of other concerns.” In Arlington, Virginia, the prospect that the extension of highway I-66 would further snarl local traffic focused the attention of county officials on alternative transportation, especially biking, an option made more appealing and feasible by the arrival of the Washington area's rapid-rail Metro system in Arlington County. Biking to a Metro station and then taking the train to work emerged as a practical antidote to traffic gridlock.

Boston's dilapidated school yards were an eyesore for all to behold. Fixing them would improve the appearance, pride, and (presumably) property values of the schools' communities and would, in the process, provide new settings for exercise. In Minnesota and Wisconsin, contaminated brownfields undermined plans (or offered potential opportunities) for redevelopment and preservation projects. Talk of converting brownfields raised the question, "conversion to what?" Tax-paying, job-generating industrial or commercial zones were one answer, but another—conversion to green-spaces with trails and other venues for active living—came willy-nilly onto the agenda, too.

In Wisconsin, unease over metropolitan sprawl and loss of farmland triggered an age-old response—there ought to be a law. The state's enactment of 1999 required all but smaller communities to adopt plans that at least contemplated principles of smart growth and new urbanism, and thus (by logical, if implicit, extension) new supports for active living. Florida, by contrast, already had a law that envisioned cooperation between county governments and school systems. The law gave little direction as to what the parties should discuss and decide, but it opened the door to deliberations about the siting of and access to schools and thus about whether getting to them on foot or by bike might be made easier. The incorporation of the Damascus-Boring community within metropolitan Portland, Oregon, proceeded in the context of the nation's oldest and toughest state laws governing metropolitan planning; the metropolitan region's own stringent rules and guidelines; and articulate community antipathy to congestion, sprawl, and threats to the environment. The incorporators were obliged to craft concept plans within these constraints, a duty that per se created strategic openings for the region's abundant and vocal active-living advocates (including some funded by an ALbD grant). Greendale, Wisconsin, finally, was the apotheosis of agenda setting, a new town the holistic nature of which entailed a built environment conducive to what would come to be called active living.

In these cases, active living entered policy agendas as a function more latent than manifest. Triggering events and openings (the advent of I-66 and Metro in Arlington, the mayor's resolve to make school yards more presentable in Boston's less affluent neighborhoods, and so on) put into play swirling considerations—environmental preservation, community development and revitalization, smart growth, new urbanism, and more) that sometimes moved strategically in step with one another (and with active living) and sometimes diverged markedly. Active living usually advanced by hitching itself to larger stars rising in particular policy fir-

maments. Doing so secured it a place on the agenda and therewith some (even if limited and contingent) leverage.

Agenda Politics: Building Political Capital

Myriad priorities are, in some sense, on someone's political agenda. The central question is, does a given priority stand high enough on the agendas of enough power holders to induce the commitment of political capital sufficient to move it forward? On this score, the seven cases show a mixed picture.

Active living in Arlington, Virginia, enjoyed several natural advantages. Decision making was uncommonly centralized: the city was coextensive with the county, governed by a county manager who not only endorsed bike paths as an element of sound planning but also controlled the major relevant agencies of county government. Bike paths were the preserve not only of the parks and recreation agency but also of the Office of Transportation, headed by a biking enthusiast. These supporters institutionalized the active-living mission by creating a dedicated staff position, the county biking coordinator, which enshrined within government a full-time mission to promote this priority. The political and cultural environments were conducive: the county, replete with federal civil servants who respected government and wanted it to lead as well as manage, sustained a self-replicating political culture, as Hanson and Young note. The economic environment, too, was favorable: at-large elections to the county council reduced neighborhood-based particularism, and in fully developed Arlington, bike paths aroused little ire of realtors and developers covetous of profitable private uses for contested terrain. Finally, the community contained a wealth of bike advocates who joined a public advisory committee.

Fortified by these political, economic, and community assets, Arlington's leaders gave their preferences a legal form and frame by writing them into the county's master plan, subdivision rules, and advisory comments. They then proceeded with strategic sagacity, for example, by using the objections of federal regulators to the design of I-66 as a rationale for expanding bike paths as an environmental resource and by advancing incrementally, expanding and improving paths whenever and as much as funds allowed and refusing to let perfect plans become the enemy of the good.

The advocates who promoted active living in the concept plan for the incorporation of Damascus-Boring in metropolitan Portland, Oregon,

also enjoyed impressive political resources and support. For one, state and regional rules obliged localities to take into account smart growth and other principles favorable to active living in their development plans. For another, the organizational milieu was thick with advocates—1000 Friends of Oregon, the statewide Coalition for a Livable Future, ALbD, and more. The scope of the decisions at issue, however, was much broader than that defined by Arlington's designs for bike paths, which meant that Portland's active-living advocates had to confront a larger number of interests on a larger number of fronts. The politically predictable result was that the advocates won some and lost some. Their faithful participation and cogent arguments ensured that their principles and preferences would stay on the table as the concept plan evolved into blueprints. But they were unable (and unprepared) to rebut the contentions of local public officials and developers that a big-box retail format was economically preferable to new-urbanist versions, could not persuade the community that a highway north of the new downtown would be better than one bisecting it, and bickered with their frequent allies, the environmentalists, about whether new trails should cross over or run alongside streams.

In the Oregon case, it is hard to say whether politics determined policy (i.e., the absence of centralized powers in the hands of committed public officials and of institutionalized support for active living within government halls made the politics of planning a classically contentious pluralist affair) or policy determined politics (i.e., the broad and wide agenda of community-shaping decisions about the location of highways, the design of retail stores, and more inherently galvanized opposition to active-living precepts among public officials and private developers. In this case, state and regional rules took active-living advocates to the proverbial outskirts of the promised land, but whether the politics of planning beyond the concept phase will admit them to it is far from clear.

Wisconsin's planning law of 1999 aimed, in effect, to create a statewide framework for communities that was comparable to, but less mandatory than, the Oregon law within which the Damascus-Boring case unfolded. A politically odd couple—1000 Friends of Wisconsin (worried about sprawl) and the Wisconsin Realtors Association (troubled by unpredictability in land-use policies)—promoted and pushed the legislative project. Before embracing the initiative, Governor Tommy Thompson wanted to see consensus, which took shape as a land-use council worked with pro-planning groups, the realtors' association, academicians, state agencies (especially the Department of Administration), an advisory body, and legislative champions (including a former real-estate agent) to create the

common ground that took statutory shape in due course. These political capital investments accumulated serious policy costs, however. Resolved to avoid the perceived statism of Oregon and solicitous of agitated small-town property-rights groups, the law's designers forswore regulatory sticks for carrots—the promise of fiscal dividends for communities with populations of more than 12,500 that incorporated the tenets of smart growth into traditional neighborhood development ordinances. When a change in party control of the legislature coincided with severe strain in the state budget, these inducements largely lost force, leaving the law roughly the strategic equivalent of Oregon's concept plans.

Brownfield conversions offer yet another instance of the import of higher levels of government for active-living initiatives when local politics are constricted and conflicted. Such conversions are products of local land-use decisions, but because they entail resolution of touchy grassroots challenges—the cost of acquiring contaminated land, liability issues, the merits of commercial-industrial versus greenspace uses, and the maintenance costs of greenspace over time—economics easily inhibits political leadership, divides the community, and makes progress contingent on a boost from the state and/or federal levels of government. Wisconsin, for example, created the Brownfield Study Group, an institutional force within state government, and appropriated funds for remediation. In Minnesota, conversions were linked to river preservation, and although the governor declined to give them state funds, the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency contrived to include conversions in federally funded environmental protection plans. In this case (as with Wisconsin's planning law and the incorporation of Damascus-Boring), the ascendance of active living on the policy agenda depended on the adroitness of advocates, on both the local and state levels, at using state and federal allies and statutory supports as sources of countervailing power against local (and sometimes statewide) interests with discordant policy preferences.

The Lee County, Florida, study, however, shows that a favorable state statutory framework, though possibly necessary, is distinctly insufficient to push active living higher on community policy agendas. Florida's law required that the state's counties plan in cooperation with county school systems. The mandate opened for discussion and negotiation several issues directly pertinent to the hopes of active-living advocates that schools might become partners in their cause. Several prickly issues topped the list: notably, the location of schools (the farther they are from residential concentrations, the less likely are pupils to walk or bike to them), the perceived safety of walking or biking to schools (“stranger danger” is a

large, albeit overblown, anxiety almost everywhere), and the willingness of schools to add or make available to the community gyms and other facilities for exercise and sports. The slow and uneven progress of deliberations in Lee County demonstrates that school systems enjoy considerable autonomy, that their organizational imperatives favor timely, low-cost acquisitions of large-tract sites located near highways and accessible (by car or bus) from several communities, and that leaders in county government are reluctant to lock horns with these formidable institutions on behalf of active-living goals. In the Lee case (unlike those of brownfields and the Wisconsin planning law), no team of community advocates and institutional anchors within government applied countervailing power to the political heft of the school system, and the economics of public-sector land use trumped arguments for viewing schools as a resource for promoting active living.

The story of the Boston Schoolyard Initiative, however, illustrates the perils of generalization: how school systems respond to active-living initiatives depends importantly on what they are asked to do, by what authorities, and with what encouragement by community forces and private funders. (In this case, too, state and federal laws and moneys had little bearing, pro or con, on local plans.) Boston's mayor had a tangible incentive to repair dilapidated school yards, because such eyesores deterred neighborhood revival. The mayor, moreover, enjoyed unusual authority over the city's school system: in response to chaos and conflict over racial desegregation of Boston's schools in the 1960s and 1970s, the mayor gained power to appoint members of the school board. School-yard repair, therefore, had friends at both the community and mayoral ends of the political spectrum, and this political base eased the construction of intermediate chains of influence. A task force, sustained by Boston Greenspace Alliance and the city's Public Facilities Department, gave rise to the Boston Schoolyard Initiative, an institutional anchor that mediated between city staff and community groups, helped acquire funds from private foundations, consulted with and reassured teachers and principals, and eased strain on the city's budget by engaging parent groups in maintaining the renovated school yards. The case is, as it were, more Arlington than Lee: the project was limited in focus and scope, its political champions had both the will and the power to lead, the community was supportive, an institutional core that spanned the public and private sectors took root, and neither private economic interests nor higher levels of government were implicated in the renovations.

In Greendale, a New Deal-era paradigm of new urbanism, the chal-

lence was less to elevate active living on the civic agenda than to keep it alive and well within a metropolitan agenda that violated new-urbanist precepts. As Greendale's downtown lost business and élan, residents lured by the prospect of a pleasant aesthetic experience into walking to and within it saw less reason to venture forth. Neither local, county, nor state leaders seemed to have the power (anyway, the resolve) to battle the "laws" of metropolitan growth in defense of Greendale's historic but corroding civic character. In the other cases examined here, a higher agenda status for active living tended to follow the consolidation of political support in and by solid institutional protectors. Greendale, by sharp and singular contrast, retained its active-livable nature in good part by virtue of a shift from (in Max Weber's terms) institutional to patrimonial rule, that is, the decision of a local resident, a magazine magnate, to energize the downtown by basing there his national headquarters and publications' visitors center. The case, in short, ends as idiosyncratically as it began.

The Celebrate Fitness sites had idiosyncrasies of their own, which derived from variations in the interplay of tribal youth councils, social and health services units within tribes, tribal leadership, formal organizations in the tribe's environment, and cultural patterns as grantees labored to put their ideas for new walking trails, ball fields, community hikes, and more into practice. Likewise, the upward mobility of trails on the policy agendas of the six communities Eyer et al. examine traced highly varied trajectories—in different sites, mayors, town managers, leaders of advocacy groups, and trail enthusiasts worked to secure federal and state funds, amend local ordinances, forge interjurisdictional agreements, acquire public and/or private land, raise local taxes and fees, improvise arrangements for maintenance, and assuage anxieties about legal liability, for example—that admit no generalization more (or less) than that political wills eventually found policy ways.

Agenda Politics: So What?

Political exertions are one thing; practical results are another. The outcomes of the initiatives examined here fall into three general categories: projects (physical additions to or changes in the built environment that encourage active living), plans (formal declarations of intent to change the built environment in ways, including but not limited to projects, that promote active living), and policies (new governmental rules of the game by which jurisdictions—especially states and communities—plan for or

otherwise seek to alter the built environment on behalf of active-living goals). The three types exhibit important political distinctions.

Projects

Five cases—Arlington's bike paths, Boston's renovated school yards, Celebrate Fitness, brownfield conversions, and community trails—trace the achievement of palpable changes in the built environment. In the first three of these, goals were local in scope; trade-offs between economic returns to land use and the promotion of active living were not very salient; local political leaders had both motive and opportunity to push the project along; a solid intermediary institution was dedicated (in both senses) to the mission; community groups were mainly pro, seldom con; battles with private interests (e.g., property owners, developers, realtors) were minimal; and higher levels of government were either peripheral (e.g., Boston) or supportive (e.g., Arlington).

Insofar as these conditions are met, brownfield conversions and community trails may also advance, but there, of course, is the rub. When the land in question is privately owned, acquisition costs loom large. Local leaders may also be nervous about liability issues and, if they do bestir themselves to turn a sow's ear into a silk purse, insistent on creating jobs and revenues in preference to options for hiking and biking. In these cases, leaders may be less likely to create and to sustain supportive institutions that bridge the public and private sectors and manage conflicts. Adjoining communities may be divided on how conversions or trails should proceed and whom they should benefit. State and/or federal support (rhetorical and/or financial) may be elusive, and public regulations may be obstructive. Costs of maintenance, which endure and grow long after construction ceases, prompt local leaders to wonder whether trails and conversions are such a bright idea after all.

Vignettes of Minnesota and Wisconsin suggest, however, that brownfield conversions may prosper in suitable conditions—for example, when the public sector owns the land in question, local leaders support both the conversion itself and allocation of the converted land to greenspace, environmental groups get mobilized, estimates of the costs of maintenance of greenspace are not overestimated, and the federal or state government lends support. The history of the six community trails likewise discloses successful and instructive coping strategies—for instance, the adoption of subdivision ordinances that require new residential developments to

accommodate trails, changes in zoning provisions, transfers of lands from state to local control, legislation that creates new options for the purchase of liability insurance, astute linking of trails to other salient local issues (such as flood control), negotiation of intermunicipal agreements, tapping of federal transportation moneys, patient compliance with regulations governing construction on floodplains and access to trails by the disabled, and the willingness of community groups to help with maintenance. This list is no tool kit of rapid, reliable, or replicable fixes, but it shows that political persistence can indeed pay off.

Plans

In two cases—Damascus-Boring, Oregon, and Lee County, Florida—the struggles of active-living advocates to gain prominence on the agenda produced mainly plans (a concept plan in metropolitan Portland; discussions and emerging, albeit tentative and tenuous, agreements in Lee County). Unlike those of the three project sites, the issues and objectives in Portland and Lee County were neither solidly local nor discrete but rather they sprawled and spilled all over the metropolitan and county canvas. In metropolitan Portland, the object of the exercise was to apply a state and regional policy framework to the design and growth of the Damascus-Boring community, which entailed intricate meshing of transportation networks, retail activities, and protected environments, each viewed in complex and sometimes conflicting public and private contexts.

Officials in Lee County aimed to do what the state told them to do: get county governments and school systems to plan cooperatively to manage growth in their communities. Alas, the schools' limited supply of collaboration (a by-product of their formal autonomy, rapid turnover among school interlocutors, and the school's approach to cost-effective siting and expansion) severely dampened demand for it among public officials. Enterprises such as renovating an external feature of individual schools (Boston school yards), converting brownfields to greenspace, and finding targets of opportunity to extend bike paths lend themselves to projectization. Persuading schools officially to change their ways of buying land and designing buildings and campuses in hopes of changing, in turn, the incentives of parents and kids to abandon cars and buses for bikes and feet en route to and from schools is a tough sell without (and quite possibly would be even with) stronger incentives to coordination than the Florida law contained.

Likewise, the agenda for Damascus-Boring envisioned not simply the extension of bike trails within a developed county with a strong biking community but rather something much broader—the systemic integration of trails into larger patterns of greenspace, which must be reconciled with the efficient movement of traffic, successful appeals to retail customers, and the protection of the natural environment. In time, active-living advocates may have an impressive roster of projects and a firm foundation of planning rules and norms to show for their energies. What they have now, however, is a concept plan, a work in progress, a placeholder that makes active-living-enhancing designs more likely and conflict over them less likely, a format that will acquire content from bargaining among revenue-minded public officials, profit-minded private developers, and myriad other interests, including, of course, active-living advocates.

Although these two planning sites share differences from those in the project category, they differ from each other in one important and politically instructive respect, namely, that the metropolitan Portland advocates seem markedly to have surpassed their Lee County counterparts in generating plans with (baby) teeth. Part of the explanation, of course, is that the two sites are only superficially counterparts. For one thing, laws and rules in Oregon and metropolitan Portland are far more directive (and sympathetic to new urbanism, smart growth, and active living) than is Florida's law calling for county-school cooperation. For another, metropolitan Portland teems with active-living advocates and organizations, which Lee County apparently does not. Moreover, in the Damascus-Boring case, schools were not the central focus of planning, as they were in the mandate Florida entrusted to its counties. In metropolitan Portland, therefore, the field of institutional engagement in both collaboration and conflict was at once broader and more fluid than in Lee County.

Greendale, Wisconsin, is arguably a third entry in the planning category because it began life as a planned community and then struggled to retain its original precepts and practices. Whereas Portland and Lee County labored to make local realities conform to state laws, Greendale has pondered how to stop local realities from conforming too closely to the drift of metropolitan development. In all three sites, plans favorable to active living have been threatened by usual suspects such as residential and commercial sprawl in suburbs; road patterns that respond to the growth of population with little thought to encouraging smart growth, new urbanism, and active living; and the difficulties of designing and modifying downtowns that are walkable, productive of tax revenues, and

attractive to private developers. Greendale's citizens seem to have been committed to preserving the town's cherished character but powerless (or clueless about how) to bring that commitment to political life. In this case, unique among the seven, the planner that mattered was an unconventional business-cum-policy entrepreneur who in one stroke revived the institutional character of the town and improved the odds that its built environment would remain hospitable to active living.

Because plans are processes (proposals to set various works in progress), political leaders have less incentive to invest in their successful consummation than they have when tangible benefits—projects—for communities and constituents are on the line. These modulated incentives may also apply to community organizations and advocacy groups, perhaps unwilling or ill-prepared to challenge private stakeholders (e.g., developers) or autonomous public institutions (e.g., schools) because they know that the crucial battles await the day that implementation of plans compels interpretation, refinement, and revision. Uncertainty as to when (indeed, whether) implementation day would come seems to have suppressed the advocates' energies in Lee County. In Portland, advocates knew that the plan had teeth (of sorts) but failed effectively to challenge arguments about the economic advantages of a big-box retail design. Until Reiman made his move, Greendale's citizens clung tightly but helplessly to their distinctive planned community. Planning to make the built environment more amenable to active living gets the show on the road, but whether power holders elect to pick up the pace is another matter.

Policy

One case—the Wisconsin planning law of 1999—depicts a state's effort to create a policy framework for the growth of its communities. Although the initiative found an institutional anchor, the Interagency Land Use Council, expanding the coalition behind it had more to do with pulling than with sharpening regulatory teeth. Crafting rules that cities, suburbs, and rural areas all would accept was all but impossible. Mandates à la Oregon were off the table, but grants and dividends to compliant communities apparently did not entice the locals to go beyond boilerplate plans. Even this limited progress was imperiled when the state budget came under stress, Republicans won both houses of the legislature, and conservatives stepped up attacks on the government's alleged violations of property rights. The law might yet guide communities to active-living initiatives they would not have undertaken otherwise, but the main message of the case says that

the disconnect between supportive state policy enactments and new local approaches to the built environment is wide and gaping.

Conclusions

Active living is steadily gaining research validation and political appeal that anoint it as a legitimate policy objective in its own right. So far, however, active-living initiatives tend to rise on political agendas when they ride the coattails of proposals to change the built environment in ways (e.g., new urbanism, smart growth, environmental protection, community development) that are consistent with though not motivated principally by a strong purposive commitment to active living. These undertakings fare best under five circumstances: strong political champions promote them; trade-offs between active-living-friendly measures and ones that produce more tax revenues and economic growth are perceived to be few or minor; responsibility for encouraging and refining the initiative is institutionalized within government by dedicated staff and some type of public-private partnership; interest-group sentiment is decidedly positive (or reliably neutral) and well-organized opponents are few; and fiscal and/or moral support is available from the federal and/or state levels of government.

These conditions are more likely to be met for microlevel projects at the local level than for macrolevel policies that envision change in (or comprehensive planning for) the built environment across a state's urban, suburban, and rural jurisdictions. Plans (formal processes that propose to link projects but lack the full force of policies) fall in between. Active-living proponents with long time horizons and plenty of patience (and resources) do and should think big about new policies and plans. Those who seek quicker results (or who command fewer resources) may prefer to cultivate local projects, which may in time supply the political building blocks for plans and policies that help to reengineer options for physical activity back into daily life in American communities.

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