



MEMORANDUM

TO: Montgomery County Planning Board

VIA: Rollin Stanley, Director, Montgomery County Planning Department

FROM: Pamela Dunn, Planner Coordinator, Research & Technology Center

SUBJECT: Health Impact Assessment

Summary: Health Impact Assessment

More and more inter-disciplinary research associates the “built environment” (i.e., land use, transportation systems and community design) with health outcomes and well-being. To integrate the fields of land use planning and public health, the use of Health Impact Assessment (HIA) has grown in popularity. A Health Impact Assessment (HIA) is defined as “a combination of procedures or methods by which a policy, program or project may be judged as to its potential effects on the health of a population and the distribution of those effects within the population” (World Health Organization, 1999).

While there is no standard approach to HIA, five main steps of the assessment are generally followed:

- Screening – a process to determine if the HIA is necessary. The screening process can include checklists, logic models or even community surveys.
- Scoping – is critical to planning and designing the HIA. It consists of three main tasks: determining the level of HIA to be conducted (rapid, intermediate, or comprehensive), determining the impacts to be assessed, and designing a work plan.
- Appraisal – a process to determine how the population may be affected by the proposal, project or policy. Appraisals are an assessment of the direction and magnitude of the health impacts; appraisals should incorporate both qualitative and quantitative methods to collect information.
- Recommendations – the development of a final report with recommendations.
- Evaluation – determine the success of the HIA with respect to changes in health status and impact on the decision-making process.

A comprehensive review of the use of Health Impact Assessment published in 2008 in the American Journal of Preventative Medicine analyzed 27 case studies. Of these 27 HIA, 16 were related to land use or transportation planning. Most of the HIA focusing on land use and redevelopment were conducted at the project level. A couple of studies

assessed the health impacts of an area or master plan. California led the way with ten of the sixteen studies related to land use and transportation.

San Francisco's early involvement in the use of HIA motivated the San Francisco Department of Public Health to create a method for assessing health impacts using health and planning tools, the Healthy Development Measurement Tool (HDMT). The HDMT is a comprehensive evaluation metric designed to consider health needs in urban development plans and projects.

Several other guides have been developed recently such as the Design for Health – Rapid Health Impact Assessment Toolkit created by the University of Minnesota, HIA Toolkit for Community Planning developed by Human Impact Partners and the Environmental Health Checklist for Planning Officials developed by the Tri-County (CO) Health Department.

Besides California, Atlanta, Minneapolis, Trenton, New Jersey, and Commerce City Colorado have used HIA in their planning process. In Atlanta, the HIA were used to evaluate the health impacts of two significant roadway projects involving redevelopment. One project, Greyfield Redevelopment of Buford Highway, estimated that 14,000 people in the highway corridor would be affected by the project, further estimating that in one year there would be 6.1 fewer pedestrian injuries, 1.6 fewer pedestrian fatalities and 73.8 fewer motor vehicle injuries. The Greyfield Redevelopment HIA would most likely be categorized as a comprehensive assessment using expert opinion, literature review and modeling for quantitative results.

The HIA conducted by the Tri-County Health Department of Commerce City, while it did not provide quantitative information on the impact of community redevelopment, it did provide a literature review, walkability assessment, and recommendations from walkability and transportation planning and public policy consultants. The HIA estimated that approximately 27,000 residents of historic Commerce City would be affected by the redevelopment. The assessment suggested the plan would increase bicyclist and pedestrian safety; decrease crime potential and fear of crime, in addition to expanding healthy food options for area residents.

Health Impact Assessment is a promising approach to identify the impacts of proposed policy and infrastructure changes, utilizing quantitative and non-quantitative analyses, in a way that allows health outcomes to be appropriately factored into planning and policy decisions.