



City of Richmond: Considering Health in the General Plan

Factors: Economic, social, physical, service

A city's general plan is an important statement of its intentions for the future: how and where to grow, what to preserve, and what values underlie the vision for the community. The general plan is the main policy document that shapes land use and includes elements on housing, transportation, economic development, and other aspects of community life. The City of Richmond is updating its general plan and has added a health policy element to assess the health impacts of development projects and environmental conservation in the city. Both the process and the results are likely to break new ground for municipalities in California.

The economic, social, and environmental issues faced by the people of Richmond make it an ideal place in which to address health concerns. Richmond is a diverse city, with a substantial industrial base, particularly in the petrochemical industry, a large shoreline, several major transportation corridors, and communities that range from semi-rural to high-value waterfront condominiums to economically struggling flatlands. It has a large African American population and is a growing immigrant gateway community, with substantial Latino and Asian populations. Richmond includes some areas of lively real estate development as well as some of the most thoroughly disinvested neighborhoods in the Bay Area. Residents' concerns with, and organizing around problems of, public safety, air quality, economic opportunity, and education have been intense for many years. There are twin challenges of attracting growth and managing that new investment so that it serves the interests of current residents. Neighborhood residents are acutely aware of the need for change in their communities and the pressures and potential effects of the larger regional Bay Area context of expensive housing and other costs.

An extensive outreach process has been underway, and in addition to the city-sponsored outreach, a number of community-based environmental justice, labor, and faith-based organizations are educating their members about health policy issues, developing positions, and encouraging their participation.

The framework for the health policy analysis and recommendations will cover 10 issue areas, several of which intersect with the rest of the general plan: access to recreation and open space; access to healthy foods; access to health services; access to daily goods and services; access to public transit and safe active transportation options; environmental quality; safe neighborhoods and public spaces; access to affordable housing; access to economic opportunities; and green and sustainable building practices.

The goal is for health considerations not to be isolated but rather to be infused throughout the planning, development, and conservation policymaking guided by the general plan. For each of the 10 issue areas, the analyses of current conditions will be followed by a set of recommendations to guide future development, including new standards and measurements of health impacts. For topics that are also the subject of their own element of the general plan (e.g., transportation, housing, economic development), the health policy element will intersect with, broaden, and reinforce the recommendations made in these other elements.

