



## ***Interview Results***

(Note – 7 person interview pool included elected and appointed officials, management, and technical staff)

1. What **surprised** you about the results?
  - a. All three cities are on the same page ... commonality among stakeholder groups in identifying community issues of concern relating to active living
  - b. Although each city has similar functional needs, the three cities have different levels or stages of addressing their needs
  - c. Breadth of work scope ... broad perspectives ... interdisciplinary nature of problems ... many problems cross jurisdictional boundaries
  - d. Large number of work group participants ... reflects public perceptions regarding importance of health issues within communities
  - e. No single group, agency, or level of government is looking at the totality (i.e., multi-faceted parts) of health/built environment issues
  
2. Which items from the results would you highlight as either **applicable** or **not applicable** to your city ... things that immediately caught your attention?
  - a. Cars (versus people) take priority
  - b. Decentralization of schools goes back to the 1960s ... spreading out (versus building up)
    - i. Takes more land
    - ii. More driving and less walking
    - iii. Adversely impacts city cores
  - c. Each jurisdiction has both *shared* needs plus city-specific *pet* projects
  - d. Greenway expansion in Gastonia
  - e. Importance of *big picture* thinking
  - f. Need for more bicycle lanes
  - g. Poor road designs (e.g., sidewalk disconnects)
  - h. Smaller cities have limited transit options ... lack of bus service between Bessemer City and Gastonia ... only one intra-city transit

- option between Belmont and Gastonia ... schedules often not convenient
- i. State-level changes (typically relating to cost-cutting) often made without public/local involvement
  - j. The City of Belmont has – for about the past 15 years – encouraged mixed use development patterns, village center design concept, and walkability
  - k. Various types of corridor development are occurring in all three cities
3. Which items are **important** enough – or might have **potential political support** – to justify moving from *good ideas* to some type of *action*?
- a. Any type of action that will better align *rules* with *policies*
  - b. Building awareness ... creating broader public support base
  - c. Corridor improvements
  - d. Greenway system expansion
  - e. Improving connectivity ... both within and between cities
  - f. Intersection improvements
  - g. Park renovation ... an example of creating great places that people can walk to
  - h. Sidewalk improvements ... both new and missing links ... this is a key component, a great program start-point, and would provide excellent project visibility
  - i. Streamlining and better coordination of funding procedures
  - j. The NCDOT *Complete Streets* program may be a good program, but it's not well understood at the local level
4. How would you describe the **political winds** within your city regarding these results?
- a. Although elected officials will generally support active living initiatives, *community-at-large* support must complement that of elected officials in order to move projects forward
  - b. Correlation exists between turn-over among elected officials and potential for project success (e.g., the lesser the turn-over, the greater the potential for success)

- c. Except for funding issues, now is a great time to begin moving forward ... funding is always an issue (especially during times of economic downturns) ... need for private sector support is increasing in importance
  - d. It's sometimes difficult to overcome political inertia at the local level ... and equally difficult to establish intra-city partnerships
  - e. Most elected officials do appreciate the importance and linkages between health and the built environment (compared to years past when support would have been very spotty) ... they understand the concept of walkability
5. What **value** might continued work on these results have for your city?
- a. Acknowledging that a problem exists is a significant *first-step* ... discussions come first, and then one needs to find champions (e.g., individuals plus groups) who can help to maintain the momentum
  - b. Every city should *want* this type of community advocacy ... it's an important community resource
  - c. Extends the community resource base ... this grant has helped to build relationships that previously did not exist ... Gaston County communities do not have a strong tradition of working well with each other ... this project has bridged the cooperation gap
  - d. Helps to efficiently fill the knowledge gap ... lots of good ideas ... now need to make things happen ... our community health depends on further action steps
  - e. Many identified issues are *awareness-based* ... also, most are *doable*
  - f. Meaningful change rarely happens by itself
6. What **options** do you see (within your city) that might generate momentum or continued action regarding any of these issues ... **suggestions** as our work group moves forward?
- a. Build on past actions/initiatives, and integrate with existing plans and on-going projects when possible
  - b. Development of a support base (i.e., a way to improve awareness) should help our cities become more proactive (versus reactive) as we address specific program initiatives

- c. Emphasize importance for cities and county to work together ...  
Gastonia and the county have a special symbiotic leadership role that impacts all other jurisdictions
- d. Encourage developers to add/contribute toward creating and providing both open spaces and infrastructure for active living
- e. Design standards should: target broad public use rather than exceptional or infrequent needs ... be inclusive and address all transportation modes (versus singular emphasis on cars and trucks) ... better accommodate needs outside single-purpose functional boxes
- f. Find ways to incentivize action steps
- g. Focus on demonstration projects ... seek state resource assistance for pilot projects
- h. Identify and explore various *points-of-entry* that will help to promote awareness
- i. Important to seek buy-in from community residents at the *family* level
- j. It all depends on community leadership ... find ways to get and keep people involved ... however, the leadership pool is typically small
- k. Keep work group participants in touch with – and talking to – one another
- l. Most people haven't yet made the connection between health and the built environment
- m. NCDOT divisions need greater decision-making authority
- n. Need for change applies to *all* levels of government ... should disseminate work group results and get others involved (especially the school board and county government)
- o. Seek and share success stories ... even those involving other jurisdictions
- p. The educational process is important ... should try to target youth (beginning with high school students)
- q. Try to market projects by utilizing both transportation and economic development threads to tie project packages together
- r. When communities work together, it is easier to maximize benefits

7. Which issues do you consider are the **most important** to your city?
- a. Acknowledge that pedestrian and bicycle needs are an essential component of project design (versus a frill that can be cut to save costs)
  - b. Build to a *people scale*
  - c. Change the state funding formula to better emphasize urban (versus rural) policy needs ... will require state-wide relook at equity issue
  - d. Focus on activities that bring people together (i.e., creating a sense of community)
  - e. I-85 level of service is low (i.e., congested) much of the time ... need new road (possibly toll) plus light rail within region ... but not at expense of pedestrian and bicycle needs
  - f. Must improve linkages relating to health and land use
  - g. Must think of sidewalks as a system ... avoid/rectify existing sidewalks that are like *rivers without a bridge*
  - h. NCDOT design standards must change in order to better accommodate pedestrian and bicycle needs
  - i. Need authority to enact local sales tax (i.e., with local control)
  - j. Need improved public transportation within the county ... with Gastonia as the focal point
  - k. Obesity is a recognized health concern ... diet and exercise are keys to healthy living ... communities must create safe and healthy built environments that are pedestrian-friendly ... the key components for active living changes are: sidewalks + greenways + intersection improvements
  - l. School siting is an important issue ... however, it's been an issue for a long time and hasn't gone very far
  - m. Weighting and prioritization of projects should tilt toward pedestrian needs ... bicycle projects are typically more expensive than pedestrian projects
8. What **level of commitment** from the City of \_\_\_\_\_ might we anticipate as our work group moves forward with this project? (e.g., project support ... staff time ... resources)

- a. Action plan – if well thought out – should receive support from most elected officials and management
- b. Expansion of public-private partnerships (to include chamber of commerce involvement)
- c. High level of staff support
- d. Matching funds for grant projects
- e. Gastonia: multi-modal transit center
- f. Belmont: pedestrian master plan implementation
- g. Bessemer City: dedicated annual funding for sidewalks + implementation of recently adopted pedestrian plan