Walking For Life:

Addressing Health in Champaign’s Pedestrian Plan

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Acknowledgements

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I undertook this project for practical reasons, hoping to take advantage of good timing, study a topic that matched my interests, and potentially contribute to a planning process meant to improve the quality of life in Champaign, Illinois. A traumatic health situation, the 2014 polar vortex, and series of interviews with concerned community health professionals made me realize that working for complete, accessible, and well-maintained pedestrian systems is more than a matter of practicality. High quality pedestrian networks are essential elements for life in a safe and healthy community.

I would like to extend a special thanks to the Champaign-Urbana professionals who shared their time and perspectives, the City of Champaign Planning and Development Department who afforded me the opportunity to become involved with their Pedestrian Plan process, my colleagues and friends in the Department of Urban and Regional Planning whose conversations and feedback were invaluable for this work, and to my wife, Jenny who literally helped me get back on my feet this semester. Without your contributions and support, this project would not have been possible.

Best wishes whichever path(s) you take,

Tyler Zwagerman
“Environments either create negative or positive health outcomes. Lacking safe and comfortable environments, those who might walk are likely to make unhealthy decisions for fear of collisions.”

*project participant*
The Challenge

Champaign’s existing pedestrian network does not provide all residents with safe walking routes to destinations throughout the community. Sidewalk gaps, difficult crossings, inadequate street lighting, and autocentric corridors limit mobility and discourage walking for exercise. Most residents live within walking distance of businesses, schools, and parks but many find that comfortable paths to these destinations are missing. The inconsistent quality of the network is hindering quality of life for residents and threatening community health. Increased vehicle collision rates (and severity), and decreased levels of physical activity, community interaction, and psychological well-being are associated with poor pedestrian infrastructure.

The Opportunity

This project was completed for the purpose of providing recommendations for the City of Champaign Planning and Development Department for addressing community health in the ongoing Walk Champaign Pedestrian Plan. A stated goal of the Walk Champaign plan is to “promote health and wellness for residents by improving the walkability of the community”. My process documents the well-researched connection between walkability and health and incorporates the perspectives of local professionals in the fields related to health and wellness to compile recommendations for what a healthy walking environment in Champaign would look like as well as how Champaign might achieve this.

Why the health perspective?

The ongoing Walk Champaign process had already collected input from Champaign residents, Illinois Department of Transportation, and multiple city departments including Public Works, Neighborhood Services and Champaign Police. Because walking environments have been shown to significantly impact public health, the inclusion of professional health perspectives was deemed both valuable and relevant.
Methodology

**Literature Review**

Describes the relationship between health, walkability, and pedestrian plans

**Informant Interviews**

Twenty professional perspectives on how to address community health through Walk Champaign

**Application**

Recommendations with details regarding purpose, structure, location, and potential impact of actions

A comprehensive literature review articulated the connection between health and walkable environments incorporating research literature, planning documents, and government publications. Twenty health professionals shared responses to a list of ten guiding questions between March 1st and April 1st of 2014. Most responses were recorded informally through interviews and note-taking while a few professionals preferred to respond to the questions in written form via email. Professionals from the fields of public health, transportation planning, park planning, healthcare, workplace wellness, community services, and disability advocacy participated in the project. Their responses were aggregated and the vision and recommendations summarized in this document reflect areas of consensus among the respondents.

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What makes a pedestrian network healthy?

The five elements below reflect the most common characteristics in professional descriptions of safe and comfortable pedestrian networks. These themes closely mirror the characteristics of healthy walking networks described in literature. When combined they represent a compelling vision for Champaign.

1. The network is complete & well-maintained  
   Sidewalks and safe crossings will be present city-wide, in good condition, and free from potential barriers.

2. Ensures access for all users  
   People of all ages, abilities, and ambulatory modes will feel comfortable walking to destinations.

3. Reduces risk and severity of injury  
   Separation from traffic, intersection improvements, increased visibility and slower speeds will reduce risk.

4. Connects to essential destinations  
   Walking will be a viable way to travel, with safe pathways to work, school, shopping and transit.

5. Supports a city-wide walking culture  
   The Champaign community will value walking and encourage it for both utility and recreation.
Walkability and Physical Health

Activity Level

Daily physical activity has many health benefits. In addition to decreasing the risk of being overweight and suffering from chronic conditions related to obesity, higher levels of physical activity have been shown to increase length and quality of life and decrease risk for osteoporosis, falling, and depression.

Health professionals recommend walking as an easy way to get moderate exercise and stay physically active. Walking for just a mile and a half per day has been shown to result in a 30 percent decreased risk of heart disease, stroke, and diabetes.

Research suggests that the quality of walking environments plays a major role in determining how active people are. Suburban-style areas with disconnected subdivisions and high traffic arterial roads discourage physical activity among most groups. Areas with complete sidewalk grids, walkable destinations, and ample green space have been shown to increase physical activity.

Collisions

Pedestrian injuries and fatalities are tragically common occurrences in Illinois. They occur for identifiable reasons, and many can be prevented through modification of the built environment. As a major cause of death and disability, collisions have long been a public health concern.

Roughly 4,000 pedestrians are killed by automobiles each year nationwide. Most of these deaths occurred along arterial streets designed for high speed traffic. Speed is a major determinant in the severity of injury and likelihood of death. Collisions that occur under 20 miles per hour are rarely fatal, but those at 40 miles an hour result in death 85 percent of the time. Children and elderly populations are at the highest risk to be injured in a collision while walking.

In Champaign, pedestrian collisions may be reduced or prevented though construction of sidewalks and physical buffer zones to separate walkers from traffic. Thoughtful redesigns of intersections may decrease traffic speed and increase comfort for walkers while education and enforcement approaches may decrease risky behaviors.

“We (as a society) are less active than ever before and at the same time our communities’ sidewalk network has lots of gaps.”
Walkability and Community Health

Vibrant Neighborhoods

Walkability has been linked to the strength and resilience of communities. Strong communities are characterized by close relationships, high levels of community involvement, environmental sustainability, and economic stability.

Communities that are built for walking are likely to support neighborhood vitality because those who walk are more likely to have conversations with neighbors, shop at local businesses, and participate in neighborhood associations. Residents who live in walk-friendly areas spend less time (and money) commuting and report a stronger sense of community and higher levels of neighborhood upkeep.

Walk friendly environments also support social network development among vulnerable populations. Presence of walkable networks increases independence, mobility, and quality of life for seniors, children/adolescents, and other groups that do not have access to automobiles.

Mental Health

Pedestrian networks that encourage residents to get outdoors for a walk have been found to reduce stress, restore attention, and even combat depression. Because walking is the most natural motion in human existence, it is reasonable to infer that the human brain may be at its most comfortable state during this activity.

The busy nature of urban environments and the demands of full schedules are enough to leave many people feeling stressed and exhausted. Traffic congestion, work deadlines, and constant electronic communication can be frustrating and overwhelming.

Research has shown that taking a daily neighborhood walk on a tree-lined street has positive short and long-term health benefits including reduced stress, increased ability to pay attention, decreased rates of depression and increased reported quality of life. These findings suggest that universal access of Champaign residents to safe and inviting walking environments will result in significant physical and psychological benefits for the population.
Finding Consensus

To determine recommended actions for how the City of Champaign can address health in its pedestrian plan, the responses of health professionals were analyzed for areas of agreement. The recommendations that follow represent the ideas for infrastructure prioritization, specific projects, policy change, and programming that were repeated by several participants. Some of the city-wide recommendations were suggested by over half of participating professionals, and all of the city-wide recommendations were suggested by at least three professionals. The details of the recommendations were also informed by the literature review.

The descriptions of each city-wide recommendation include the following:

- Key components of the approach
- Reasoning behind the recommendation
- Examples of locations implementing similar approaches
- Healthy network elements supported by the approach

A revised ordinance should address city-wide sidewalk snow removal to make sure residents throughout the community have access to essential destinations and can stay active in winter. A revised ordinance should also be enforced on a shorter time-frame and promote a program that organizes neighbors to shovel walks for those who are unable.

Champaign’s existing ordinance does not provide for safe accessibility for the population during the winter months. It only requires snow removal in campustown and downtown districts and allows a 48 hour window for compliance.

Comparable communities like Evanston, IL and Madison, WI require sidewalk clearance of all public sidewalks for any snow or ice and shorter time frames for enforcement. Madison enforces tighter standards for businesses, recognizing the need for walkable access to destinations even when it snows.

Supports: a complete & well-maintained network, access for all users, reduced injury risk, connections to destinations, and a walking culture.
Prioritize Improvements for Champaign’s High-Reliance Neighborhoods

Projects should be prioritized for areas in Champaign where populations use the pedestrian network out of necessity. This project identifies high-reliance groups as seniors, children, low-income residents and disabled residents. These groups are the least likely to drive and most likely to be involved in pedestrian collisions. Data for Champaign census tracts revealed the highest proportion of these groups in the Garden Hills and Douglass Park areas.

Professionals agreed that while high quality walking networks are important for everyone, the health of some users may be impacted most by access to them since driving is not a viable option.

Needs-based prioritization was applied by the Nashville, TN MPO who notably directed fixes toward High Health Impact populations in a 2009 Pedestrian study.

Supports: access for all users, reduced injury risk

“Environments impact health even more for those who do not drive.”

Invest in Public Awareness of the Benefits of Walking and Safe Behavior

A combination of media forms should promote walking, inform residents about walkable community events, highlight pedestrian projects, and praise the multiple benefits of walking.

Project and policy changes alone are not likely to change walking and driving behaviors in Champaign. Public awareness for walking is lacking in Champaign. Residents encounter many messages promoting automobile ownership and fast food restaurants, but rarely see those healthy behaviors or responsible citizenship.

Supports: a walking culture
A system of Wayfinding signs could direct pedestrians to parks, shopping areas, athletic facilities and cultural attractions. Wayfinding in Champaign could also distinguish neighborhoods and may also highlight historical buildings and schools. Wayfinding signage could be scaled for easy visibility for automobiles or pedestrians.

Pedestrians in Champaign currently lack directional cues to help them navigate and walk to destinations. Wayfinding would highlight existing connections and encourage residents and visitors to walk to destinations in the community.

Northfield, Minnesota’s wayfinding signage (pictured at left) was developed and installed in downtown and historic districts to highlight destinations and encourage exploration on foot.

Supports: connections to destinations, and a walking culture

“A comfortable walking routes should be identified throughout Champaign, and should be marked with signage.”

A year-round calendar of walk-friendly events should be prepared by highlighting existing events and adding a few more with the expressed purpose of promoting walking in Champaign. Events create an opportunity for people to socialize, celebrate walking/healthy habits, and build momentum for future investment in walkability. Events like the Taste of Champaign, Boneyard Arts festival, and CU Days already cater to the walking public and added events like a Walk to Work Day, Walks with the Mayor, Winter Walks, or Open Streets could be added to the schedule. Events were cited as a means to bolster Champaign’s walking culture.

The City of Riverside, CA invites residents to Walk with the Mayor events which occur six times per year. In Alberta, Canada 110,000 people participated in Winter Walk Day, registering and logging distance walked on February 5th of 2014.

Supports: a walking culture
Collaborate with decision-makers at Champaign Unit 4 schools to prioritize more CUSRTS programming and pedestrian infrastructure improvements near Champaign schools.

CUSRTS offers school-area planning support and funnels funding for infrastructure improvements. Safe routes also encourages walking and biking to school through a variety of programs. CUSRTS has successfully launched programs and mapped walking routes for all K-8 Urbana Public Schools, but not all schools in Champaign. While a relationship exists between CUSRTS, parents, the City, and Unit 4; it should be strengthened. In Champaign schools like South Side Elementary, stakeholders have shown high levels of commitment and found SRTS to be a great partner to promote safer trips to school.

Supports: access for all users, reduced injury risk, connections to destinations, and a walking culture

All arterial and collector streets, as well as bus routes and walking routes to major shopping destinations should be prioritized sidewalk gap infill projects. The Champaign Sidewalk Gap Program should be amended to focus on these corridors and address gaps longer than one block.

Busy corridors and bus routes in Champaign are not served by public sidewalks. Major streets like Springfield Avenue, Prospect Avenue, Neil Street, and approaches to interstates have significant gaps.

Facing a similar problem, the Portland Bureau of Transportation (Portland, Oregon) identified about ten miles of priority funded sidewalk infill projects with most sidewalk infill along arterial streets.

Supports: a complete & well-maintained network, access for all users, reduced injury risk, connections to destinations, and a walking culture
All arterial and collector streets, as well as bus routes, bridges and walking routes to major destinations should be prioritized for street light installation. Lighting should be installed to improve safety as budgets allow.

While Champaign’s adopted Manual of Practice for public infrastructure includes lighting standards for all streets and intersections, many areas of the community lack appropriate levels of lighting and some neighborhoods have almost no street lights. The strength of Champaign’s pedestrian network and health of its residents would be improved through prioritizing streetlight installation in these areas.

In other communities, like Salt Lake City, UT, Street Lighting Master Plans require developers to install street lighting in new projects and promote lighting upgrades during road reconstruction.

Supports: a complete & well-maintained network, access for all users, reduced injury risk, connections to destinations, and a walking culture

Install Streetlighting along High Demand Corridors

Installation of streetlighting along bridges and highway overpasses has been shown to significantly decrease risk of pedestrian-vehicle collisions.

Retrofit to Support Champaign’s Complete Streets Resolution

Champaign has funded complete streets improvements connecting to the community core, but would benefit the walking public by retrofitting community-wide.

Walk Champaign should create a list of potential complete streets application projects that may be implemented as future funding allows. The policy would be most appropriately applied to existing collector and minor arterial streets and would have the potential to improve safety and connectivity for the walking public. Resurfacing and reconstruction projects offer a cost-effective opportunity to implement complete streets designs.

Since Champaign only adopted complete streets via a 2008 declaration, there remains significant work to be done to accommodate the needs of all users.

Many communities prioritize and celebrate complete streets projects. Seattle, WA maintains a complete streets webpage that allows the public to keep tabs on complete streets projects that are underway.

Supports: a complete & well-maintained network, access for all users, reduced injury risk, connections to destinations, and a walking culture
Neighborhood destinations should be encouraged through land use plans and regulations. “Up-zoning” locations should be identified near some of Champaign’s most homogenous residential areas. Subdivision regulations could also be amended to require mixed-used development which would increase the number of destinations in new Champaign neighborhoods. Champaign Parks Department may also be a resource to increase the prevalence of small neighborhood parks, playgrounds, and plazas.

While Champaign has some great examples of neighborhood centers, development in recent decades has resulted in areas that are homogenous and scaled for automobiles rather than people.

**Colorado Springs, CO** addresses similar concerns through zoning revisions and distribution of a design manual with details and illustrations of the City’s adopted standards for mixed use.

**Supports:** access for all users, connections to destinations

Revise development standards to require a direct separated path for pedestrians to access destinations safely from the public right of way to the door. Major retail centers and subdivisions should have multiple connections to the pedestrian network to increase connectivity. Champaign’s current pedestrian connectivity requirements in urban neighborhood districts should be city-wide.

The City of Champaign’s standards for development require the creation of sidewalks along public rights or way, but lack requirements for connecting the development itself to Champaign’s pedestrian system. Subdivisions and commercial centers often lack logical connections for pedestrians.

Design standards have been adopted in **Austin, Texas** that promote safe pedestrian environments through regulating setbacks, sidewalk design, path connectivity, parking design, and shade.

**Supports:** a complete & well-maintained network, access for all users, reduced injury risk, connections to destinations, and a walking culture
Site-Specific Recommendations

Prioritizing for High Health Impact

The site recommendations that follow (S1-S9) reflect location-specific project ideas that were suggested throughout the interview (and electronic) conversations. Most of the site recommendations were specifically mentioned by multiple professionals. Other site projects are included here because they were recommended by one professional, but were found to support the project priorities of the group. For example, the connections to Hessel and Dodds Park were only explicitly mentioned once, but supported by several professionals who emphasized prioritizing connections to parks. While suggestions were parsed out of all question responses, the following two-part question yielded the most site specific responses.

Describe a pedestrian infrastructure project that would have the potential to improve walkability and promote health in Champaign. Where should the City invest for the greatest health impact?

While the project ideas are unique, they share many common characteristics. All projects identify a barrier to access and suggest a clear infrastructure fix. Several projects involve arterial improvements and all are located in high traffic areas. Each of the specific projects also contributes to several identified elements of a healthy pedestrian network.

**S1 Sidewalk Infill Between Dodds Park Trail and Mattis Avenue**

A sidewalk connection from Mattis Avenue into Dodds Park would promote physical activity on the trail system and promote access to recreational fields, a community garden, and Parkland College.

Construct a sidewalk connection between the Olympic Tribute and Laborers Memorial and the sidewalk along Mattis Avenue.

The large trail system that runs from Dodds Park to the Centennial neighborhood lacks a logical connection to Mattis Avenue. Pedestrians walking from the nearby Garden Hills neighborhood must either access Dodds Park and the nearby Eddie Albert Community Garden by automobile, or walk several hundred feet through grass /in a roadway that connects Mattis Avenue to Parkland College. The gap discourages active transportation and recreation and should be addressed via collaboration between the City of Champaign and the Champaign Park District.

Supports: a complete & well-maintained network, access for all users, reduced injury risk, and connections to destinations.
Create a mid-block crossing treatment with high visibility signage, lighting, and a pedestrian refuge island for this location. A well-designed crossing here would improve walking access to and from a major public recreational asset. A treatment here might also serve as an example for future mid-block crossing projects along Champaign arterial roads.

Hessel Park is part of a walkable neighborhood and is one of the most heavily trafficked parks in Champaign. The lack of a safe crossing at Kirby Avenue on the south end of the park results in many pedestrians dodging traffic and hurrying across the right of way. An apartment complex and transit stop located to the south of the park compound demand for a safer crossing. Current conditions are dangerous and may deter some people from using the park entirely.

Supports: a complete & well-maintained network, access for all users, reduced injury risk, connections to destinations

“Pedestrians should be welcomed to shopping areas and parks with complete, well-maintained sidewalks and safe, comfortable crossings.”

Construct sidewalks along both sides of Country Fair Drive to increase safe connectivity to destinations both the north and south of Country Fair Apartments. Create a midblock crossing with appropriate signage, lighting, and crosswalk paint to increase visibility for pedestrians crossing Country Fair Drive. Safe crossing between the apartments and the transit hub to the east would increase walkable access to both local and community destinations.

The Country Fair Drive area has a high number of multifamily residential units in close proximity to lots of destinations. Unfortunately, this part of Champaign was designed without requirements for sidewalks and connections to businesses and few pedestrian facilities exist.

Supports: a complete & well-maintained network, access for all users, reduced injury risk, connections to destinations
Reconstruct bridges and interchanges where Prospect Avenue and Neil Street cross I-74 to accommodate pedestrian and bicycles along with automobile traffic. Prioritize pedestrian and bicycle facilities on both sides of the bridge along with improved crossing treatments to reduce risk of injury for pedestrians at points of conflict with fast moving traffic.

The I-74 bridge overpasses at both Prospect Avenue and Neil Street only have sidewalks on their east sides and the existing sidewalks abut directly to the roadbed. Bridge approaches also have sidewalks on only one side, but evidence from clear “goat paths” indicates that pedestrians are walking along both sides of the right of way.

Supports: a complete & well-maintained network, access for all users, reduced injury risk, connections to destinations

Champaign should create a long-term improvement plan for railroad underpasses. Difficult underpasses like those at Green Street and St. Mary’s Road should be addressed first, while upgrades for other underpasses could be redesigned to move them from “good” to “great”.

The Canadian National Railroad raised line creates a barrier for east-west moving pedestrians and motorized traffic. The quality of these underpasses varies significantly. Some underpasses are inviting and safely separate pedestrians from traffic, while others are hazardous and unappealing.

Supports: a complete & well-maintained network, access for all users, reduced injury risk, connections to destinations
Complete a retrofit project to create a protective buffer between pedestrians and automobile traffic. Reduce curb cuts and minimize driveway conflicts to improve safety and comfort.

Professionals interviewed for this project noted that the entire north Prospect Avenue corridor presents challenges that should be addressed in the *Walk Champaign* plan. Pedestrian facilities on this stretch of Prospect Avenue are insufficient and dangerous. Sidewalk facilities along this portion of Prospect are immediately adjacent to the roadbed which offers pedestrians little protection from traffic and makes walking very uncomfortable.

**Supports:** a complete & well-maintained network, access for all users, reduced injury risk, connections to destinations

While sidewalks are present along Prospect Avenue, the corridor design discourages use from everyone except those who have no choice but to walk. Intersections are also uncomfortable and dangerous.

South Neil Street Sidewalk Gap Infill and Streetscape Improvements

Neil Street is an important commercial arterial and gateway corridor for both downtown and campustown but it has not been designed with walking in mind. Active transportation here is uncomfortable at best.

Construct sidewalks along the east side of Neil Street, improve pedestrian crossing treatments at intersections and add or widen tree-lined buffers between the sidewalk and the roadbed to protect pedestrians and discourage speeding.

The existing facilities on South Neil Street are either directly adjacent to the road or missing entirely. Improvements would increase access to many businesses and add elements of comfort and safety along a crucial Champaign corridor.

**Supports:** a complete & well-maintained network, access for all users, reduced injury risk, connections to destinations
Adopt a retrofit strategy for Bradley Avenue that includes redesign of the at-grade pedestrian railroad crossing, increased buffer zones, and improved crossing treatments. This stretch of Bradley is also a good candidate for a road diet and complete streets project.

The poor quality of the existing rail road crossing forces pedestrians pushing strollers or using mobility aides into the roadbed and the excessive width of traffic lanes increases speed and decreases safety.

Supports: a complete & well-maintained network, access for all users, reduced injury risk, connections to destinations

“A need a cultural change that privileges walkers over drivers. Walkers in Champaign-Urbana today may still feel like targets.”

A Sidewalk Gap infill project should be completed in this area to ensure that all public streets are outfitted with sidewalks on both sides of the street. Priority sidewalk gaps in the area include those along Neil Street, Town Center Boulevard, and Marketview Drive which serve as fundamental routes of connectivity in the area. Champaign should also partner with businesses to improve door to door pedestrian connectivity.

Marketplace Mall was cited by several professionals as an area of high pedestrian traffic that lacks pedestrian facilities. Champaign residents who travel to Marketplace Mall by foot or by bicycle will find that the existing infrastructure does not offer safe or comfortable passage to the numerous destinations in the area.

Supports: a complete & well-maintained network, access for all users, reduced injury risk, connections to destinations
Ease of Implementation

While each of the preceding recommendations represent important steps toward a healthier walking network in Champaign, some steps are more difficult to take than others. Several factors include infrastructure costs, jurisdictional boundaries, and perceived benefits for the community as a whole. The following summary of anticipated implementation needs should be valuable from a city planning and public works standpoint. As funding opportunities and partnerships allow, City officials can quickly identify projects that match the existing scope of resources. Each project is informally ranked relative to the others for ease of implementation on a scale from easiest to most difficult.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site Specific Recommendation</th>
<th>Anticipated Costs</th>
<th>Jurisdictions Involved</th>
<th>Anticipated Support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S1 Sidewalk Infill Between Dodds Park Trail and Mattis Avenue</td>
<td>Easiest</td>
<td>Low: 500+ feet of sidewalk</td>
<td>City of Champaign</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S2 Midblock Crossing at Kirby and Valley Road (Hessel Park)</td>
<td>Easiest</td>
<td>Low: Treatments include paint, flashing beacons, or refuge islands</td>
<td>City of Champaign</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S3 Country Fair Drive Sidewalk Gap Infill and Midblock Crossing</td>
<td>Moderately Easy</td>
<td>Medium: 2,600+ feet of sidewalk &amp; crossing treatment</td>
<td>City of Champaign</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S4 Interstate 74 Bridge and Interchange Improvements</td>
<td>Difficult</td>
<td>Very High: 4,000+ feet of sidewalk, crossing retrofits, &amp; reduced turning radii</td>
<td>City of Champaign, Illinois Department of Transportation</td>
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### Ease of Implementation (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site Specific Recommendation</th>
<th>Anticipated Costs</th>
<th>Jurisdictions Involved</th>
<th>Anticipated Support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>S5</strong> Canadian National Railroad Underpass Improvements</td>
<td>Difficult</td>
<td>High: Bridge repairs, lighting, sidewalks, drainage, streetscaping</td>
<td>City of Champaign</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>S6</strong> Prospect Avenue Retrofit between Bradley and Bloomington</td>
<td>Most Difficult</td>
<td>Very High: sidewalk &amp; buffer improvements, reduced curb cuts &amp; crossing redesign</td>
<td>City of Champaign</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>S7</strong> South Neil Sidewalk Gap Infill and Streetscape Improvements</td>
<td>Most Difficult</td>
<td>Very High: 3,000+ feet of sidewalk, sidewalk &amp; buffer improvements &amp; crossing redesign</td>
<td>City of Champaign</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>S8</strong> Bradley Avenue Retrofit between Neil and Carver</td>
<td>Difficult</td>
<td>Medium: railroad crossing improvements, sidewalk buffers, and intersection redesign</td>
<td>City of Champaign</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>S9</strong> Sidewalk Gap Infill Project for the Greater Marketplace Mall Area</td>
<td>Difficult</td>
<td>Very High: Several thousand feet of sidewalk installation</td>
<td>City of Champaign</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Build on this Process

Of the 32 individuals that were asked to participate in this project, 20 took the time to share their responses. The high response rate suggests that professionals in health-related fields in Champaign-Urbana are interested (on the whole) in contributing to the planning dialogue for Walk Champaign. The conversation started by this project may serve as an example for future Champaign planning processes. Health impacts of development decisions are clear and the need for future collaboration between planning and community health fields is great.

Keep Asking Questions

The ten questions that were asked to all respondents are listed at the right. The open ended nature of the questions produced a wide variety of responses. While these questions were appropriate for aggregating a vision for a healthy walking network, they did not request input on the health impact of specific proposals. Future Champaign plan processes could seek health professionals’ perspectives for both broad and location specific proposals.

Incorporate Health Data

This project was qualitative in nature, gathering well-informed opinions from individuals who work in health related fields. Spatial analysis of Champaign neighborhoods could quantify the quality of the built environment and determine the distribution of chronic conditions that are impacted by walking and physical activity. Incorporating existing health data into decision processes could help Champaign target projects for greater health impact.

1. Why does the quality of a walking environment matter for community health?

2. Whose health is impacted by walkability? Are some groups of people more impacted than others?

3. Pedestrian Plans have proliferated across the country in the last 10 years. Is this a fad, or will walkability remain important ten years from now? 30 years from now?

4. Safety of pedestrians is a major health priority and perceived safety is crucial for getting more people walking. What do you see as Champaign’s greatest obstacle (s) in achieving a safe pedestrian environment?

5. Apart from pedestrian safety, what do you believe are the necessary characteristics of a walkable neighborhood?

6. Most Champaign neighborhoods present many challenges for the walking public. Do you believe it possible to retrofit unwelcoming environments to encourage walking in the future? Explain.

7. How can Champaign increase its mode share of walkers who commute to work or school on foot?

8. How can Champaign increase the number of people who walk for exercise, fresh air, to shop, dine, get out with the kids/dog?

9. Describe a pedestrian infrastructure project that would have the potential to improve walkability and promote health in Champaign. Where should the City invest for the greatest health impact?

10. What policies or programs should the City of Champaign adopt / implement in order to promote pedestrian activity in our community?