

# Evolution Series

*Twenty years of health equity innovation*

## Economic Justice

# New Partnerships for Healthier Neighborhoods



Bay Area Regional Health  
Inequities Initiative



# New Partnerships for Healthier Neighborhoods

Bringing Public Health and Redevelopment Together



## **Acknowledgments**

In October 2009, Public Health Law & Policy (PHLP) and the Bay Area Regional Health Inequities Initiative (BARHII) convened staff from redevelopment and public health agencies in the San Francisco Bay Area to explore the basis and potential for collaboration. This report collects observations and recommendations that emerged from that meeting, which drew representatives from the following agencies:

Alameda County Public Health Department  
San Francisco Department of Public Health  
City and County of San Francisco Redevelopment Agency  
City of Oakland, Community and Economic Development Agency  
Contra Costa Health Services  
Contra Costa County Department of Conservation & Development  
County of San Mateo Health System  
San Jose Redevelopment Agency  
Santa Clara County Public Health Department  
The California Endowment  
The San Francisco Foundation  
Kaiser Permanente

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PHLP is a nonprofit organization that provides legal information on matters relating to public health. The legal information provided in this document does not constitute legal advice or legal representation. For legal advice, readers should contact a lawyer in their state.

BARHII is dedicated to transforming public health practice to eliminate health inequities using broad approaches to and create healthy communities. This resource is a product of the built environment committee.

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# Executive Summary

The built environment – the physical structures that make up the areas where we live, work, and play – has a profound effect on our health. The neighborhoods with the worst health outcomes are home to the poorest residents and often lack basic amenities (like grocery stores, pharmacies, and banks), have fewer parks, and experience higher crime rates.

In recent years, public health practitioners – concerned with escalating rates of chronic disease – have begun partnering with colleagues in planning and transportation agencies to work to reverse these trends. A few innovative health departments have also initiated partnerships with redevelopment agencies: unlike land use or transportation planning staff, redevelopment agencies have a specific mandate to work in low-income or “blighted” areas.

To explore lessons learned from these collaborations and identify the potential for future work, Public Health Law & Policy and the Bay Area Regional Health Inequities Initiative (with support from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation) convened staff from several of the Bay Area’s redevelopment and public health agencies in October 2009 for a roundtable in Oakland, California. This report collects observations and recommendations that emerged during that meeting, and explores the rationale and potential for public health departments and redevelopment agencies to work together more widely.

The key learning and recommendations from this convening extend far beyond the Bay Area to communities across the country. While redevelopment law will vary from state to state, the basic concepts and scopes of engagement apply nationwide. Readers outside California should embrace the findings of the report and work within the redevelopment law in their state to promote public health goals.

By virtue of the resources commanded by public health departments and redevelopment agencies, a collaboration harbors huge potential for mutual benefit and community health improvement, especially in low-income neighborhoods.

**Redevelopment agencies** can leverage their unique powers and financing sources to improve health outcomes by:

- **Ensuring that community participation and input** is central to the process of establishing redevelopment goals and priority projects
- **Making health impacts explicit during the planning phase**, using potential health benefits and concerns to inform the decision-making process

“I am struck by the level and intensity of alignment of what redevelopment and public health do. It’s the world’s best-kept secret.”

– Jim Kennedy, Director, Contra Costa County  
Redevelopment Agency, Immediate Past President,  
California Redevelopment Association

- **Coordinating public agencies citywide**, including public health departments, to ensure that joint strategies for redevelopment areas are pursued
- **Educating residents and partners about specific design interventions that benefit community health** and ensuring that new projects contain these features

**Public health departments** can support redevelopment agency work by:

- **Using data** to illustrate community health benefits of redevelopment strategies (such as density, traffic calming, and parking requirements) to build wider support
- **Organizing residents** to participate in the redevelopment process, ensuring the sustained community engagement that is essential to the success of a redevelopment project
- **Working to incorporate public health goals into redevelopment plans and five-year updates** by participating in resident committees, commenting on plans, co-writing environmental review documents, and building political will to support redevelopment plans that advance public health in the neighborhood
- **Partnering in implementation**, include fundraising to implement priority projects and analyzing and monitoring the health impacts of redevelopment decisions

Working together, redevelopment agencies and public health departments can overcome their own institutional challenges and advance efforts to improve community health. This report offers recommendations to create and support a closer partnership.



Photo by Tim Wagner for HEAC

# Introduction

Evidence strongly suggests that our neighborhoods play a key role in determining our health. In the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area, for example, people who live in poor neighborhoods can expect to live on average ten years less than those who live in affluent neighborhoods.<sup>1</sup>

Neighborhoods with the worst health outcomes tend to lack full-service grocery stores, featuring a proliferation of fast food and liquor stores instead. They typically also have unreliable or inadequate public transportation, limited access to open space, and higher crime rates. All of these conditions put residents, who tend to be disproportionately low-income people of color, at higher risk for preventable diseases such as heart disease, cancer, stroke, diabetes, asthma, alcohol, and drug abuse.

To address these persistent health inequities, public health advocates are increasingly calling for changes to the built environment, arguing that these physical changes – making streets safer and more attractive, creating parks, attracting grocery stores, building compact and transit-oriented housing, and creating mixed-income, mixed-use communities without displacing residents – are essential building blocks to community health.

Public health departments possess many technical tools and resources to support neighborhood improvement efforts, but they rarely have the necessary funding and real estate expertise to fully realize these goals. Redevelopment agencies, however, have the legal authority, financing tools, and expertise to revitalize neighborhoods designated as redevelopment areas.

Many neighborhoods with the greatest health inequities are located in redevelopment areas. In these neighborhoods, state law makes unique tools and financing sources available to redevelopment agencies to revitalize neighborhoods and stimulate economic activity. A more integrated partnership between public health and redevelopment agencies holds great potential for successful, sustained results.

This report provides an overview of how public health departments and redevelopment agencies can improve health in the most vulnerable neighborhoods while protecting against displacement and gentrification. The recommendations in this report draw from the dialogue among representatives

“Our combined task is to create examples of how to do it well so the old legacies will no longer define the community’s perception of redevelopment.”

– Wendel Brunner, Public Health Director,  
Contra Costa County

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<sup>1</sup> Bay Area Regional Health Inequities Initiative. *Health Inequities in the Bay Area*. 2008, p. 13. Available at: [www.barhii.org/press/download/barhii\\_report08.pdf](http://www.barhii.org/press/download/barhii_report08.pdf); see also, Alameda County Public Health Department. *Life and Death from Unnatural Causes: Health and Social Inequity in Alameda County*. 2008. Available at: [www.acphd.gov](http://www.acphd.gov).



of the Bay Area's public health and redevelopment agencies at a roundtable that took place in October 2009 in Oakland, California. The report draws on innovative interagency collaborations that are already under way to highlight best practices for future work. Finally, this report proposes a set of recommendations for creating partnerships that advance public health, create economic opportunity, and improve residents' quality of life.



# Redevelopment: A Resource for Creating Healthy Communities

Redevelopment agencies plan and finance a range of physical improvement and economic development projects, from improving street safety to developing space for retail, housing, and recreation. Many of these projects are also essential to improving community health.

The premise of redevelopment is that certain urban neighborhoods experience “blight,” or conditions that prevent an area’s economic potential from being realized. Redevelopment agencies create plans to eliminate blight and revitalize neighborhoods by using particular financing tools, incentives, and public-private partnerships. Though typically staffed by city or county personnel, redevelopment agencies are independent state agencies with legal authority and financing mechanisms that are not otherwise available to cities and counties.

The California Community Redevelopment Law, the state law that establishes the tools of redevelopment, is contained in the state’s Health and Safety Code.<sup>2</sup> The law outlines the requirements for establishing redevelopment areas, administering funds, and engaging citizens in the process.

Most state and federal laws limit redevelopment activities to communities that meet the statutory definition of *blight*. California’s definition encompasses a significant number of community health hazards: unsafe or unhealthy buildings; incompatible land uses; lack of commercial facilities (including grocery stores); excess of bars, liquor stores, and adult-oriented businesses; residential overcrowding; and high crime rates. But the law does not require redevelopment agencies to consider health outcomes when determining neighborhood priorities – the impact of redevelopment investment is measured, instead, by increased tax revenues that result from community improvements made by redevelopment agencies.

“Although redevelopment law is part of the Health and Safety Code, there is no accountability for making investments that improve community health.”

– *Rajiv Bhatia, Director of Environmental Health, San Francisco Department of Public Health*

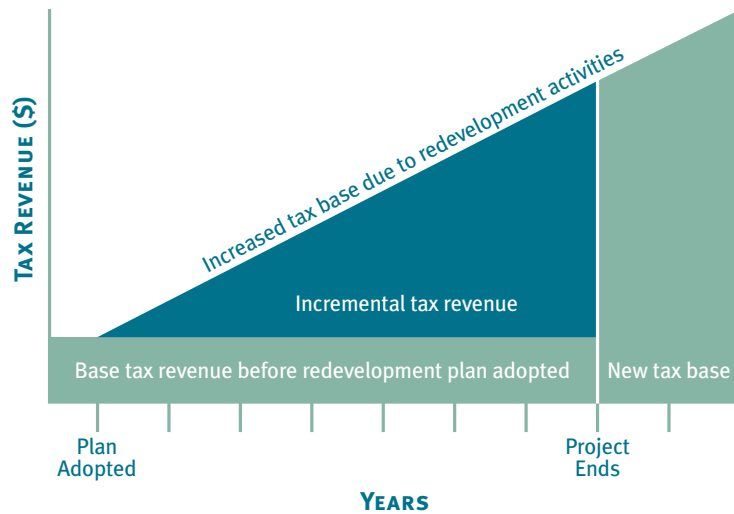
## Redevelopment Tools

Redevelopment agencies hold powerful tools for community revitalization. Plans for how these tools will be used are typically developed with input from community residents.

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<sup>2</sup> Please note that while redevelopment law varies from state to state, the basic tools are similar nationwide. Contact PHLP for assistance to understand redevelopment law in your state. Visit [www.healthplanning.org](http://www.healthplanning.org).

## Tax Increment Financing



Redevelopment agencies have budgets and income streams that are separate from those of the city or county. They issue their own bonds and pay them back by collecting any increase (or increment) in property taxes generated in the redevelopment area over the life of the plan. These funds can be used to provide loans or grants, acquire or assemble land, and improve infrastructure.

## Land Acquisition

Redevelopment agencies can purchase land, assemble small parcels into larger sites, and develop it with partners or sell it to others to develop. This tool is particularly important for large-scale projects such as full-service grocery stores, housing, and mixed-use developments.

## Eminent Domain

Redevelopment agencies have the power to take land from private property owners in exchange for “just compensation” as long as it is used for the “public good” or a “legitimate public purpose.” This power has led to significant controversy, and private land owners have contested what public purpose is being served when their property is subjected to eminent domain. Courts have debated exactly what counts as a “public good” and have allowed a broad definition, which includes both *public use* (such as schools, highways, and public transit) as well as private development that contributes



Oakland Cultural Heritage Survey: Oakland City Planning Department

towards some other *public purpose* like new jobs or economic development (such as a new sports stadium or a grocery store). As a response to public anger over perceived eminent domain abuses, some states and localities have enacted laws that limit the power of eminent domain. Many California redevelopment areas, such as the Bayview redevelopment area in San Francisco, have adopted policies that prohibit the use of eminent domain on residential properties.

## Redevelopment Activities

Redevelopment agencies carry out their mission through a number of activities that provide the funding, technical expertise, and partnerships necessary for community revitalization.

**Fund development projects.** Redevelopment agencies can acquire land, assemble parcels, and provide loans to build new mixed-use, commercial, or residential buildings.

**Establish design guidelines or other development standards for projects that use redevelopment funds.** Standards may include healthy development criteria (such as requirements for walkability and mixed-use development), environmental sustainability requirements, labor standards, and affordable housing requirements.

**Fund the construction of community amenities.** Examples include parks, streetscape improvements, storefront/façade improvements, and parking garages.

**Fund safety initiatives.** Examples include community-based safety programs, clean-up efforts, and increased police presence in redevelopment neighborhoods.

**Negotiate community benefits agreements.** Redevelopment agencies can negotiate legally binding agreements with developers to provide benefits such as parks, funding for cultural events, or workforce development.

**Provide grants to community-based organizations.** Redevelopment agencies fund nonprofits to offer business technical assistance, workforce development, and other support to implement goals outlined in the redevelopment plan.

**Partner with city agencies and community organizations.** Redevelopment funds, while substantial, are not always enough to achieve everything in a redevelopment plan. Redevelopment agencies must partner with other city agencies and nonprofits to carry out priority projects. Redevelopment agencies commonly use federal Community Development Block Grant funds, the city's general funds, elected officials' discretionary funds, philanthropic funds, and nonprofit loan sources, depending on the project.

### *A Voice in the Process*

*The San Jose Redevelopment Agency (SJRA) has gone above and beyond the legal requirements for resident input. In response to residents' demands that the agency focus more resources on neighborhood needs, the Strong Neighborhoods Initiative was developed in 2002 to bring residents, business leaders, and elected officials together to identify community priorities. SJRA funded the development of a community-driven plan for each neighborhood and adopted those plans as redevelopment priorities. Many redevelopment agencies see community engagement as a lengthy, potentially messy process – but the San Jose experience has shown that when the community chooses redevelopment projects itself, those projects get done faster and less expensively with broader levels of support. (For more information on the Strong Neighborhood Initiative, see “San Jose: A Voice in the Process,” a podcast from PHLP, available at [www.healthypplanning.org](http://www.healthypplanning.org).)*

## Residents' Role

While redevelopment tools can be leveraged for positive community change, many residents and advocates are skeptical, given the troubled history of urban renewal. Before citizen engagement became a legal requirement of the process,

redevelopment agencies razed many once-vibrant neighborhoods and neighborhood-serving business districts in the name of economic progress. What resulted was not revitalization but widespread relocation, severed community ties, and decades of disinvestment.

Partly in response to public outcry, California has adopted a number of citizen oversight and community engagement requirements for the redevelopment process.<sup>3</sup> Since 1972 redevelopment project areas have been required to have either a project area committee (PAC) or a community advisory

committee (CAC). PACs are required when the redevelopment plan calls for use of eminent domain or if the project area includes a concentration of low-income households; otherwise, a CAC is formed. PAC members – project area residents, businesspeople and community organization representatives – help create and implement the redevelopment plan, approve the budget, approve or reject real estate development proposals within the project area, and provide overall guidance on redevelopment activities. CACs are appointed by elected officials and play a more limited, advisory role.

The level of community engagement that PACs and CACs facilitate – either by themselves or through partnerships with other local organizations – varies significantly from one redevelopment agency to the next. Many community members face time constraints, daycare needs, language barriers, lack of expertise on built environment issues, and other barriers to engaging in the redevelopment process. The

structure of the outreach process and meetings can help to ensure that the most vulnerable residents' voices are heard.

For more details about the redevelopment process and how public health advocates can get involved, see [www.healthyplanning.org](http://www.healthyplanning.org).



Photo by Tim Wagner for HEAC

“People should be involved in the decisions that impact their lives. When you ask communities what they want, they want public health infrastructure – even if they wouldn’t call it that.”

– Kip Harkness, Senior Project Manager,  
San Jose Redevelopment Agency

<sup>3</sup> Contact PHLP for more information about legal requirements for resident involvement in your state. Visit [www.healthyplanning.org](http://www.healthyplanning.org).

# Elements of a Healthy Community

The infrastructure of a healthy community includes elements of the built environment that promote residents' health. The California Department of Public Health has drafted the following list of key elements of a healthy community:<sup>4</sup>

## 1. Meets Basic Needs of All

- Safe, sustainable, accessible and affordable transportation options
- Accessible and nutritious healthy foods
- Affordable, high-quality, socially integrated and location-efficient housing<sup>5</sup>
- Affordable, high-quality health care
- Complete and livable communities including affordable and high quality schools, parks and recreational facilities, childcare, libraries, financial services, and other daily needs

## 2. Quality and Sustainability of Environment

- Clean air, soil, and water, and environments free of excessive noise
- Tobacco- and smoke-free environments
- Preserved natural and open spaces, including agricultural lands
- Minimized waste, toxics, and greenhouse gas emissions
- Affordable and sustainable energy use

## 3. Adequate Levels of Economic, Social Development

- Living wage, safe and healthy job opportunities for all
- Support for healthy development of children and adolescents
- Opportunities for high quality and accessible education
- Health and social equity

## 4. Supportive and Respectful Social Relationships

- Robust social and civic engagement
- Socially cohesive and supportive relationships, families, homes, and neighborhoods
- Safe communities, free of crime and violence

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<sup>4</sup> Linda Rudolph, MD, MPH. *Chief Deputy and Director, Center for Chronic Disease, Injury Prevention and Health Promotion, California Department of Public Health*. Draft distributed for review at January 15, 2010 meeting of the Bay Area Regional Health Inequities Initiative ([www.barhii.org](http://www.barhii.org)).

<sup>5</sup> "Location-efficient housing" refers to residential and commercial housing designed to maximize accessibility and affordability by promoting walkability, mixed-use, and infill development.

Most redevelopment agencies are building some aspects of this infrastructure but not explicitly focusing on health outcomes. Much more can be done through redevelopment planning to realize all of these elements and establish a true community health infrastructure.

Increasingly, innovative redevelopment agencies are partnering with public health to understand the health data, identify the most pressing needs, set joint goals, and prioritize the most relevant activities to achieve those goals in their particular community. What follows is a more detailed vision of what a healthy community would look like, expanding on each of the elements identified above. Activities that redevelopment agencies can engage in to advance community health infrastructure are emphasized in *italics*.

## 1. Meets Basic Needs of All

### ▪ Safe, Sustainable, Accessible and Affordable Transportation Options

Living in auto-oriented, single-use areas contributes to respiratory illness, obesity, social isolation, and other health problems. People living in highly walkable, mixed-use communities are more likely to meet recommended guidelines for daily physical activity.

#### **Complete Streets**

Complete streets provide people with a range of safe choices for getting around their communities, including walking and biking. Complete streets are typically achieved through a range of physical interventions, such as traffic-calming measures, safe crossings for pedestrians, and well-placed bike lanes.



*Redevelopment agencies can adopt complete street guidelines and ensure that all new developments support complete street goals. To ensure that these guidelines are implemented, agencies can partner with their local traffic and public works department to agree on a set of protocols for street design.*

#### **Quality, Accessible Public Transit**

Quality public transit allows residents to meet daily needs without owning a car. Reduced car use contributes to increased physical activity, improved air and water quality, and

fewer pedestrian injuries. It also promotes a more compact form of development and allows land to be used for community-serving purposes instead of parking or roads.

*Redevelopment agencies can advocate to transit agencies for improvements to existing transit routes, facilitate integrated planning with transit agencies, and help to secure outside funds for community engagement or developing features to make transit more appealing (such as attractive bus shelters).*

### **Transit-Oriented Development**

Buildings near public transit facilitate safe and easy connections to transit stops and adjacent commercial areas. Residential density in transit corridors supports viable public transportation options. Transit stops that are safe, well lit, and visible from nearby locations can make residents more willing to take public transit. Ground-floor retail spaces near transit stops that feature transit-supportive uses, such as a café or newsstand, create a more active and safe environment.

*Redevelopment agencies can adopt transit-oriented development guidelines for development projects of any size that utilize redevelopment funds to create more transit-friendly urban fabric.*

### ■ Accessible and Nutritious Healthy Foods

Residents have healthy diets because they are able to purchase affordable, fresh, culturally appropriate food near their homes. An attractive and inviting grocery store is located nearby with easy access by foot or public transit. The neighborhood also offers other opportunities for residents to conveniently purchase healthy food, such as farmers' markets, small green grocers, mobile produce vendors, and community supported agriculture programs. Restaurants provide affordable and healthy meal options. Residents and school children have the opportunity to grow their own food through community gardens or farms.



Photo by Anwyn Hurxthal

*Redevelopments agencies can engage in a range of strategies to improve healthy food access. For grocery stores, redevelopment agencies can support the development process from market studies and site analysis through site acquisition and construction of community amenities once a project is complete. Redevelopment agencies can work closely with the neighborhood to develop consensus on criteria essential for community support; building consensus in advance removes some of the perceived risk to developers that could make the difference in a project's feasibility. Sometimes these requirements may be formalized into a community benefits agreement. With a similar objective,*



*redevelopment agencies can work with other city agencies to reduce the steps in the permitting and entitlement process (the legal method of obtaining approvals for the right to develop property for a desired use).*

*Agencies can also fund a variety of other projects to increase the accessibility of healthy food – for instance, providing funds and technical assistance to improve existing food stores, and providing land and funds for farmers’ market, urban agriculture, and community garden projects. Redevelopment agencies can coordinate with other city agencies, particularly with economic development, to maximize the resources and political support necessary to achieve healthy food goals.*

- **Affordable, High-Quality, Socially Integrated and Location-Efficient Housing**

A range of housing options (including unit size, affordability, and ownership options) support the development of a culturally rich, mixed-income community. Housing types reflect the demographics and family composition in the neighborhood, including options for multi-generational families to live together. New buildings are designed to create healthy indoor environments, efficiently use resources, and generate minimal environmental impacts.

Mixed-use and transit-oriented housing in commercial districts include well-designed commercial spaces that feature neighborhood-oriented businesses and services. Housing is connected to transit and neighborhood destinations through safe and attractive walking and biking routes. Community members have influence over the development process so that it reflects the identity, character, and diversity of the neighborhood.

*Redevelopment agencies can establish long-term affordable rental housing and homeownership opportunities, foreclosure prevention and homeownership counseling, and employment development programs such as job readiness, training, and placement to enable long-term residents to stay in the neighborhood. Through the Affordable Housing Set Aside, California redevelopment agencies must dedicate 20 percent of tax increment funds (see page 6) to affordable housing projects. Redevelopment agencies can use these funds to acquire land, and partner with private and nonprofit developers to build housing.*

*In communities with aging public housing projects, the agencies can work with the local housing authority to rehabilitate or replace outdated structures with new buildings and amenities that better meet residents’ needs. Redevelopment agencies can ensure that residents and the community at large are involved in the design, its configuration on the site, the connection to the surrounding neighborhood, and the phasing of the projects.*

- **Affordable, High-Quality Health Care**

Affordable health care facilities are available within the community and include a full range of services. Access to preventive and primary care is a critical component of an overall strategy for community well-being.

*Redevelopment agencies may assemble land, provide loans, and contribute funds to help develop health care facilities. Agencies can also offer health care providers affordable and long-term leases in spaces that redevelopment agencies own, or convince other agencies to do the same. Redevelopment agencies can also work with transit agencies to ensure convenient physical access to facilities.*

- **Complete and Livable Communities**

Residents have access to affordable and high-quality schools, parks and recreational facilities, childcare, libraries, and financial services within their neighborhood.

## 2. Quality and Sustainability of Environment

Decisions about the location of certain land uses, land use mix and intensity, transportation investments, and design and building guidelines all play a role in environmental health.

- **Clean Air, Soil, and Water, and Environments Free of Excessive Noise**

Community residents live in environments free of toxic contamination, healthy and able to thrive. The air outside is safe to breathe, and housing, schools, and community spaces have safe and healthy indoor air. Industry is responsible and takes measures to ensure minimal impact on local residents, and residential neighborhoods are free of illegal dumping and commercial truck traffic. Existing neighborhood brownfields are slated for remediation. New development considers environmental conditions and takes appropriate remediation or mitigation strategies.

*Redevelopment agencies can require clean-air and other environmental standards for the construction process of new buildings in redevelopment areas. Agencies can also apply for funds for brownfield remediation and can partner with the Environmental Protection Agency and other organizations to support a neighborhood's funding application. If additional barriers exist to environmental remediation in key sites, redevelopment agencies can partner with cities to create unique funding pools, such as revolving loan funds, or creatively address long-term liability concerns.*



- **Tobacco- and Smoke-Free Environments**

Local residents are protected from the harmful effects of secondhand smoke. Children attend school and play in neighborhoods where tobacco retailers do not proliferate.

*Redevelopment agencies can work with the local planning department to require a local tobacco retailer license as a way to ensure compliance with local business standards, to reduce youth access to tobacco, and to limit the negative public health effects associated with tobacco use. Local policies can require that new tobacco retailers be located away from areas frequented by children (e.g., schools, playgrounds, video arcades), restrict new significant tobacco retailers to light industrial or industrial use zones, and limit the total number of tobacco retailers in any community or their proximity to each other. If a city or county determines that a community already has sufficient outlets for tobacco products, the local government can prohibit new retailers from opening. Finally, redevelopment agencies can require any new multi-unit housing built with redevelopment funds to be smoke-free.*



- **Preserved Natural and Open Spaces, Including Agricultural Lands**

The neighborhood has a network of parks, open spaces, and trails that provide residents of all ages with opportunities for physical activity. Parks are safe, well lit, well maintained, and designed to foster community. Trails provide safe ways for people of all ages and abilities to connect to neighborhood destinations such as schools, parks, and business districts. The community plays a formative role in determining park design and programming to ensure that the types of activities and facilities are culturally relevant and meet their needs.

*Redevelopment agencies can build parks, require parks and open space in new development projects, and retrofit existing parks to meet the recreation and safety needs of the community. Safety in public spaces can also be supported through the use of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles such as limiting access and increasing natural surveillance (sometimes called “eyes on the street”). In some communities, agencies can also partner with other city agencies and philanthropic and community-based organizations to ensure that completed parks are adequately monitored and maintained.*

- **Minimized Waste, Toxics, and Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Affordable and Sustainable Energy Use**

Buildings in the neighborhood are designed to promote walkability and environmental sustainability. Where possible, brownfields are cleaned up and prepared for productive use. All buildings are placed on the site in a way that respects the natural landscape, solar, and wind patterns. Buildings

are easy to maintain and are built using green building materials, where possible. New buildings provide safe and clear connections within the development as well as to nearby destinations. Sustainable materials are utilized, where possible, and systems are in place to ensure healthy indoor environments.

*Because redevelopment agencies focus their efforts in urban areas, many are involved in infill and brownfield development projects. Redevelopment agencies can identify sites in need of clean-up, work with state and federal agencies to finance the costs of clean-up, and prepare sites for reuse. Redevelopment agencies can adopt design guidelines for new developments in the redevelopment area, and establish design review subcommittees to provide education about elements of good design that support environmental sustainability. Redevelopment agencies can also provide incentives for developers to install indoor air quality control measures or adopt green building principles.*

### 3. Adequate Levels of Economic, Social Development

Access to high-quality employment opportunities tends to increase equality in income and wealth. Similarly, access to high-quality educational institutions for children and adult learners is highly correlated with positive community health outcomes.

- **Living Wage, Safe and Healthy Job Opportunities for All**

Residents of the redevelopment project area have access to jobs offering a wage sufficient to provide for basic needs, including housing, food, utilities, transport, and health care.

*Redevelopment agencies can set local hiring goals and require developers to offer a living wage. Private sector job creation is a major goal for redevelopment agencies. Effort to create new jobs can be coupled with workforce development programs.*

- **Support for Healthy Development of Children and Adolescents and**

- **Opportunities for High-Quality and Accessible Education**

**Schools:** Schools are located in the neighborhood and act as a centerpiece of the community. Students learn about healthy living and are served healthy food in the cafeterias and vending machines on campus. Strong graduation rates for high school students contribute to longer life spans.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> *Overcoming Obstacles to Health.* Report from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation to the Commission to Build a Healthier America, February 2008. Available at: [www.commissiononhealth.org/PDF/ObstaclesToHealth-Report.pdf](http://www.commissiononhealth.org/PDF/ObstaclesToHealth-Report.pdf).

**Joint use of school facilities:** In many instances, the school serves as the center of the community, and its facilities and grounds are shared with other community services, such as a health center, library, community garden, job training programs for parents, or senior activities. Joint use of schools for a wider range of community activities supports healthy children and families, and ensures that public facilities and funds are most efficiently utilized.



*Although redevelopment agencies cannot invest directly in education, they can partner with schools to support the construction of new schools or contribute funds for historic preservation of schools. Redevelopment agencies and schools can use joint use agreements to share the cost of school construction.<sup>7</sup> Agencies can advocate for new school buildings that adhere to community design and health guidelines, and ensure that those schools are connected to the neighborhood fabric.*

- **Health and Social Equity**

The root causes of health inequities are systematically addressed through investments in community health infrastructure. Residents' rates of disease, health outcomes, and access to health care are no longer associated with factors in the built environment.

#### 4. Supportive and Respectful Social Relationships

Elements of the physical environment can facilitate the social connections that are correlated with lower stress and better health. Good physical design is also critical to reducing crime.

- **Robust Social and Civic Engagement**

Residents are educated about the planning and development processes that affect their neighborhood's future, including land use, economic development and redevelopment. Community members work together to build consensus on key priorities and ensure that their needs are realized.

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<sup>7</sup> For more information about creating joint use agreements, see "Opening School Grounds to the Community After Hours," a toolkit from Public Health Law & Policy. Available at: [www.healthyplanning.org](http://www.healthyplanning.org); See also National Policy & Legal Analysis Network to Prevent Childhood Obesity (NPLAN). "Model Joint Use Agreement Resources." Available at: [www.nplan.org](http://www.nplan.org).

Residents and local businesses actively participate in activities to shape the neighborhood's future, including participating on local boards and steering committees.

*Redevelopment agencies can train their staff on meeting facilitation techniques and promote awareness of the power dynamics inherent in the redevelopment process. They can create inviting meetings featuring multiple formats for community participation; they can ensure that people feel safe to participate by establishing basic ground rules. Redevelopment agencies can also partner with community-based organizations to conduct culturally appropriate outreach, education, and organizing efforts. Redevelopment agencies may also encourage organizational coordination in redevelopment areas to reduce the burden of residents to participate in multiple community engagement processes.*

- **Socially Cohesive and Supportive Relationships, Families, Homes, and Neighborhoods**

Residents, merchants, and cultural institutions retain long-term tenure in the neighborhood. Longtime business owners are offered targeted programs and services so they can benefit from reinvestment in the redevelopment project area. Healthy neighborhoods feature a thriving commercial district that provides places for residents to find goods and services, earn their livelihood as business owners and employees, access cultural and social resources, and meet and mix with their neighbors. A vibrant commercial district encourages walking by providing a safe, attractive destination.

*Redevelopment agencies can support commercial district stabilization and revitalization by ensuring that community members and merchants provide input in the redevelopment plan. Agencies can provide financial, technical, and other support to existing retailers and can help arts and cultural institutions gain long-term tenure of their facilities. During the implementation phase, agencies can fund an organization to oversee a commercial district revitalization program or the effort to establish a Business Improvement/Community Benefits District. Redevelopment agencies can also provide funds for targeted interventions such as façade improvements (and other investments in retail infrastructure), business technical assistance, promotional material development, and the creation of attractive streetscapes. Finally, they can assemble land and provide funds to develop underutilized sites along a commercial district.*

- **Safe Communities, Free of Crime and Violence**

Community design promotes safety by minimizing danger to pedestrians and reducing opportunities for crime and violence. Residents of all ages are able to walk and bike throughout the community, thanks to curb extensions (known as bulb-outs), special pavement treatment (such as

using paint, lighting, or textured construction materials to enhance the visibility of crosswalks), street trees, and other pedestrian safety and traffic calming measures. These measures are particularly concentrated where pedestrian traffic is likely to be high, such as near parks, schools, and commercial districts. The Safe Routes to School program enables children to travel safely from their homes to schools and after-school activities. Communities see an integrated mix of land uses and income levels: poor people and people of color are no longer residentially segregated, and gangs are less compelling as a way to endure social separation.

Buildings, stores, parks, and community facilities are designed using Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles, creating “eyes on the street” that create natural surveillance to deter criminal activity. Active storefronts and well-used properties provide few opportunities for illegal activities. After-school activities and employment programs provide young people with productive activities. An engaged and responsive police force partners with residents and employs community policing techniques to create a crime-free neighborhood. All of these factors enable residents to walk and play in neighborhoods without fear of crime.

*Redevelopment agencies can adopt CPTED design principles for all projects that receive their funds and complete CPTED analysis for future plans as part of the design review process. In addition, they can provide funds for surveillance systems, police officers, or for community organizations to implement community safety activities.*

# Agency Partnerships: Assets, Challenges, and Roles

Partnerships between public health and redevelopment agencies can introduce new funding sources, technical tools, and fields of expertise to each agency's work. While both agencies bring many assets to the process of creating healthy communities, they also face particular challenges. This section explores some of these assets and challenges, outlining the roles each agency can play in a public health/redevelopment collaboration.

## Public Health Departments

### Public Health Assets

Public health departments use data on neighborhood health to help guide public policy. These data are extremely helpful in raising awareness of the close connection between the built environment and public health, and in providing a quantifiable method for assessing impact. As such, the data are generally utilized during the development process or during planning efforts, such as the update of a general plan, that govern the city or county for years. In San Francisco, which pioneered the use of a Healthy Development Measurement Tool, the health department developed stand-alone indicators for environmental stewardship, sustainable and safe transportation, social cohesion, access to goods and services, adequate and healthy housing, and more.<sup>8</sup> Public health agencies can adapt this tool using local data to bolster support for projects that improve community health infrastructure.

Public health departments are also trying to improve their own capacity to help organize and mobilize local communities. Staff work with a variety of traditional and non-traditional allies, including non-profit organizations, community constituents, and neighborhood coalitions. While public health departments, like redevelopment agencies, are public institutions trying to work in neighborhoods where residents may be wary of government, the fundamental interest in community health can serve as a bridge to building strong working relationships.

### Public Health Challenges

Even though public health staff have an important role to play, they do not have a direct mandate to work with redevelopment agencies. Opportunities for



<sup>8</sup> More information on San Francisco's Healthy Development Measurement Tool and its use by other communities is available at: [www.thehdmt.org](http://www.thehdmt.org).



partnership are limited by politics and the strength of local relationships. Interagency relationship dynamics are also at play and may require bold political leadership to overcome.

Public health departments often lack experience with real estate and economic development, since their staff are mostly trained in biomedical and social sciences. Public health departments and advocates are also constrained by their funding sources, which too often are focused on particular diseases or risk factors (e.g., tobacco control or obesity prevention) and rarely cover comprehensive policy strategies.

## A Change in the Air

*The Contra Costa County Redevelopment Agency (RDA) and Contra Costa Health Services (CCHS) are using the tools of redevelopment to improve health outcomes for residents in the unincorporated area of North Richmond. A coalition of nonprofit community development, organizing, and social justice organizations (including Neighborhood House of North Richmond, Community Health Initiative, West County Toxics Coalition, and the Pacific Institute) partnered with CCHS in 2004 to lead a study of air quality inside residents' homes. Residents found high levels of pollutants tied to exhaust from diesel trucks traveling through their neighborhood. Residents presented the findings to the RDA, who trained the residents to complete traffic counts at priority intersections and worked with them to propose alternate truck routes. The Board of Supervisors adopted the alternate route in 2007 and is currently securing funding to implement the project. More information on the North Richmond Truck Study is available on Contra Costa County's website or at [www.healthyplanning.org](http://www.healthyplanning.org) (see "Richmond: A Change in the Air," a podcast from PHLP).*

## How Public Health Can Partner in Redevelopment Work

The relationship between each individual redevelopment agency, public health department, and group of neighborhood stakeholders will be different. In some cases, cooperative agencies and shared goals will make partnerships easy; in other instances the community, redevelopment agency, and public health priorities will be at odds. Agencies and community partners must determine when to take a partnership approach and when to mount an advocacy campaign; when to lobby and engage elected officials and when to work under the radar. All strategies will likely be necessary at different times to achieve community health goals.

- **Use data to advocate for health equity, build support for redevelopment goals, and illustrate public health outcomes.** Public health departments can collect data to help redevelopment agencies prioritize the projects that have the greatest potential to improve community health. Public health data can also be used to demonstrate the impact of proposed redevelopment projects and, where appropriate, provide legitimacy and credibility to redevelopment goals.
- **Organize and mobilize communities to participate in the redevelopment process.** Sustained community engagement is essential to the success of a redevelopment projects. Public health departments can assist redevelopment agencies in engaging residents in making decisions and setting priorities for the neighborhood. Public health advocates who work with residents and community-based organizations can educate their constituencies about the connections between public health and the redevelopment process, and help residents build the skills needed to effectively advocate for community priorities in redevelopment plans.<sup>9</sup>
- **Ensure that public health goals are incorporated into redevelopment plans and five-year updates.** Once public health issues are included in redevelopment plans, redevelopment departments become legally responsible for implementing strategies to improve health.

<sup>9</sup> For more on ensuring strong community engagement in the redevelopment process, see "Getting Involved in Redevelopment: Strategies for Public Health Advocates," a fact sheet from Public Health Law & Policy. Available at: [www.healthyplanning.org](http://www.healthyplanning.org)

- **Partner in implementation.** Public health departments can help raise funds from the philanthropic community to implement priority projects, develop creative solutions to address specific neighborhood problems, and help analyze and monitor the health impacts of redevelopment decisions.

### *Cleaning Up a Community Plaza*

*Mendel Plaza was completed in the heart of San Francisco's Bayview commercial district in late 2006 as part of a light rail project, but the city provided no ongoing funds for maintenance or local programming. Very soon, the plaza became a haven for loitering, illegal dumping, graffiti, and drug dealing. Residents felt uncomfortable coming to the commercial district, using the light rail, or shopping at the farmers' market on Mendel Plaza. The commercial district manager convened a group of adjacent merchants, property owners, community representatives, and city agencies (including public health, public works, recreation and parks, police, the arts commission, the department of the environment, and the district supervisor) to develop a maintenance, security, and programming plan.*

# Redevelopment Agencies

## Redevelopment Assets

Redevelopment agencies have the unique legal authority to establish tax increment financing districts and to use those funds to improve targeted communities (see page 6). Redevelopment agencies can pay for physical improvements, assemble land, provide incentives for private developers, build affordable and mixed-income housing, improve community safety, build parks and community facilities, and provide grants to community based organizations to carry out targeted economic development projects.

Often, redevelopment agencies can access additional funding sources, such as the Community Development Block Grant program, or other local funds. This ability often depends on the general perception of the agency, relationships with elected officials, and how well staff are able to partner with other city agencies – such as planning, police, and public works – to collaborate on implementation in redevelopment neighborhoods.

## Redevelopment Challenges

Redevelopment agencies face a number of challenges in addressing public health issues through their work. They may lack awareness of the public health implications of redevelopment decisions. For both financial and political reasons, they face significant pressure to focus on large real estate deals rather than multiple smaller interventions that might generate greater public health impact. Local elected officials, who often form the boards of the redevelopment agencies, are under equal pressure to generate dramatic transformations, feeding into a general preference for major projects. Meanwhile, neighborhood design interventions to improve public health (such as increasing density) are not universally popular and may be more difficult to get approved.

Because redevelopment agencies rely on tax increment financing, projects must generate sufficient tax revenues to pay back loans that financed community improvements. Even when parks, streetscapes, and other community improvements are supported by a redevelopment plan, the agency must balance those needs with the kinds of efforts that generate significant tax revenue increases.

Finally, some redevelopment agencies are hampered by their own legacy, even when historically destructive practices, such as eminent domain, are no longer in use. Many communities do not trust their redevelopment agency's true commitment to social justice and equity.

## Restrictions and Limitations of Redevelopment Funds

Redevelopment funds may not take the place of existing city agencies and services, and therefore cannot be used to fund services often desired, such as street cleaning or trash pickup. Some agencies creatively circumvent these barriers, for example, by funding a youth development organization to paint murals on walls that are common graffiti targets. California redevelopment law requires that 20 percent of tax increment funds must be used to create affordable housing (known as the Affordable Housing Set Aside). This is an essential protection for communities against residential displacement.

In addition to the clear restrictions, there are additional constraints to consider in the use of redevelopment funds. When redevelopment funds are insufficient to complete major real estate projects, redevelopment resources may be employed as an incentive or catalyst for private and nonprofit developers to fulfill neighborhood goals. In these partnerships, redevelopment agencies relinquish some control over the resulting project and often must make compromises (for example, about site design) to ensure its successful completion.

The better the site, the perceived opportunity, and the incentive package from the redevelopment agency/city, the less compromise is typically needed. Community consensus and a streamlined development process (due to city agency coordination) are also typically advantageous incentives. These negotiations are difficult because operators can bring many ideas about the neighborhood and ideal site design that may not match the experience of residents and city/redevelopment staff. Redevelopment projects are ultimately reliant to on market conditions. Throughout the redevelopment process it remains essential for the community to have a say in when to compromise and when to pass on an opportunity.



Photo by Tim Wagner for HEAC

## How Redevelopment Staff Can Promote Public Health

Redevelopment agencies can do much to ensure that redevelopment areas and implementation projects improve public health.

- **Invest in community participation.** Redevelopment agencies can ensure that strong community input is solicited in determining the neighborhood's priorities, and that resident and other stakeholders participate in the implementation of redevelopment efforts. Alternatively, where staff

capacity is limited or there are institutional barriers to real community engagement, redevelopment agencies can fund or invite other partners (such as the public health department) to engage the community and build consensus.

- **Make health impacts explicit during the planning and prioritization phases.** Redevelopment agencies can involve public health staff in the planning process and use potential health benefits and impacts to inform the decision making process.
- **Increase citywide coordination in redevelopment neighborhoods, including public health.** Redevelopment agencies can work with other city agencies and elected officials engaged in redevelopment areas to make sure that all activities are coordinated and joint strategies are pursued. The benefits in public support, increased efficiencies, political will, and staff capacity will far outweigh any challenges of coordination.
- **Educate constituents and partners about specific design interventions that benefit public health, and ensure that new projects contain these features.** Redevelopment agencies and their resident engagement committees can ensure that new projects support public health goals, both proactively (through education and outreach) and reactively (through the project review process). If agencies use community benefits agreements or design guidelines, those can be modified to promote and ensure public health benefits from new projects.
- **Seek out public health to inform decisions.** Redevelopment agencies can solicit input from public health agencies to ensure that decisions are helping to create a healthy and active community.

# Advancing the Partnership: Where to Start

**A**s this report makes clear, public health departments and redevelopment agencies can partner on a range of activities to help build healthier communities. The following list summarizes the first steps agencies might take to develop successful partnerships.

- 1. Create opportunities for relationship-building.** Bring together staff from public health and redevelopment agencies to explore avenues for collaboration. To build awareness of what each agency does and the advantages of working together, public health and redevelopment professionals can make presentations to each others' staff and governing bodies, convene regional gatherings, and establish informal peer networks to share experiences and seek advice. These networks can become a resource for staff to share their experiences, seek advice, and learn about new ways that redevelopment and public health agencies can work together.
- 2. Communicate the many benefits of a redevelopment and public health partnership.** This message should be conveyed at the neighborhood, city, and regional levels. Redevelopment agencies can use public health data to frame discussions about redevelopment, highlighting best practices and examples of successful partnerships. Advocacy organizations can support local partnerships by communicating a joint message.
- 3. Partner to develop pilot implementation projects,** and analyze the steps, challenges, and benefits to share with the field. Through deliberate neighborhood efforts, staff can explore and assess the opportunities and benefits of partnering.
- 4. Develop a broad base of leadership.** Support and leadership from elected officials, for example, can help create a culture of coordination and make it politically favorable for agencies to work together. In cities or counties where agencies do not have a history of collaboration, occasional regional forums (featuring positive examples from other jurisdictions) might help demonstrate the potential benefits of collaboration. Residents can play a leadership role in pressuring elected officials, city staff, and neighborhood organizations to facilitate collaborative efforts. Philanthropic organizations can play a leadership role by catalyzing early-stage collaborations between public health and redevelopment.

## Conclusion

Evidence clearly demonstrates that a community's physical environment plays a formative role in determining residents' health. Improvements to the built environment – from increasing access to physical activity to attracting healthy food sources to decreasing environmental contamination – help establish a healthy community infrastructure.

Both public health and redevelopment agencies bring many capacities and resources to support neighborhood improvement efforts. Throughout the steps of the redevelopment process, there are many opportunities for proactive residents, businesses, local organizations, and advocates to provide input to ensure that health outcomes are included in redevelopment plans. Public health agencies can add to this effort by bringing data and analytical tools, garnering public support, and helping redevelopment agencies tailor their revitalization activities to support the creation of a healthy community infrastructure.

Nascent partnerships between redevelopment and public health staff are emerging in many neighborhoods, but far more can be done to systematically encourage these collaborations. By providing more avenues for relationship-building among staff, establishing pilot projects, and exploring joint solutions, both agencies can develop greater capacity, mutual trust, and tangible examples of success. Promoting the benefits and best practices of these partnerships will help advance equity improve the quality of life for the most vulnerable residents of our communities.







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