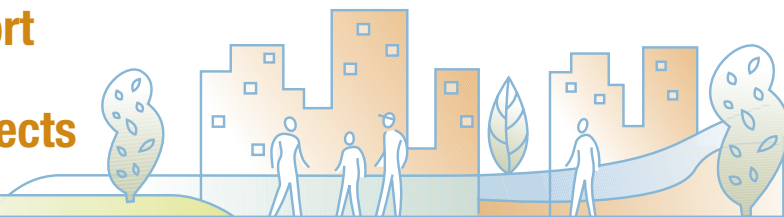


Real estate developers support incentives for adding public health amenities to their projects



One hundred years ago, squalid living conditions in dense cities created a myriad of public health problems and led to two fields: urban planning and public health.

Now a century later, the two fields have come full circle to battle a new health threat—this one posed by lifestyles rather than germs. That’s why Public Health—Seattle and King County has pioneered new work to improve the health of our communities through the built environment, in collaboration with the Group Health Community Foundation and the University of Washington’s School of Urban Design and Planning and School of Public Health and Community Medicine.

In the summer of 2004, the Tobacco Prevention Program of Public Health—Seattle and King County began exploring ways to encourage real-estate developers to incorporate public health amenities into their projects.

Evaluators from the Group Health Community Foundation interviewed developers and public planners about the potential to offer incentives and regulatory relief to those who include amenities such as smoke-free buildings and walking paths in their projects.

The respondents understood the concept of offering incentives to developers for public health amenities and enthusiastically supported these kinds of exchanges, especially when the exchange included built-in amenities (e.g. attractive stairwells or outdoor spaces) and was beneficial to their financial bottom line.

Next steps: designing the incentives

The next step is a collaborative effort between Tobacco Prevention and the University of Washington’s School of Urban Design and Planning and School of Public Health and Community Medicine on a policy-oriented charette on November 16 in Seattle. The charette will be an intensive work session with stakeholders brainstorming potential incentives and benefits. Participants will also be looking at challenges, solutions and strategies for this kind of incentive exchange program. The group will identify the two or three most feasible incentives to offer and begin drafting a model policy for a city to adopt.

Partners and funders welcome

The Tobacco Prevention Program is seeking organizations that are interested in partnering in or providing financial support to this work. For more information about the project or to request the results of the charette, please contact Roger Valdez, Program Manager for Tobacco Prevention Program of Public Health—Seattle and King County at roger.valdez@metrokc.gov.

The executive summary and complete study, “Report on interviews with developers and public planners on incentives and the built environment” is available at www.ghcfoundation.org.

“...with illnesses such as obesity, diabetes, and heart disease linked to diet, exercise and smoking, the Tobacco Prevention Program hopes to ‘whet the appetite’ of developers for providing built environments that contribute to healthy lifestyles”

— *Puget Sound Business Journal*,
October 29, 2004



GROUP HEALTH
community
foundation

Study Results

Methodology

Evaluators at the Group Health Community Foundation conducted in-depth interviews with 11 developers, six public planners, four individuals working in both development and management, three who work for developers, and two land-use attorneys. Both the public and private sectors were represented as well as a mix of for-profit and non-profit agencies.

Key findings

There is support. Respondents were familiar with the concept of offering incentives to developers and enthusiastic about these kinds of exchanges.

Incentives should speak to the developer's bottom line.

Making the financial case to developers is crucial because marketability is an important factor to developers. The incentives offered need to be proportional to the amenities desired. The most preferred incentives were:

- increases in density
- flexibility with parking requirements
- a predictable and quick permit process
- flexibility in zoning and land-use code
- assembled parcels
- pooled open space
- tax breaks and low-cost loans

The barriers are governmental. Respondents said government bureaucracy and the legal process would be the main barriers to changing existing building code and land-use requirements.

Plan different strategies for amenities that are built-in versus ongoing. Developers construct buildings and sell them for profit. Developers said they could provide amenities that are built into a structure (e.g. attractive stairwells or outdoor spaces), but for service amenities that require ongoing management over the life of a building, building management should be engaged.

Prepare to engage neighborhoods. Neighborhood opposition may be a barrier, particularly to increased height, density increases, and changes in neighborhood parking. However, respondents felt that a well-designed incentive program could be good for everyone without compromising the balance between developer and community needs.

There is support... and momentum

"I'd be all for it. We do smoke-free buildings anyway. Both commercial and residential projects are worthy of incentives [for smoke-free buildings.]"

"We are here as a community... Also, these amenities are a good marketing tool."

"Developers follow trends, not lead them. Developers are risk adverse, not trendy. If the trend is that people don't smoke, I'd say 'give me two more floors and I'll make my building smoke free.'"

"This is a great public policy idea for health."

— Group Health Community Foundation Report, September 30, 2004

Contacts

Roger Valdez, Tobacco Prevention Program Public Health—Seattle & King County

999 3rd Avenue, Suite 900
Seattle, Washington 98104
(206) 205-4014

Emily Bourcier, Evaluation Team Group Health Community Foundation

1730 Minor Ave, Suite 1500
Seattle, WA 98101
(206) 287-2035
www.ghcfoundation.org