

How Walkable Is Your Community?

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On October 1st and 2nd, 2009 - Cornell Cooperative Extension's Southern Tier Wellness Partnership (STWP) embarked on a new and exciting grant program that is geared to help municipalities in Cattaraugus and Allegany Counties build the infrastructure needed to develop streets that invite physical activity. The communities we worked with in year one are Wellsville in Allegany County, and Gowanda in Cattaraugus County! The initiative will focus on helping Wellsville's and Gowanda's municipality pass a "Complete Streets" policy which asks transportation planners and engineers to consistently design and alter the rights-of-way with all users in mind (including bicycle, pedestrian and persons with disabilities). The policy will focus on all new construction, reconstruction, and maintenance projects.

To "Kick off" the Initiative, the Southern Tier Wellness Partnership, in collaboration with Allegany Western Steuben Rural Health Network, and Healthy Community Alliance hosted a Complete Streets Training and Walkability Assessment in Gowanda on October 1st and Wellsville on October 2nd, 2009. The training was held to engage community members, stake holders, elected officials, law enforcement and non-profit organizations to help expand their knowledge on how to create and design the community to be safe and accessible for pedestrians, bicyclists, wheelchair users and transit users. The training ended with a "Walkabout" in both communities, targeting the high traffic areas, including the Main Streets and the streets that surrounded the local schools.

Recommendations were made by the New York State Department of Transportation Bike and Pedestrian Specialist, and the Trainers Justin Booth from the Safe Routes to School Coalition and Joshua Poppel, from Alta Engineering in Albany, NY.

Through this process, the group created the "Vision" of what a walkable community would look like, which included creating an attractive and safe streetscape that encouraged and invited physical activity, to make sure that all pedestrian facilities meet the American's with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements for accessibility. Also the vision included the updating and improvement of signage for pedestrians, increased crossing times at intersections and how to use walkability as a tool to encourage tourism in the area.

The Southern Tier Wellness Partnership has received the report from our specialists and presented the report to the Community Outreach team that was involved with the study. The Community Outreach team will also bring the recommendations to the Village Town Board and Planning officials to decide what the next steps to building a pedestrian friendly community will be.

The walking assessment reports are available on our website, and for more information on the Complete Streets Program in Allegany and Cattaraugus Counties please visit www.southerntierwellnesspartnership.org.