

Kirkland, Washington

A Comprehensive Approach to Walkability

Recognizing that pedestrian safety and walkability are key components of the quality of life that a community offers its citizens, the City of Kirkland, Wash. has implemented a multi-faceted approach that includes a walking program for adults age 50 and older, a pedestrian safety program, and an in-pavement lights crosswalk program. These initiatives, coupled with numerous community involvement and public policy efforts, have earned Kirkland a 2007 Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) *Achievement Award for Excellence in Building Healthy Communities for Active Aging*.

The EPA achievement award recognizes Kirkland's programs and policies that have improved the health and well-being of the city's 19,000 older residents. This population of adults age 50 and older is projected to increase 20 to 25 percent in the next 10 years. Kirkland, a suburb of Seattle, has a total population of almost 47,000. The municipality is located on the eastern side of Lake Washington, the state's second largest lake. Like most of Seattle's "eastside neighbors", Kirkland is a relatively affluent and well-educated community.

The city offers more than 50 physical activity programs specifically designed for older adults. Programs include the *Kirkland Steppers Walk Program*, which organizes free group-walks through the downtown area twice a week during the summer. Through the *PedFlag Pedestrian Safety Program*, established in 1995, colorful orange flags have been placed at 63 crosswalks to remind drivers to yield to pedestrians. The *Flashing Crosswalk Program* has incorporated flashing lights into the pavement at crosswalks throughout the city. The *Flashing Crosswalk Program*, launched in 1997, has about 30 installations – all at crosswalks where traffic does not have to stop unless a pedestrian is present. In addition, Kirkland is the first city in the state of Washington to have adopted a *Complete Streets Ordinance* to design streets for the needs of walkers, bicyclists and drivers.

Currently the Parks and Community Services Department and Seattle King County Public Health Department have collaborated to develop walking maps for six of the city's 11 neighborhoods. Maps for the remaining five neighborhoods are in development.

In describing the *Kirkland Steppers Walking Program*, Carrie Hite, Deputy Director for Parks and Community Services said, "We have been successful because we started small and grew the program over time. This past summer we had about 200 people who regularly participated in the twice-a-week walks. Participants received t-shirts, and now you see those t-shirts all over the city. In addition to promoting walking, we were able to incorporate blood pressure checks, performed by nurses in the community. This activity enabled walkers to not only become more active, but to see how physical activity can help improve health."

As the various programs were launched, Hite indicated that one of the greatest challenges was lack of human resources. There was not an assigned staff person who could dedicate their efforts to walkability issues. "However, many people were willing to put in extra time and energy to get the various initiatives off the ground," she explained. "In addition to staff efforts, the city council was supportive, and in 2007 the council established an Active Living Task Force, comprised of representatives from the city manager's office, the departments of public works, parks and community services, planning and community development, and the police, as well as representatives from community agencies and local businesses."

Kirkland was also the first city in the state to establish a Senior Council as an official board charged to advise the city council of the needs of residents age 50 and older. The council is made up of 13 older adults or people who work with older adults, who advise the city council on the needs of older residents. Safety, loneliness, transportation, and affordable housing are among the most frequently raised concerns, reflecting the desire of many older adults to remain active and independent as they age.

Kirkland also initiated a youth council and a Pedestrian Safety Task Force. The Pedestrian Safety Task Force includes representatives of downtown businesses, as well as community members. Other support to promote the walkability of Kirkland has come from the University of Washington, which provided social marketing assistance.

The city has established several policies and regulations designed to support and encourage pedestrian-friendliness. The comprehensive city plan includes policies that recognize the importance of land-use regulations that require pedestrian connections that promote walking within commercial, multi-family projects, and to adjoining streets and properties. A non-motorized transportation plan is in place to improve the pedestrian and bicycle systems.

Over the next six years, Kirkland plans to invest \$6 million to improve sidewalk connections between commercial and residential developments, and to consider a new indoor recreation complex.

Contact:

[Carrie S. Hite](mailto:chite@ci.kirkland.wa.us) (chite@ci.kirkland.wa.us)
Deputy Director Parks & Community Services
City of Kirkland
(425) 587-3320

About the Award

2007 Achievement Award for Excellence in Building Healthy Communities for Active Aging

The award honors the achievements of communities that have successfully combined concepts of smart growth and active aging. Active aging strives to promote strategies that engage older adults through structured and unstructured opportunities for physical activity. Active aging is supported by safe, walkable environments. Smart growth strives to minimize the impact of the built environment on both human health and the natural environment by integrating environmental considerations into development patterns. Using smart growth, communities create attractive, walkable neighborhoods that give people of all ages, income levels, and physical abilities a range of safe, affordable and convenient choices in where to live and how to get around.

For additional information, please visit the EPA's Aging Initiative Web site at <http://www.epa.gov/aging/bhc/awards/index.htm>.