

Advancing health in growing communities



Hello, Get Healthy Partners!

I'm a community health planner working to create healthy, equitable environments for people who live and work in San Mateo County.

No doubt over the last few years you've noticed new construction underway in San Mateo County. Cranes swinging building materials into place, bulldozers rumbling through construction sites, and homes, offices, and stores rising out of the dust –giving our communities new homes, jobs, and economic opportunities. After our recent building slump, development is back on the Peninsula.

While many of these emerging developments will likely be expensive and serve new customers, workers, and residents, they can also be harnessed to improve services for people who already live and work in surrounding neighborhoods. Some Cities are using the hot real estate market to make sure developers are giving back by paying for community benefits to enhance the health of all residents. These benefits seek to improve housing, traffic, quality of life, and working conditions for all families in their communities using a process called Community Benefits Programs.

Community Benefit Programs (CBPs) are a comprehensive approach to capture the value of investment for public goods. Successful CBPs reflect the racial and linguistic diversity of communities and take the lead from community members not often heard in the planning process such as renters, low-income workers, and immigrants. Cities or community organizations convene residents to identify and prioritize the kinds of improvements they need and create standard fees to pay for agreed upon benefits. CBPs can also require developers to participate in local programs or incorporate needed amenities into their development such as a park or daycare center.

When developers give back through CBPs, we can literally build health into our communities. This allows Cities to address housing, transportation, jobs, parks and public program needs via the captured development revenue, all of which help residents live longer, healthier lives. Below are examples of the types of benefits that are often considered.

- **Healthy homes:** Research shows that stable housing affordable to residents at different economic levels helps keep residents healthy. Agreements can ensure that developers are building the right type of housing needed for the local workforce, or contributing to a fund to make sure affordable homes geared towards families are built.
- **Accessible transportation:** Funding for transportation systems can make riding transit, walking and biking easier for residents. Fees can fund new bike and pedestrian improvements, safety programs, or even provide transit passes for low-income residents in new buildings. These agreements ensure developers are helping solve the traffic congestion and air quality impacts their developments create and make it easier for residents to get out of their cars to start taking transit, walking, and biking.

- **Great jobs:** When residents have good, stable well-paying jobs, their health outcomes are better. Cities can use CBPs to make sure developers hire local workers to do the construction, meet fair labor standards and that workers receive a living wage. Developers may also contribute to a local job training program to create a pipeline of good jobs and a well prepared workforce.
- **Active parks:** Studies show that being in green space improves mental health for kids and adults. Investments in parks and park programs, either through a fund or created by developers on site, provide opportunities to help people stay active and healthy.
- **Public programs:** It can be hard for Cities to find funds for events, programming for kids, and the arts. Through a community fund assessed on new development, Cities can create a funding source for some of the programs that make a city vibrant and fun. Residents can lead the charge in spending these funds to make sure programs reflect the needs and interests of the community.

Community engagement needs to be the cornerstone for establishing a Community Benefits Program. When residents are genuinely included in planning processes, the outcomes make the community a better place to live with priorities that reflect the true needs of local residents. Participation gives people a feeling of investment in their community that makes roots deeper, commitment greater, and bonds stronger. And that's great for health.

Redwood City recently passed a [Community Benefits Program](#) using many of approaches listed above to make sure development benefits local residents. As buildings continue to go up in Redwood City and the City begins working with developers to capture benefits, residents can expect better funding for the things that are important to them, and more investments in health. If you or your organization thinks a Community Benefits Program could be the right tool to bring healthy development to your city, let us know! We'd be happy to work with you.

Sincerely,

Maeve Johnston
Community Health Planner

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