

# Planning for smart, healthy growth means planning for activity.

## **Moving Grays Harbor By Maryann Welch**

Nearly two-thirds – 65 percent – of Grays Harborites are overweight. That's not healthy for the individual residents or the community.

That's why a year ago, 23 participants from agencies throughout Grays Harbor came together to create a "Strategic Plan for Decreasing Obesity Through Increasing Physical Activity 2006-2009."

These weekly columns are one way we're getting the message out.

### **Vision for healthy, active community**

When the HealthNow! community task force convened in March 2005 the members envisioned seven hopes for the future of Grays Harbor.

Here's a glimpse of that vision.

#### **We envision:**

- A community where families can be physically active together.
- A community environment that provides all residents, regardless of income, opportunities to be physically active.
- A community that has well-maintained sidewalks and trails and is easily accessible to strollers, walkers, bikers and people with individual accessibility needs.
- A community that promotes everyday wellness in addition to sponsoring community events and supports and encourages all residents to walk or bike to work and/or school.
- A community that is motivated to increase its level of physical

activity based on the understanding of potential health benefits.

- A community where drivers take responsibility for the safety of pedestrians.
- A community that is physically appealing to walk or bike throughout and can be broadly recognized as an active and healthy community.

### **Getting from here to there safely**

Part of the vision of an active, fit community, is planning for improvements and new development in our area to encourage walking, biking and other physical activity.

In some areas in Grays Harbor this has been done well. I love how downtown Aberdeen looks now. I love even more how much easier and more pleasant it is to get around as a pedestrian. Having a well-designed plan draws people to walk and to frequent shops and restaurants. Plus, it just makes our city much more attractive.

A few years back Cosmopolis revamped its sidewalks and downtown core. It too is beautiful and convenient and clearly accommodates pedestrians. And, if you haven't visited Elma lately you'll be amazed at the transformation the nice big sidewalks, bike paths, garbage containers and plentiful bike racks make. All of these areas are something to be proud of.

But boy, do other areas of our cities and county need work!

East Aberdeen is a nightmare for pedestrians or bicyclists. It may be too late to fix the way it's laid out, but it's certainly a shame. It's difficult for a shopper to walk from store to store anywhere on the east side of the Wishkah River. The entire area is suited to using a car (lots of drive-ups) and seems discouraging if not dangerous for pedestrians.

There are other areas such as these sprinkled throughout Grays Harbor. Places where sidewalks appear and then disappear or are in such bad shape that they're hazardous.

Not only is safe pedestrian access an activity issue but many times it's a necessity. On side streets near our building in the West End of Aberdeen, I have seen young mothers struggling to pack groceries and supervise toddlers while dodging puddles and traffic.

As we all work toward an active, healthy community, we need to keep an eye on our "built environment."

I'm talking to the city and county officials as they look at each new development or opportunities for improvements. Please, see how it ties in to other areas with pedestrian access, crosswalks, walking paths, bike trails and general curb appeal.

I'm also talking to all of us citizens – stay tuned in to any development that might be coming. Speak up for more and improved sidewalks, for well-designed pedestrian paths, for benches and places to rest.

All in all it will be easier for people in Grays Harbor to make healthy lifestyle changes as individuals if the environment encourages and supports those choices regardless of location or income.

We live in a beautiful area, with so many parks, trails and wildlife. Let's work hard to see that our "built" environment is also attractive and promotes healthy people.

### **This week's challenge**

Enjoy some pedestrian-friendly walking areas this week. Take a stroll in downtown Aberdeen between F and L streets on Wishkah and Heron. Or, get your body moving on the sidewalks of downtown Elma or Cosmopolis. Wherever you choose, keep walking!

### **Mark your calendar**

- **Anyday** -- Have you walked the Bowerman Basin Sandpiper Trail? Located at the Hoquiam Airport, this is a perennial favorite of bird lovers. A 1-mile planked trail lets you enjoy sightings of birds of many different feathers as well as scenic views. Trail access may be muddy at times, but well worth the journey.

*Maryann Welch is the director of Grays Harbor County's Public Health and Social Services Department.*

*If you have questions about becoming more active or have information about free or low-cost activity in the area, contact the health department at 532-8665 ext. 483, e-mail us at [moving@co.grays-harbor.wa.us](mailto:moving@co.grays-harbor.wa.us) or visit our web site at [www.ghphss.org](http://www.ghphss.org).*