



Chapter Five

Creating a Livable and Healthy Community

Introduction

“The concept of a livable community has evolved over the past several decades, with a range of definitions that reflects a diversity of viewpoints. The term goes back at least as far as the 1970s, when groups such as the Partners for Livable Spaces used it broadly to encompass environment, quality of life, economic opportunity, jobs, etc. In the realm of urban planning during the 1990s, the term became increasingly associated with the Smart Growth movement. From this perspective, a livable community incorporates mixed-use development, exhibits a compact development pattern, minimizes highly dispersed development patterns (“sprawl”), provides transportation choices, and makes efficient use of scarce resources and existing infrastructure. In recent years, the term evolved further to include additional principles that are now generally held to be important elements of livable communities. These include community design for safety and security, community design for active lifestyles (e.g., walking and exercise), and greater public participation in the planning process.”

Source: “A Report to the Nation on Livable Communities: Creating Environments for Successful Aging.”

Quality of Life

The ReNewton 2030 Plan stresses the importance of improving the community’s existing quality-of-life amenities, as well as expanding them as the city grows. Achieving these objectives will make the community a more attractive place to college students, young professionals, young families, and higher-income households, as well as current citizens, empty-nesters, and retirees who want to live near a metropolitan city.

The term “quality-of-life amenities” includes parks, open spaces, recreational facilities, and trails for walking and biking. It also includes the design principles advocated in the “complete streets philosophy” to build a city that accommodates walking, biking, or use of a public bus system. The building of a new recreation center and public library are also viewed as important assets contributing to the livability of Newton. Equally important to the future is the support of programs and initiatives to build the city to accommodate healthy lifestyles. A holistic, comprehensive mindset about recreation, transportation, housing, and work will enhance the quality of life. Equally important to quality of life is embracing the multicultural heritage of the community. When everyone, regardless of race or ethnicity, plays a part in sustaining, creating, and building a sense of place, then the entire community is rewarded with unity.

All of the community facilities, roads, streets, parks, bike lanes, and sidewalks that create and contribute to livability require the investment of public tax dollars, as well as public-private partnerships. In the long run, providing quality-of-life amenities to enhance Newton’s livability will contribute to the community’s ability to attract businesses, industry, and households. Quality of life is ultimately about people and building a place where everyone enjoys a productive, healthy, and safe life.

Quality of Life

Goal: Enhance and celebrate the community's multicultural heritage.

Goal: Invest in and build quality-of-life amenities – recreation, open spaces, education, health care, cultural amenities, and entertainment – to attract new households and businesses to the community.

Goal: Improve effective communication and dealings among all races and ethnic groups.

Community Health and Wellness

A growing trend across the country is the awareness of how city planning can contribute to individual wellness and community health. Equally important is the emergence of collaborative planning among local governments, healthcare providers, social programs, and public health entities to promote and create healthy cities. The ever-increasing demand for healthcare services, an aging population, and fewer public financial resources require the sharing of resources, collaborative planning, and innovative solutions at the local level.

There is also a greater emphasis on people focusing on their own health and wellness. People are taking greater interest in exercise, healthy eating, and their overall lifestyle. People of all ages are aware of how an active lifestyle can affect their health. This is why city plans are critical to community health and individual wellness. It is through proper planning that sidewalks connect people to parks, schools, neighborhoods, and other arenas of community life. For instance, when city planning is focused on livability and healthy living, it successfully integrates citywide linear trails for people to bike to work, walk downtown, or enjoy extended rides. Planning for healthy living also encourages new developments to be more compact and accommodate mixed uses to foster increasing reliance on walking.

Community health and wellness extend into how the community collectively views itself — are we the kind of city that citizens want to live in and local leaders want to create? The types of industries that locate in Newton have a significant influence on community health. “Clean” industries or businesses willing to invest in employee wellness define expectations for a healthy place. Likewise, ensuring that buildings and public spaces are accessible for aging and disabled populations is another way of committing to community health. Builders and land developers will ideally create places that promote healthy living and contribute to the overall quality of life. In summary, community health is not defined only by wellness programs, public parks, or pedestrian-friendly places. It's the synergy that exists when leaders and citizens are focused on building a community committed to an integrated city planning approach.

Community Health and Wellness

- Goal: Promote residents' health through local land use, transportation, and recreation planning and development.
- Goal: Create collaborative partnerships between city officials, public health professionals, and nonprofit organizations to promote community and individual well-being.
- Goal: Promote ease of access for citizens with disabilities or special needs.
- Goal: Foster a mindset that encourages individual wellness, active lifestyles, and healthy living as a part of our community identity and way of life.

Future Strategies & Policies

New Public Library

A new public library has been designed and the Library Board is working toward securing a funding source with the City Commission. The new library will remain at the same location, which is consistent with the master plan for downtown redevelopment. A new public library will achieve the vision and goals of the ReNewton 2030 Plan and is recommended to be funded and approved.

Community Hospital Services

Develop and enforce zoning requirements and restrictions that will limit the extent to which specialty hospital and ambulatory surgical care services may be established in the community and engage in unfair competitive practices to the detriment of existing community hospital services.

Attractive City Entranceways and Highway Corridors

The city entranceways and highway corridors create a lasting impression of the community. Entranceways are the points where people arrive in the community from the major highways.

The following intersections are considered key entry points and should be treated as “gateways” to the city. These gateways should include open spaces, unique landscaping, walls, and city identity signage. Consideration should be given to acquiring additional right-of-way based on gateway design concepts to ensure that a positive and aesthetically pleasing image is presented.

North Newton

- Highway K-15 and I-135 Interchange (North Gateway)
- Main Street and Railroad Crossing (South Gateway)

Newton I-135 Corridor

- Broadway and I-135 Interchange
- 1st Street and I-135 Interchange
- 36th Street and I-135 Interchange

Newton US-50 Corridor

- Kansas Avenue and US-50
- Anderson Avenue and US-50
- Meridian Avenue and US-50
- Old Trail Road and US-50

The preparation of a Gateway and Corridor Landscape and Signage Plan for city entranceways and highway corridors can ensure a visually attractive and consistent community image. These master landscape plans guide private development landscaping efforts bordering gateways or a highway corridor, as well as the installation of wayfinding signs and the planting of trees and shrubs by the City of Newton in the public right-of-way.

Adequate screening, buffering, and landscaping along the I-135 and US-50 right-of-way is another important entryway design consideration. Below are design principles that should be incorporated during the platting or site design of property bordering a highway right-of-way.

- Residential lots that border a right-of-way should include a 50-foot buffer zone. This buffer zone should include extensive landscape plantings, as well as large shade trees.
- Commercial and industrial development along a right-of-way should include a 25-foot landscaping zone to enhance the visual quality and character of the highway corridor.

Infant and Childcare Options

Working toward expanding infant and childcare options will improve the livability of the community. Parents face difficult choices when trying to balance child care, workplace demands, and the family budget. Our understanding of early childhood development reinforces the importance of acceptable infant and child care for working parents. This is another prime community issue that will require private-public partnerships and collaborative relationships to overcome funding challenges. This issue could come before the proposed Community Health Planning Council for discussion and planning.

ADA Enforcement

The continued implementation of the 20-year old Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) by local building code officials remains a top concern. The federal legislation imposes standards for accessible design for people with disabilities to gain access to a building or other facilities. The rules apply to new buildings and pre-ADA facilities. This mention of ADA is intended to simply reinforce the importance of ensuring accessibility for all citizens to places and buildings in the community.

Outreach to Independent Seniors

A challenge voiced in the ReNewton public retreat was the need to ensure that senior citizens who live independently are informed about available services and programs for the elderly. This issue is consistent with other concerns voiced about improving overall communication of information within the community. There was a general belief that there are many effective services and programs to help senior citizens, but those living in their own homes may not know what is available. Equally important, communicating about programs for seniors to volunteer their time and talents is important.

Community Gardens

Another idea generated from the public was the need to create more community gardens to allow people to grow their own vegetables. These gardens can help people live an active life and eat healthy. The community gardens could complement the objectives of the group charged with creating a downtown farmers' market.

One-Stop Center for Social Services

Several providers of social services in the community voiced the need for a one-stop center to allow people to learn about all available resources in one location. This idea could also be brought before the proposed Community Health Planning Council for consideration.

Community Health Planning Council

The creation of a Community Health Planning Council is envisioned to bring together a cross-section of individuals working on health care, housing, transportation, social services, and community development. The purpose of the council is to coordinate programs, ensure a comprehensive approach to planning and program delivery, share information and resources, and work collaboratively to improve the delivery of health care.

Cultural Diversity and Social Cohesion

The Newton community is composed of citizens from various races, ethnic groups, religious faiths, and social classes, and with varying physical and mental abilities. Of course, there are differences between individuals and groups of people, but we acknowledge these differences and strive to embrace our ethnicity, diversity, and heritage. We are a community that respects cultural diversity and values social cohesion.

Demographers have documented the anticipated growth in ethnic diversity among Kansans over the next 20 to 40 years. The fastest growing segment of Newton's population is Hispanic or Latino. As the community becomes more diverse, it becomes even more important that all people feel welcome and part of the social and community fabric. This strengthens the community in cultural richness. In addition, as the baby boomer generation retires from the workforce, cities that are recognized as accepting of varying ethnicity and diversity are helping themselves by creating a competitive economic advantage by welcoming a diverse workforce.

Cultural Diversity and Social Cohesion

- Goal: Build a community that values, supports, and creates a sense of belonging for everyone.
- Goal: Facilitate equality, social understanding, and social cohesion for all citizens.
- Goal: Foster connections among neighbors and encourage interaction among people from different backgrounds.

Future Strategies & Policies

Collaborative Leadership Council

A special challenge facing the community is the lack of effective community communication, awareness, understanding, and trust among the various races and ethnic groups. While one community retreat about our diverse heritage shouldn't dictate definitive conclusions, it was clear that much work needs to be done to improve communication among all the citizens of Newton. The intent behind the Collaborative Leadership Council is for the city to create a multi-race and multi-ethnic council to work on issues of community communication, awareness, and inclusiveness.

Ethnic Heritage

Newton is proud of our long and rich African-American, Hispanic, Latino, Germanic, and other European histories and heritage. The community should celebrate its cultural diversity and heritage. Events should focus on sharing the contributions of African-Americans, Hispanics, Latinos, and European-Americans in creating the

community. Local celebrations of cultural foods, dance, music, and faith will build understanding and acceptance. Addressing the question of how discrimination has influenced and impacted the community, both from a historical viewpoint and currently, would help create a better future for us all.