

Active Community Environment Workgroup & Teams

Background

In 2006 the Physical Activity, Nutrition and Healthy Weight program within Maine CDC convened a state level Active Community Environment Workgroup (ACEW). In addition to members of the MeCDC PAN program, the workgroup was made up of representatives from Maine Department of Conservation, Maine State Planning Office and Maine Department of Transportation. Each representative on the workgroup had some connection to promoting active environments either via the grant programs they managed, planning efforts they were connected with or both. In 2008 the ACEW merged a final training event focusing on built environment with the Maine Department of Transportation's bicycle and pedestrian conference to create the Maine Active Community Conference. ACEW has hosted an Active Community Conference each year since.

In 2010 the ACEW began to expand its membership to include other key members whose departments or agencies had a connection to the built environment and the work of promoting physical activity. In addition to the founding four state agencies, ACEW membership now includes these other state agencies: Department of Education, Maine Tourism, Department of Environmental Protection and the Department of Economic and Community Development; these non-governmental agencies: The Bicycle Coalition of Maine, Maine GrowSmart and The Maine Development Foundation / Maine Downtown Center; The Maine Recreation and Park Association, Maine Association of Planners, Portland Area Comprehensive Transportation System and the Maine Chapter, American Public Works Association. Recruitment is ongoing to include all professions that impact the built environment and can help to promote this important work.

Expansion of representation on ACEW at the state level was viewed as essential in the continuing dissemination of the ACE work, in recognition that elements of active community environments are impacted by many. Simultaneous to this expansion ACEW initiated the concept of Active Community Environment Teams (ACET's, pronounced assets – because they are). Briefly, ACET's are the local level counterpart to the state level ACEW, in recognition that most decisions, policies and programs that affect the ability of people to lead active lifestyles are made at the local level, ACEW is promoting ACET's to serve at this local level to promote ACE concepts and practices.

What is an Active Community Environment?

Active Community Environments (ACEs) are places where people of all ages and abilities have the opportunity to live, work and play in a safe and inviting place which enables physically active recreation and transportation, particularly walking and biking. These places:

- Support and promote physical activity for ALL people
- Have sidewalks, safe roads for biking, multi-use paths and trails, parks and open spaces and facilities for recreation
- Have quality connections between homes, stores, workplaces, schools, downtowns and/or village centers

ACEs help people to be more physically active. They create a vibrant community atmosphere that enables healthy lifestyles, social interaction, environmental quality and economic prosperity.

These environments:

- Promote walking and bicycling opportunities
- Provide accessible recreation facilities
- Address street design and housing density
- Foster trail connectivity
- Improve availability of public transit
- Encourage neighborhood school sites
- Provide safe routes to school

Partnerships are vital for ACE because they can bring together the many disciplines that have influence in a community, such as public health, urban planning, transportation, recreation, design and others. A capable partnership can consider the range of perspectives related to active living issues and can advocate for policy and environmental changes as one voice.

Policy changes are important for the ACE because the built environment is shaped by ordinances, master plans, design guidelines, and government rules and protocols (or the lack of) that affect **Environmental Changes** to the built environment

What is an Active Community Environment Team?

Active Community Environment Teams (ACET's) encourage environmental and policy change that will increase levels of physical activity and improve public health by promoting walking, bicycling, and the development of accessible recreation facilities. ACET's advise policy makers and planners in supporting and enhancing community designs that encourage all citizens to be physically active in their daily lives. ACET's are the key to implementing Active Community Environment concepts.

Functions of the ACET's may include but are not limited to:

- Promote "Health in All Policy" (HiAP) deliberations within their district/community.
- Identify needs and priorities
- Sponsor educational/workshops, invite experts to inform and educate
- Advise Local / Regional Planning Organizations
- Provide guidance to other local/regional policy makers.
- Conduct community assessments (Walkability, bikeability, HIA)
- Advocate for policy change
- Provide guidance on the allocation of funding
- Review comprehensive plans

Who serves on an ACET?

An ACET may be formed within a single larger community, or among several smaller communities depending on local resources and conditions. In either case it is recommended that an Active Community Environment Team include the following:

ACET – core committee members

- City / Town administrators and or elected officials
- City / Town planner
- Director of Parks & Recreation or their representative.
- Director of Public Works or their representative.
- Superintendent of Schools (in RSU locales – local high school principal – or

commensurate highest school level staff for local community)

- Representative of local trails / bicycle-pedestrian coalition or similar citizen based agency
- Representative of local business community

ACET at large committee members

- Local / regional health/Healthy Maine Partnerships
- PTA / PTO reps
- Planning board members
- School board members
- P&R advisory board members
- Police Department representatives
- Citizens (especially older 50+ and younger 17-)