

LINCOLN COUNTY HEALTHY & ACTIVE STRATEGIC PLAN





HEALTHY & ACTIVE STRATEGIC PLAN

In 2015 the Lincoln County Health Department, as part of a 5 county coalition, received a 1422 Grant (Public Health Actions to Prevent Chronic Disease) and formed Live Healthy Lincoln County. The purpose of this grant is to find ways to improve public health and lower rates of chronic diseases such as obesity, diabetes, and heart disease. Chronic diseases account for most deaths in the United States and are a driver in rising health care costs for millions of Americans. Over the past fifty years both diets and activity level of Americans changed, increasing the risk for developing one or more chronic diseases. Reversing these trends often has to be dealt with at the local level, through access to healthy life style options. Using the 1422 grant, Lincoln County embarked on a strategic planning effort to identify the best strategies for improving the health of all Lincoln County residents. The following pages summarize this effort and identify the priority projects moving forward.

Healthy & Active Lincoln County: Emerging Themes

The following document outlines the themes that emerged from a county wide survey respondents and eight stakeholder groups held throughout the county. Groups were held at:

- » Sylvan Unified School (students & staff)
- » Sylvan Senior Center
- » Lincoln County Courthouse
- » Lincoln Senior Center
- » Lincoln County Hospital
- » Lincoln Jr/Sr. High School (students & staff)
- » Barnard
- » Beverly

All discussion groups were facilitated by a representative of RDG Planning & Design. Each discussion opened with a brief introduction and background on previous studies and objective of the process. Little information was given on potential directions forward in order to keep a blank canvas for input.

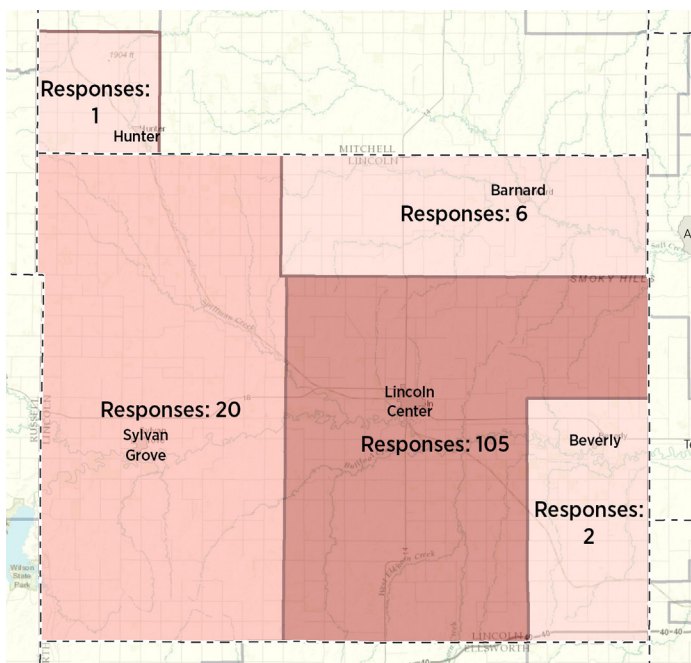
The following will first summarize the survey themes, then discussion group themes, and finally summarize priority projects that participants identified.

County Survey

A full summary for the survey is available upon request. The following summarizes the major themes.

When asked how to improve individual wellness, respondents felt the following would have the highest impact in order of frequency:

- » Improved park and recreation facilities
- » Safe pedestrian routes
- » Wellness center



Survey responses by zip code



Park and Recreation themes

Respondents felt there were more weaknesses than strengths when considering park, recreation, and cultural amenities

Weaknesses:

- » Access to trail networks
- » Sidewalks

Neutral:

- » Parks
- » Recreation playing fields
- » Access to regional recreation resources
- » Community garden

When asked what the most important actions Lincoln County could take with regards to parks and recreation respondents noted:

- » Developing and managing a wellness center
- » Expanding or improving the existing swimming pool
- » Focusing on maintaining the existing parks and adding new recreation facilities



Trails and Sidewalks

Safe pedestrian routes and trail connectivity is one way improve active living. Themes related to walking and biking improvements included:

- » A high frequency of walking, running and biking with approximately 60% of respondents regularly-to-frequently doing these activities
- » If bike and/or trail improvements were made, residents identified the following priority destinations (listed in order of frequency):
 - Parks
 - Schools
 - Between communities
 - Around communities
 - Downtown (no specification on which community but connections to stores, restaurants and businesses were frequently noted and apply to all communities)
 - River
 - Wilson Lake
 - Scenic locations
- » With these improvements, 75% said they would regularly-or-frequently walk, run or bike





Wellness Center

A wellness center has frequently been discussed in the past, respondents were asked to provide feedback on the type of facility, frequency of use, and willingness to pay.

If a wellness center were built, respondents would want to see a:

- » Fitness center
- » Running/walking track
- » Exercise/dance room

Approximately 71% of respondents would regularly-to-frequently (more than once a week) use a wellness center with these amenities

Most respondents understood that there would be some cost for using a wellness center

- » Over 61% are willing to pay \$30 per month for an individual
 - Of those individuals 37% were willing to pay more than \$30
- » Over 66% are willing to pay \$40 per month for a family
 - Of those families, 57% were willing to pay more than \$40

Stakeholder Groups

The following themes emerged from the conversations with individuals across the entire county.

Sidewalks and trails

Overall themes

- » Sidewalks in all the communities are inconsistent, in poor condition, and lacking along the highways within towns
- » A lot of residents, especially older residents, walk for exercise
- » Connections to schools in Sylvan and Lincoln do not exist or are in poor condition
- » Some individuals ride to the Lake but it takes a very confident and experienced rider – narrow road and lots of hills
- » Access to the river was noted at two different meetings

“If we want to have more biking we have to have a bike repair shop”

Sylvan Grove

- » Moving around town is fairly easy but there was a strong interest in having trails or sidewalks that would take you to more scenic locations
- » Cemetery has great views but pedestrian access between it and the town is very poor
- » School track is not used by residents
- » A walking trail around the edge of the school property would provide a good loop, connections to the school, and some scenery

“I’m a walker but avoid east side of town because it’s not paved”

“Usually walk in the street but would use a trail”

Lincoln

- » Completed a Safe Routes to School study and application but funding has been cut back
- » Connection between the park and school was frequently mentioned by residents



- » Loop from downtown, to the park, school, football field, hospital and back downtown could be done with improved sidewalks and trail connections



- » Many of the meetings were finished by asking participants what they thought the priority projects should be, sidewalk or trails were mentioned every time

“Sidewalks would be very beneficial to everybody”

Priorities: “Walking trails that have amenities along the way”

“Need something that lets you know how far you’ve gone”

“Work out or even reading stations along a route”

“High school is not very bike friendly”

Barnard

- » Many residents try to walk in the streets but sidewalk conditions and gaps along with loose dogs make it difficult some times



- » There are no sidewalks to or around the park

- » Levee surrounds the city and would provide an almost 3 mile loop around the community. Work may need to be done to improve the levee before a formalized trail could be added.

Parks & Recreation Resources

Overall themes

- » Many of the park features are for small children with few amenities for older kids and adults
- » Many of the parks need to have old equipment removed and layouts improved to enhance opportunities and the experience one can have in the park



Sylvan Grove

- » Volleyball and basketball courts need to be improved
- » Poor sidewalks to the park and no sidewalks in the park
- » Potential for the Fairgrounds:
 - Sidewalk connections
 - Frisbee golf through the grounds
 - Splash pad
 - Sand volleyball

“Use the church basketball court because it is a better court”

Lincoln

- » Tennis courts could be repurposed to attract more users
- » Was a proposal to develop a Frisbee golf course but funding was never secured
- » Band shell is unusable, even if it was refurbished, due to the current layout of the park
- » Expand on items in the park that might be attractive to users besides small children
 - This may include the ability to “check-out” certain games or equipment from the Lincoln County Recreation Department, such as ladder ball, washers, or bocce ball
- » Need more recreation offerings that are appealing to a wider range of ages, especially more adult programming



Barnard

- » Park is in good condition and used but there are no sidewalks around the park
- » Would like to have some satellite adult rec programming that could be offered in Barnard
- » If the Community Center becomes a drop-off point for school children it should be opened with some recreation programming

“Just a good sidewalk all the way around the park would be good”

“Need more structured planned events”

“More adult programming”

Beverly

- » Very nice park but no sidewalks to or around the park
- » There is no access to water in the park

“Could there be adult rec programming that coordinates with the kids practices”

Wellness Center

Issue may not be finding funding to build the facility but how to support the maintenance and staffing for the long term

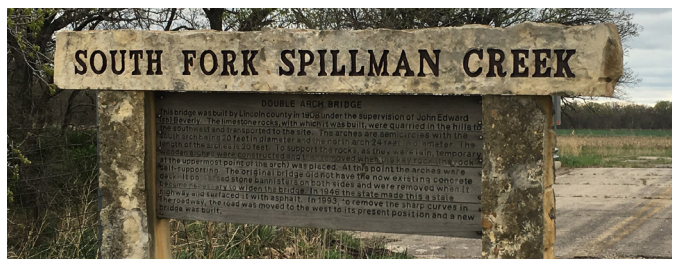
Past fitness facilities have had sporadic success. Biggest issues

- » Consistency
- » Size
- » Variety both in types of work outs and features that would attract a broader audience

Most participants either clearly stated or inferred the need for variety that would attract a range of ages. This was seen as essential to the long term success of the facility – it would have to have something for every age group

Success was defined as:

- » Having features for all ages
- » Walking track
- » Fitness area
- » Exercise classes
- » Classroom space



The need for a pool was widely discussed. Issues and ideas included:

- » A pool would be very expensive to maintain
- » An indoor pool would take active programming and leadership
- » Possibly smaller therapy pool would meet much of the need
- » Improvements to the existing Lincoln pool and improved sidewalks between the pool and a wellness center may fill some of the gap

Need to have access at different times of the day

- » Potentially using a key code access to certain parts of the facility at certain times

Variety of classes at times that work with peoples’ work schedules



Central location within the county to serve the most residents

The former car dealership across the street from the County Courthouse has potential to be renovated as a wellness center

- » Potential for a public private partnership
- » Room for expansion with some adjoining properties in common ownership and others in poor condition

“A fitness center would benefit the county more; people won’t come from out of town to use a trail”

Healthy Foods

Access to healthy foods is limited.

- » Lincoln has a good community garden and many residents in Sylvan Grove have small gardens
 - Lincoln’s community garden includes rental spots and shared spaces that are maintained by volunteers
 - The volunteer grew 2,000 pounds of food last year that was all given away
 - Garden will have a dedicated intern for the summer of 2016

Need for more classes on healthy eating.

- » Classes need to be held in the communities around the county
- » Need classes on canning and food preparation
- » The cost of food has driven many towards more processed foods and individuals often don’t know how to prepare different kinds of vegetables
- » Wellness center may include a commercial kitchen that could be used for classes or rented out by those trying to start catering or other food related businesses

Pool

- » The existing pool is a draw for residents from around the county
- » Hours and classes have not been consistent
- » Fewer kids seem to be going to the pool because they appear to have other options at home and outside Lincoln County (recently renovated city pool within thirty miles north of Lincoln County).
 - Dependence on need a ride to get to the pool or other recreation resources may further support kids just staying home and spending time in front of a screen
- » The idea of an indoor pool was mentioned in several meetings but seemed to some to be cost prohibitive
- » Many thought that although a full size indoor pool may be difficult to support, a therapy pool was feasible

Transportation

- » Access to public transportation was a question asked in the survey but important and interest was low
- » Only one group gravitated toward this issue and the discussion focused on access to shopping and doctor visits by the elderly



- » Limited discussion would indicate that most did not see it as a universal enough opportunity to improve residents overall health

Priority projects

Survey

Based on a list of community health themes from the county Health Impact Assessment participants were asked to rank these themes from most to least relevant. The top four relevant themes included:

1. Retention/recruitment of health care providers
2. Sustaining and building existing health services/providers and specialized health services
3. Elder issues and care
4. Quality, trust, satisfaction, communication related to health care

Stakeholder Discussions

The list of above themes are all very important but do not provide specific projects or programs that could be implemented by the county to improve the health of residents today and into the future. At the conclusion of most of the discussion groups participants were asked to identify what they thought should be the priority project for improving residents' health in the county. The following is a list of those responses in no particular order.

Group 2 (Sylvan Grove)

- » Nutrition classes
- » Walking trail
- » Pool improvements, something that could be used year around
- » Education on canning and food preparation

Group 3 (Lincoln County Courthouse)

- » Sidewalks would be very beneficial to everybody
- » Nutrition should be a priority but limited without some place to do the education

Group 4 (Lincoln)

- » Some kind of trail around town
- » Public transportation that runs to Salina and Hays
- » Walking trails that have amenities along the way
- » Fitness center

Group 5 (Lincoln)

- » Wellness centers solves a lot of the problems
- » Trails or walking path are something that we can be getting done
- » One way through the park

HEALTHY & ACTIVE STRATEGIC PLAN

Health & Active Lincoln County: Strategic Directions & Next Steps

This document complements the Emerging Themes report and is based on an over two-hour workshop with nearly 25 participants from around the county. Some of those participants were involved in the earlier focus groups and interviews that resulted in the Emerging Themes. Others were new to this process.

As part of this workshop, participants were asked to:

- » Validate the issues and opportunities identified in the Emerging Themes report
- » Identify missed opportunities
- » Define what active means and what it looks like for Lincoln County
- » Develop a vision statement for an Active Lincoln County
- » Review priority projects from the Emerging Themes report based on:

- Audiences touched
- Obstacles
- Needed partners
- Needed resources
- Long term viability of the project and the partners and resources needed to extend the life of the project
- » Prioritize projects based on their review and discussing:
 - Ease of implementation
 - Ability to create momentum for other community projects
 - Ability to strengthen the community beyond health and wellness
- » Finally, identifying primarily actions in the next six months



Reviewing & Confirming Emerging Themes

Additional opportunities. There was little surprise over the opportunities that had emerged from the survey and stakeholder groups. Items such as the interest in the pool, healthy foods, willingness to pay for a wellness center membership, level of activity by participants, and lack of interest in public transportation did surprise some of the participants. Discussion on the hurdles began early, specifically related to costs and ownership of sidewalks. Also noted was the need to better communicate the options that are out there today, including the weight room at the school. Finally the need to expand the Lincoln County Recreation Department was seen as a missed opportunity with questions about the age groups it is serving.

What active means and looks like. Active for almost all of the participants focused around family and connecting with neighbors.

- » Any physical movement opportunity to do it together
- » Seeing people out and about



- » Knowing your neighbors
- » Hearing the sounds of kids and families laughing while out being active
- » Talking about activities

Vision statement. Based on what groups had discussed with regards to active, and healthy living and what that looked like to them, each group identified a vision statement.

- » Active Lincoln County families will utilize revitalized city parks, sports facilities, connecting our communities through safe sidewalks, and a robust recreation department available for all ages to decrease chronic disease
- » A cohesive community, moving forward together in a positive, healthy direction
- » Living Lively in Lincoln County
- » Live Healthy Lincoln County

Prioritizing Projects

Missed opportunities. Most groups felt that the Emerging Themes document identified key projects and that moving forward these would be the projects to focus on. One group did note that expansion of the Lincoln County Recreation Department and activities for adults should be added.

Most impact. Once groups agreed on the list of potential projects they began to discuss which projects could have the most impact on the health of Lincoln County residents. In order of frequency these projects included:

- » Trails, walking paths and sidewalks
- » Family activity night
- » Nutrition classes
- » Connecting trails across the county



Reaching the biggest audience. One of the most important aspect of any project is the audiences that can be touched by a project. Dollars are limited and therefore any project should reach the broadest audience possible. Groups were challenged to think about the audiences impacted by their priority projects, not only what groups might be missed but how it could be adjusted to reach an even broader group of residents.

As most groups were gravitating toward trails and sidewalk improvements the discussion focused mostly on this opportunity. To expand the audience participants noted the need to improve ADA accessibility and provide signage to direct visitors to the routes. It was noted that almost all of the projects benefited town residents more than rural residents. However, during stakeholder discussions rural residents noted that they often used their local roads around their homes to walk but were interested in coming into the communities for walks that would provide interest and nice views. One group also noted the need to continue to think about both indoor and outdoor activities that would engage audiences year around.

Assessment of priority projects. Once a group had identified priority projects they were challenged to further assess those projects based on some given criteria. This criteria included:



- » Obstacles
- » Potential partners
- » Needed resources
- » Long term viability
- » Ease of implementation

The following discussion of these criteria focused on paths and sidewalks because participants were gravitating toward that as *the* priority project. This type of project could be applied to each community and includes:

- » Lincoln: A loop that connects downtown, the park, high school, football field, and hospital
- » Sylvan Grove: Either a loop around the park or around school property or both with a connecting sidewalk
- » Barnard: A loop around the community using the levee system and sidewalks around the park
- » Beverly: Sidewalks around the park
- » Linking communities: specifically connecting Lincoln, Vesper, and Sylvan Grove using the railroad line

Obstacles to the development of paths and better sidewalks included:

- » Communication
- » Lack of leadership
- » Financing construction and maintenance
- » Nay-sayers
- » Addressing ownership and maintenance
 - Do property owners want their sidewalks replaced. Some sections in Lincoln are constructed of the historic limestone. The potential to repair these historic sections will need to be evaluated in the final design and implementation but should not be seen as an insurmountable hurdle.
- » Other design issues that will need to be addressed such as trees along routes

Through early planning and communication these hurdles can all be addressed. Resources for construction financing are available but determining at the very beginning who will be responsible for maintenance and upkeep of the system will be important and may not fall to one individual or group. Residents may be asked to help with snow removal along their section of sidewalk while the cities may take ownership of directional signage. Solutions to all of these problems can be found, what is important is to identify and address them early, not as an afterthought.

Partners. Every project, whether large or small, takes partners to complete and making Lincoln County a healthier community is no different. Identifying those partners early on is essential. Groups felt that key partners in the implementation of an improved pedestrian system or expanded Lincoln County Recreation Department included:

- » The business community
- » City councils and county commission
- » Local land owners and homeowners



- » School districts

Resources. Beyond the obvious need for funding resources, groups identified the need for volunteers to assist with maintenance, mowing, and programming. Additionally, assistance with planning and potentially right-of-way purchasing. For those interested in creating a family game night or expanded rec programming, the need for volunteer resources will be necessary.

Long term viability. Participants were challenged to think about ways to extend the viability of any project. This included engagement of a broad generation of community members, bringing in participants with fresh ideas, and expanding routes over time.

Ease of implementation. There was general consensus that with proper funding implementation of an improved path and sidewalk system was “doable.”

For the time and investment that communities will place into the priority project the benefits should go beyond just the one project - building momentum for expanded awareness and investment. Participants were challenged to think about how their priority project could create momentum for other projects and benefit the communities beyond improved health.

Momentum and community benefits. Everyone felt that a visible path and sidewalk system would build momentum in the community. Specifically getting residents interested in projects such as linking trails and a wellness center. Groups also felt there was benefit well beyond just improving access and opportunity for being active. Groups noted the linking of downtown will connect people to businesses, strengthening the economy and attracting residents. Improved curb appeal was also noted. Additionally, it should be noted that from the beginning the definition of active often focused on getting residents out with their families and connecting with their communities. When residents are connected and aware they tend to have more “ownership” in their community or neighborhood, creating safer, cleaners, and lively communities.

Next Steps

With the identification of paths and sidewalks as the primary project, actions to be taken in the next six months were identified. These included:

- » Approach schools, cities, and property owners and gain preliminary approvals
- » Design and plan the system (stake out where sidewalks will go)
- » Research funding sources and apply for grants
- » Recruit necessary partners and volunteers

Concluding Thoughts

At the conclusion of the workshop it was clear that the priority project was the development of a path and sidewalk system. This consensus came from independent conversations within four individual groups, with one group also noting the development of a “family night.” While much of the discussion focused around the sidewalk and trail connection within Lincoln it should be emphasized that each community can do this type of project at their own scale. Residents of Lincoln County should be excited about the momentum that implementation can create and not lose track of future projects. Based on discussions these projects may include:

- » Connecting links between communities
- » Expanded rec programming
- » Development of a wellness center
- » Park improvements that offer activities for a broader age range such as disc golf