

BLUE CROSS/BLUE SHIELD ACTIVE COMMUNITY PLANNING GRANT PROPOSAL NARRATIVE

SECTION ONE: Vision & Commitment - “Making the Connections Across the Community to Enhance our Many Healthy Community Assets”

History of the Community’s Long Standing Leadership to being a Healthy Community

The City of Bloomington has a long history of commitment to the overall health of the residents.

- Bloomington is one of four cities in the state with a public health department.
- The City of Bloomington has established commissions and advisory boards consisting of appointed citizens who review and provide input into strategic planning and the comprehensive plan. These commissions and advisory boards include: Planning; Traffic & Transportation; Public Health; Human Rights; and Parks, Arts & Recreation. The use of commissions and advisory boards ensure an appropriate level of citizen input on Bloomington planning issues including comprehensive plan updates.
- Starting in the 1950’s with the Bloomington Athletic Association – at one time the largest community-based youth athletic program in the United States – and a model for scores of other communities across the country, the City of Bloomington began its partnerships with many community organizations, including several other youth sports associations, to provide numerous other active living program opportunities:
 - Bloomington Youth Soccer Club
 - Bloomington Hockey Association
 - YMCA/Tri-City Skate Park with the Southdale YMCA and the cities of Edina and Richfield
 - Older adult athletic programs with the Born Again Jocks organization (20+ years of providing athletic programs for older adults)
 - St. Luke’s wellness center
 - Winter Fete program with Three Rivers Park District
- The City of Bloomington maintains and operates an extensive parks system; over 36% of the City’s 38.3 square miles is parkland or open space. The parks system provides a wide variety of facilities and programming opportunities designed to enhance the quality of life, health, and wellness of our patrons. Some of these park facilities that support active lifestyles include: Bloomington Family Aquatic Center, Bloomington Ice Garden, Dwan and Hyland Greens Golf Courses, athletic fields, tennis courts, playgrounds, plus many miles of park

trails. See [Attachment A](#) for a City of Bloomington park map.

- Over the years, the City of Bloomington has placed a system of sidewalks along the major surface thoroughfares in the community as a means for promoting walking. In the past couple decades it has also required sidewalks along the more local streets. It has also placed bicycling/walking paths along thoroughfares such as Normandale Boulevard, France Avenue, and portions of American Boulevard as well as other areas of the community.
- In 1974 the Nine Mile Watershed District and City of Bloomington created Lake Normandale from a wetland and provided what has become a very popular walking and biking amenity for not only residents, but also employees and people from other communities.
- The City of Bloomington and the Bloomington School District have for several decades been leaders in the provision of adaptive recreation programs and inclusion supports for individuals with special needs.
- The City of Bloomington and Bloomington School District have for many years cooperatively programmed their respective indoor and outdoor recreational facilities to jointly promote a more healthful community for both City and School District athletic programs.
- In 1999 the Bloomington School District successfully passed a \$107 million bond referendum, at the time the largest bond referendum in the state. A significant share of this funding has gone to add better gym spaces in the elementary schools as well as comprehensive indoor community activity/recreation centers at the two high schools that are open to the public.
- Over twenty years ago, the City of Bloomington was one of three intervention cities selected to participate in the Minnesota Heart Health Program. This was a large community-based heart health prevention program conducted by the University of Minnesota School of Public Health and funded through the federal government.
- From this beginning, the City of Bloomington leadership has continued to focus on building a healthy community through development of City ordinances and policies which create smoke-free environments for those who work, live, or visit the community.
- For the past twenty-two years the City of Bloomington has challenged employees, businesses, and residents to get physical with the *Shape-Up Challenge*; a friendly competition where points are awarded for doing aerobic activities with strength training and flexibility (see [Attachment B](#)). Each year the Mayor kicks off this campaign by inviting the public to join in a two-mile walk around Normandale Lake.
- The City of Bloomington also maintains a wellness committee that promotes health and wellness initiatives for its employees. For over ten years there has been a partnership among the cities of Bloomington, Edina, and

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Richfield to form the *Tri-City Partners*, an initiative for promoting healthy youth and communities.

- In 1999, the City approved the design for Light Rail Transit (LRT) to come into the Community. This provides not only an alternative transportation link to other communities for bikers and walkers – it has been the impetus for the next transformation of the community that had gone first from a traditional residential suburb of 86,000 population to an Edge City with over 100,000 jobs and is now developing its most eastern community edge with higher density mixed-use development that is one of the keys to promoting healthy communities.
- In 2002, the City of Bloomington approved and is providing financial support for the first LRT oriented Development in the Twin Cities known as Bloomington Central Station. Over 5 phases, this site – which had been the location of a traditional suburban hi-rise office complex - will on 45 acres add:
 - 1100 Housing units
 - 350-room hotel
 - 2 acre Urban Scale Park (garnering Metropolitan Council Livable Communities grant funding)
 - 2 million more square feet office
 - Up to 100,000 square feet of retail
- In 2004, the City adopted requirements for all areas within one-half mile of the LRT stations for higher-density mixed use.
- As a result of LRT the next phase of the Mall is expected to provide a much greater array of uses including a possible residential component in a higher-density setting
- While a fully developed community with no real “green field” opportunities on which to form alternative land uses, Bloomington continues beyond its Airport South area to transform key areas of the community into a higher-density mixed use.
- At 98th Street and Lyndale Avenue, and 84th Street and Lyndale Avenue, the City has assisted in the development of higher-density mixed-use development to promote alternative uses of transportation. It is presently in the process of a similar development approach at France Avenue and Old Shakopee Road.
- As noted below in the work plan, the City is presently developing zoning amendments for higher-density mixed-use development in other areas of the community.

More recent initiatives illustrating continued commitment to a vision promoting a Healthy Community have included:

- In 2004, Bloomington was the first community in the metro area to adopt a comprehensive smoke-free policy that includes parks, City facilities, restaurants, and all work sites. The leadership the City provided on this issue

led eventually to smoking prohibitions by Minneapolis, Golden Valley, Hennepin and Ramsey Counties, and, most recently, the City of St. Paul.

- In 2005, the Mayor kicked off the Blue Cross and Blue Shield & Metropolitan Council-sponsored Walkable Communities Workshop held in Bloomington. Over 100 City of Bloomington, school, and business leadership, City department heads, advisory and commission members, and community members attended this workshop. The workshop was very well received and the City is exploring opportunities to incorporate the Walkable Communities' concepts and principles into the 2008 City comprehensive plan update.
- Development of the Bloomington hiking and biking guide (see [Attachment C](#)) to promote the recreational and wellness benefits of walking and bicycling. The guide extols the many health benefits of hiking and biking and includes a map of hiking and biking trails in the city. This updated guide was promoted to Bloomington residents recently in Mayor Gene Winstead's newsletter column "*An Active Community by Design; Non-Motorized Transportation Options for the Future*" (see [Attachment D](#)).
- In 2005 the City undertook the construction of the \$1.2 million trail in Hyland Park that runs along East Bush Lake Road from 106th Street to 84th Street. The new trail is expected to be completed in the fall of 2006 and provides connections to the trails around Bush Lake, Normandale Lake, and the North Corridor Trail, which provides a link to Edina.
- In the past few years, the City has looked and begun to implement a re-striping of some of its collector / minor arterial streets with "bikeable" painted areas near the curbs. The first major project of this type was along Poplar Bridge Road/90th Street/ 94th Street from France Avenue to Nesbitt Avenue. Previously, Nesbitt Avenue had been re-striped north of Old Shakopee Road to 98th Street as a traffic calming measure that had the additional benefit of providing the "bikeable shoulders."
- In addition, over the past year City of Bloomington public works, park and recreation, planning, and public health staff, as well as a Bloomington City council member and a Transportation and Traffic Advisory Commission member, have been active in the Two Wheels to Town Initiative (TWTTI). TWTTI is a partnership with the cities of Minneapolis, Richfield, and Edina that seeks to promote cooperation among the cities and relevant stakeholders to facilitate the design, building, and promotion of bicycle transport systems within and among their communities. On April 24, 2006 the Bloomington City Council expressed its support for the TWTTI and will consider approval of a resolution of support at its May 1, 2006 meeting (see [Attachment E](#)). Other partners that the City of Bloomington works closely with are Hennepin County, Minnesota Department of Transportation (MDOT), Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR), the Metropolitan Council,

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Minnesota Department of Health, Three River Parks District, and the 494 Corridor Commuter Services.

- This spring, the City of Bloomington is partnering with 494 Corridor Commuter Services to sponsor a bicycling commuter challenge whereby residents can register to win an \$800 commuter bicycle if they agree to ride a bike to work during the month of April. To further encourage the expanded use of bicycles in our community, the Bloomington City Council recently enacted an ordinance change to permit the use of bicycles on City sidewalks.

Commitment to Continuing Leadership as a Healthy Community

While the City of Bloomington has undertaken many individual efforts over the years, the purpose of this Blue Cross/Blue Shield grant request is to be more intentional in the development of an alternative transportation corridor plan. This plan will move from having an almost exclusively recreational focus to providing much better-connected opportunities across the community to providing the more robust alternative transportation network that people can use for their work, retail, and recreational use on a more year-round basis. This plan, by its existence - along with appropriate marketing of the opportunities - will continue to build on the healthy lifestyle approach for all ages that Bloomington has been known for promoting for the past 50 years. With its changing demographics in terms of age and range of abilities – a range of alternative transportation opportunities become ever more important. The intent of the grant is to develop the alternative transportation system in conjunction with the development of the City’s next strategic plan and the alternative land use planning designations for its commercial areas and that these will then be used in the development of the City’s overall transportation and comprehensive plan on a more integrated basis. The development of this plan will also serve as the basis upon which the City can request/obtain funding to implement such a plan.

The following City of Bloomington staffs are committed to attend presentations, conducted by the Technical Assistance provider, about active living and its expressions in the built environment and relationship to community planning and policymaking:

Randy Quale, Manager of Parks and Recreation

Eileen O’Connell, Public Health Program Manager

To be Determined, Planning Division full-time staff

Chad Smith, Traffic and Transportation Engineer

Resumes for these individuals are attached. If awarded the City will provide to Blue Cross and Blue Shield its additional community partners and alternative transportation stakeholders that will attend these presentations.

The City of Bloomington Mayor, City Council, and staff support the Active Community Planning grant application and will strive to enact policies and projects directly resulting from the planning process. The proposed alternative transportation plan

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and grant were presented at the April 24, 2006 Bloomington City Council meeting and Council voiced its support for both.

Attached are various letters of commitment and support for the Blue Cross/Blue Shield grant request. If awarded the grant the City agrees to undertake a health impact assessment using a tool provided by the Technical Assistance provider. Information yielded by this assessment will be considered for incorporation into the Bloomington planning initiatives including Strategic Planning, Parks Master Plan, Transportation Plan, and the 2008 comprehensive plan update.

SECTION TWO: Work Plan

The City of Bloomington proposes to undertake a holistic approach to a planning and marketing initiative entitled “Making the Connections Across the Community to Enhance our Many Healthy Community Assets ” to promote and enhance an alternative transportation system in Bloomington. The project goals for the “Making the Connections Across the Community to Enhance our Many Healthy Community Assets” work plan are as follows:

1. Develop an achievable alternative transportation plan that addresses both inter- and intra-City connectivity. The developed plan will then be used as a basis upon which the City’ s integrated transportation, parks, and land use plan come together in its 2008 comprehensive plan update – but also provide the basis to seek funding provided for implementing alternative transportation plans.
2. Develop and implement a marketing initiative to increase community knowledge of alternative transportation modes.
3. Promote and enhance alternative transportation modes so they play a key role in encouraging active living in the community.
4. Increase the number, connections to, and mileage of developed alternative transportation corridors.
5. Increase the number of residents and visitors utilizing alternative transportation in the community.

This initiative consists of two key components:

1. **Physical:** The preparation of a plan that addresses the physical components of alternative transportation modes available to the community. Alternative transportation includes all modes of transportation other than personal and commercial motor vehicles, including but not limited to walking, bicycling, personal transportation assistance devices, rollerblading, and transit. Potentials and opportunities for developing a comprehensive and complete network for alternative transportation would be formulated including designated walking and bicycling facilities. The plan would serve as a guide to promoting and enhancing the use of alternative transportation by Bloomington residents and visitors.

2. **Activities:** Encourage and promote active living through the use of alternative modes of transportation. By developing alternative transportation modes that are readily accessible, convenient and safe to use, the community will be more apt to utilize alternative modes of transportation. This will help connect the knowledge people have regarding healthy lifestyles with their motivation to lead a healthier lifestyle (get the head and the heart together!)

If awarded, the City of Bloomington would engage a consultant to work with staff, stakeholders, and the general public to prepare an alternative transportation plan for the City. The City would also engage a second consultant to develop a database for park trails and bikeways. By developing an alternative transportation plan we expect the City to provide greater access and connection to parks, open space, alternative transportation links, transit, commercial, schools, employment, and other desired destinations both within and outside the City, thereby encouraging people to live a healthier lifestyle through exercise. The City is currently conducting an inventory of all the existing sidewalks that will be incorporated into the alternative transportation plan. Attached is a map that highlights some of the existing trails, sidewalks, and potential alternative transportation corridors in Bloomington (see [Attachment F](#)). While there are many miles of trails and sidewalks already provided in Bloomington, there is a vital need to develop a comprehensive alternative transportation plan that unites the existing transportation corridors, identifies gaps where new connections should be incorporated, and develops maps of the alternative transportation corridors for distribution to the public. The City is also working with neighboring communities on identifying alternative transportation corridors among and through our communities.

Current City Planning Initiatives: As it prepares for the next revision to its comprehensive plan, due in 2008, the City of Bloomington has embraced these land-use planning resources in the development of a new Strategic Plan and a new generation of mixed-use zoning codes.

Strategic Planning: The City of Bloomington has already embarked upon a citywide Strategic Planning exercise. The City has retained Springsted & Associates to facilitate a joint City Council – Community planning process to develop a new vision for Bloomington’s future. The development of the new Strategic Plan will involve the City Council, its Advisory Boards and Commissions (Planning, Traffic and Transportation, Public Health, Human Rights, and Parks, Arts & Recreation), City staff, and other important City stakeholders including the Bloomington School District, the Bloomington Chamber of Commerce, and numerous other Bloomington organizations as well as the general public through our Neighborhood Watch program. Through the Chamber’s Economic Development Committee, the City has already actively engaged the Bloomington Chamber of Commerce in this exercise.

Zoning Amendment Initiative that Supports Healthy Lifestyles: Much of Bloomington’s first generation of

commercial development of the auto-oriented era is now ripe for redevelopment providing an opportunity for the City to “re-invent” itself. Bloomington’s City Council has already articulated a “String of Pearls” redevelopment strategy for its tired “grey field” neighborhood strip malls that lie at key intersections along its major arterial roadways. A year ago, the City Council commissioned its Planning Staff and Planning Commission to develop a new generation of pedestrian-friendly mixed-use zoning codes to govern the redevelopment of these aging strip malls at three levels of development intensity:

1. **Neighborhood Mixed Use:** This district would govern the redevelopment of neighborhood commercial centers such as France Avenue & Old Shakopee Road. Initial drafts of this zoning district would require parking behind the buildings instead of in front of them as well as building designs that would put “eyes on the street” and would encourage mixed-use development including housing.
2. **Regional Mixed Use:** This district would govern the redevelopment of larger scale redevelopment opportunities such as the approximate 40-acre area lying between Penn Avenue and I-35W, south of American Boulevard. Initial drafts of this zoning district would include minimum density requirements and require a housing component to encourage development that is similar in form to Excelsior & Grand in St. Louis Park. The City has already issued notices to the property owners in the areas where this zoning district would first be applied so that they can participate in shaping the final form of this zoning district.
3. **Commercial Mixed Use:** This district would govern the redevelopment of large scale regional “shopping centers” such as the 45-acre Southtown shopping center that lies between Penn Avenue and I-35W and between I494 and American Boulevard. It would encourage the redevelopment of properties such as this in the form of walkable mixed-use “Lifestyle Centers” such as “The Shops of Arbor Lakes” in Maple Grove, except with higher densities and a greater mix of uses (developments such as “The Gateway Center” in Salt Lake City, Utah, the “Washingtonian Center” in Gaithersburg, Maryland, or “Marketplace Commons” in Arlington, Virginia would be better national examples of this type of redevelopment.)

As noted above, the City of Bloomington has already created and implemented a model “Transit Oriented Development” zoning district that governs the redevelopment of the “Bloomington Central Station” area around a new LRT station in eastern Bloomington. This district requires a pedestrian-friendly streetscape (there are no building setback requirements, for example) and mandates a mix of uses – housing, office, retail, and hotel – to create a transit and pedestrian-oriented neighborhood that will encourage walking within the zone. In addition, the City is working with the Developer to enhance trail connections between the development and the adjacent Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge to facilitate the active use of wildlife refuge trails by the inhabitants of the development. A primary goal of all of these new zoning districts is to create neighborhood gathering places that

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encourage residents to walk to and within the new developments from the surrounding neighborhoods.

The development of the other new zoning districts is well underway – the goal is to have these districts ready for Bloomington City Council consideration by June 2006. Final adoption of the new zoning districts (with a few exceptions) will be held in abeyance until the completion of the Strategic Planning exercise to ensure that the new zoning districts are consistent with the Community’s vision as revealed through the Strategic Planning process.

Alternative Transportation Initiative: A recent survey of members of the Bloomington City Council, Planning Commission, Port Authority, and Housing & Redevelopment Authority revealed a strong consensus that the City needs to plan for improved east-west transit service along American Boulevard to support more intense development along this corridor. A good transit network can also promote less driving and more walking, especially in conjunction with “Transit Oriented Development” such as Bloomington Central Station or the potential transit oriented development that the City is encouraging in the Southtown area through new zoning districts for the area which anticipate the future I-35W Bus Rapid Transit Line (which will have a station in this area). In addition, the City and the Metropolitan Council anticipate the need to construct a new transit hub in the Normandale Lakes Office complex, the second largest employment concentration in the south metro area (after the Mall of America). In both cases, planning for these facilities must also make provision for improved pedestrian connections between the new transit facility and the surrounding development.

The City of Bloomington is currently administering the construction of the East Bush Lake Road bikeway. This project connects several existing facilities to form a large network of non-motorized facilities and increase access to and from western Bloomington. The City continues to apply for funding for non-motorized projects, such as the Old Cedar Avenue (Long Meadow Lake) bridge. This bridge is the critical missing link that would connect Hennepin and Dakota counties.

SECTION THREE: Long-Term Capacity

The cities of Bloomington, Edina, and Richfield currently are reviewing potential non-motorized travel destination nodes and multi-modal interfaces to incorporate in the 2008 updates of their comprehensive plans. Specifically, the cities are looking at coordinating an alternative transportation network and a bike plan with each other and with neighboring cities to create a well-connected regional network that bridges jurisdictional boundaries and physical obstacles such as freeways and rivers. In the past, interconnection has not been a major element in comprehensive planning. Often trails and walkways would simply end at the city boundary or where the cost of providing trail continuity across a physical barrier was more than the city’s capital budget could handle. This coordinated application is designed to enhance trail utility and design by increasing communication and creating a common sub-regional funding agenda. One of the implementation issues is retrofitting existing developed neighborhoods and

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street systems due to the 1950s to 1980s era development patterns in the three cities. However, the City staff and leadership are committed to creating an environment that supports and encourages active living by Bloomington, Edina, and Richfield residents. A natural by-product of this connection will be to make new routes through our communities available to residents in the surrounding cities of Minneapolis, St. Paul, Eagan, Eden Prairie, Hopkins, St. Louis Park, and other cities of northern Dakota County.

Currently, Bloomington is experiencing redevelopment of many locations in the community. These locations tend to be neighborhood commercial centers, areas served by transit, functionally obsolete commercial structures along major arteries, and highways. Because these are future destinations for bike riders and pedestrians, the redevelopment patterns create excellent opportunities for adding highly desired destinations to the trail system.

Developing the new transportation plan with the City of Bloomington's concurrent Strategic Plan, zoning rewrite, and long-range park planning projects establishes a theme that can coordinate and direct these Strategic and Comprehensive Plan and zoning ordinance elements to be effective in promoting active living.

Strategic and comprehensive planning has a long successful history in Bloomington, Edina, and Richfield. Looking back at plans from the 1960s, 70s, 80s, and 90s demonstrates that once an idea is adopted in a city's planning framework, it is implemented. One impressive example is the concept of an I-494 arterial ring route, proposed in a study by the consultant DMJM over 30 years ago. The three cities incorporated the ring route proposal in their plans and implemented it at the highest rate that funding and right-of-way acquisition would allow. Today the result is the 76th Street (in Richfield and Edina) and American Boulevard (in Bloomington) high capacity arterials that meet and exceed the initial study's objectives of taking short distance trips off of I-494, creating a continuous east-west route that minimizes traffic impacts on residential areas and creates a new front door for commercial uses along the parallel arterials. This is the sort of vision that now needs to be applied to describing a network of bicycle and pedestrian routes for the three cities and region.

Implementing a competent system is not as difficult a funding proposition as constructing twelve miles of arterial streets, bridges, and tunnels through a developed commercial strip. Yet certain critical links in the anticipated system will be costly. Having a single vision for the system will certainly improve the potential for competing for federal, state, and regional funding. In addition, the three cities will continue to identify funding in their capital improvement programs to assure the plan's implementation.