



Public-health planner suggests legislating a leaner York

By **EMILY OPILO**
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When people think about solutions to America's obesity epidemic, better zoning might not be the first thing to come to mind.

But that's what brought public-health planning and transportation consultant Mark Fenton to York on Thursday. A walking advocate and former competitive walker, Fenton visits cities across the country to help community leaders influence healthy behavior through more pedestrian-friendly legislation and design.

Locally, he's been working with members of York's Action Communities for Health, Innovation and Environmental Change, or ACHIEVE, program to brainstorm less-traditional ideas for increasing physical activity and healthier lifestyles. Thursday, he met with a group of York's leaders and residents to share his findings.

Unhealthy behavior doesn't begin to change until it becomes socially unacceptable and less convenient, Fenton said, citing the change in society's perspective on smoking.

"The downward trend didn't happen way back here when we knew tobacco was bad for us," Fenton said, pointing to a chart with smoking rates.

"It happened out here when we actually started changing policies and started taxing the daylight out of the product, put a warning label on the side,

and we made it hard to smoke in public places."

Mounting a local health campaign needs to be more than just T-shirts and water bottles, he said. Laws and design need to make physical activity the default, easiest option, he said.

Fenton conducted a walkability study of York and made several recommendations:

Develop a network that encourages active travel.

Connecting paths and bike routes with each other and with popular destinations can have a huge impact, Fenton said. In many cities, the least-attractive stretches of trails are the most traveled, because they go somewhere important.

Mandate better site design. Fenton recommended the city create better incentives for mixed use, multi-story, downtown development with limited parking to encourage pedestrian-friendly businesses.


The city should aim high when looking for retailers for the Northwest Triangle, he said. Traditional big box stores, such as Target, can be integrated into a city and encourage walking.

Think about safety. Making pedestrians feel safer with median islands, roundabouts and curb extensions can make walking more attractive. Fenton praised York for the design of downtown Market Street that forces drivers to slow down, but using cheaper alternatives like painting limited lanes on a street can also be effective, he said.

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