

PAGE AVENUE HEALTH IMPACT ASSESSMENT
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This health impact assessment (HIA) examined the potential **health impacts** of the Page Avenue redevelopment located in Pagedale, Missouri in St. Louis County. The priority impacts of interest included employment; access to goods, services , and recreation; access to healthy foods; pedestrian safety; community safety; community identity; and housing. In addition, the HIA identified **limitations, challenges, and opportunities** associated with the redevelopment’s capacity to improve community health. Using multiple forms of evidence, the Healthy PAGE Project offers strategies at multiple scales of action for modifying current plans and supplementing with programs and policies **to maximize health benefits**. It is hoped that the Page Avenue HIA will encourage policies and actions that create an economic, physical, and social environment that enables youth and adults in this community to lead healthy lives.

This project was made possible by funding from the Washington University Center for Social Development, Alvin J. Siteman Cancer Center, and Institute for Public Health (#0903-03), as well as the Active Living Research program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (#66584).

HEALTHY PAGE PROJECT

In 2009-2010, an interdisciplinary team at Washington University along with St. Louis area community and academic partners led a comprehensive health impact assessment (HIA) of the Page Avenue redevelopment. Funded partially by tax increment financing (TIF), the redevelopment has been planned for Page Avenue between Kingsland Avenue and Buckner Avenue in Pagedale, Missouri located in St. Louis County. TIF is a tool to use future tax revenue to finance the current improvements that will create that revenue. The design generated for the passing of the TIF ordinance in 2007 was expected to have significant health impacts on area residents and therefore became the focus of the Page Avenue HIA. The redevelopment plan includes:

Scott Associates/Redevelopment Planning and Architecture and Sneary Architectural Illustration

175 Units of residential townhouses (1000 sf.)

Grocery store (16,000 sf.)

Retail / commercial development (10,000 sf.)

Urban park

Office space (25,000 sf.)

Bank (5,000 sf.)

48 Units senior housing (360 sf. each)



HEALTHY PAGE PROJECT

The HIA was intended to provide an impartial assessment of the health impacts of the redevelopment. It was also hoped that this HIA would (1) increase awareness among regional decision-makers and stakeholders regarding the many factors that impact health and (2) encourage local and regional discussion surrounding how to define and plan for a healthy community.

The Page Avenue HIA was focused on answering these questions:

- **Do current conditions in this community promote health?**
- **How will the Page Avenue redevelopment affect the health of the community?**
- **What actions can be taken to maximize community health benefits?**



WHAT IS AN HIA?

An HIA is a combination of procedures, methods, and tools by which a policy, program, or project may be judged as to its potential effects on the health of a population and the distribution of those effects within the population. An HIA seeks to provide decision makers from the non-health sector with recommendations to mitigate the negative and maximize the positive impacts on health or health inequities.¹

HIAs view health from a broad perspective, taking into account a wide range of environmental factors, such as housing conditions, roadway safety, and social and economic variables. Often, HIAs can promote civic engagement by engaging community members and other stakeholder groups who will be affected by a decision.

Key decision-makers and stakeholders

The Page Avenue redevelopment is the product of an on-going partnership between the City of Pagedale and the non-profit organization, Beyond Housing, one of the region's leading providers of housing and support services for low-income families and homeowners. The project evolved out of the 2001 Pagedale Community Action Plan carried out by the City of Pagedale, Beyond Housing, and St. Louis County. Beyond Housing is acting as the master developer of the Page Avenue redevelopment.

WHAT IS A HEALTHY COMMUNITY?

Today, health is viewed not merely as the absence of disease or infirmity, but as a state of physical, mental, and social well-being. This definition recognizes that numerous factors influence individual health, not just the qualities of the individual. The social, physical, and economic environments of where a person lives, works, goes to school, and spends time are also important for enabling people to lead healthy lives.

Pagedale community members and government decision-makers described a healthy community as one with the following traits:

- lack of crime
- access to healthy foods
- promotes unity
- high quality school district
- economic stability
- walkable
- neighbors knowing neighbors
- decent housing in sound condition
- opportunities for social interaction
- neighborhood management

The HIA team identified the following types of individuals and organizations who are or will be involved in making decisions about the Page Avenue redevelopment:

- **Developer**, including Beyond Housing Executive Director and Board of Directors
- **City of Pagedale**, including the Mayor, Board of Aldermen, Residents, and Police Department
- **St. Louis County**, including TIF Commission, Economic Council (and subunit Economic Development Collaborative), and County Government (Planning, Health, and Transportation)
- **East-West Gateway Council of Governments**
- **Missouri Department of Transportation**

Community stakeholders include:

- Residents
- Business owners
- Civic and religious leaders
- School officials



Do current conditions in this community promote health?

The Page Avenue HIA examined the potential health impacts of the redevelopment on individuals, youth, and families living primarily in Pagedale, MO as well as surrounding communities in University City and Wellston as defined by the 63133 zip code and area of the 63130 zip code north of Olive Blvd. Although the focus area is relatively small in geography and population size, the HIA team viewed the HIA as having a potential impact on the decision-making currently underway for the 24 municipalities that make up the Normandy School District in St. Louis County.

Policy and socioeconomic environment

Historically, the area bounded by the Normandy School District has been fragmented given the multiple jurisdictions in a small geographic area. The lack of centralized policy-making has led to competition between municipalities and limited political influence at the county and state levels—particularly with regard to the distribution of government-funded resources. From 2006-2008 in Pagedale, 21 percent of residents were living in poverty, and 95 percent of residents identified as black or African American. As of 2000, Pagedale had an unemployment rate of 11.5 percent. The study area saw improved high school graduation rates and reduced drop out rates between 1990 and 2000, however these are still low compared to St. Louis County.

Health-related indicators

This region of St. Louis County experiences a high rate of early mortality from chronic disease. Between 2000 and 2007, Pagedale (zip code 63133) and its surrounding communities were in the upper tertile of cardiovascular and diabetes death rates for persons aged 45 to 64 years in the St. Louis region.



In addition, in 2007, African American adults in St. Louis County had a much higher prevalence of obesity than non-Hispanic White adults. Based on the Pagedale household survey, the prevalence of self-reported physical activity and healthy eating were found to be low. The majority of residents surveyed reported no leisure-time physical activity or use of nearby parks, and 67 percent of adults reported consuming one or fewer daily servings of fruits and vegetables. Healthy eating is challenging when there is a lack of places to shop for healthy food. Prior to the opening of the new full-service grocery store in the redevelopment, this area was served by small groceries and convenience stores; of those audited, they did not serve lean cuts of meat, fresh fruit, or low to no-fat dairy.

Physical infrastructure

This area has experienced decreasing population and declining investment over the years, resulting in deteriorating infrastructure, vacant housing, and boarded up commercial structures. More recently the area was disproportionately affected by the U.S. foreclosure crisis relative to the rest of St. Louis County, resulting in a dramatic increase in vacant and abandoned property. Pagedale lacks a bank, laundromats, dry cleaners, and shops. The conditions of the sidewalks and speed of the traffic do not generally promote walkability. Beyond Housing has greatly improved the existing housing stock of the area by building new homes and subsidizing housing repair to older homes.



How will the redevelopment affect the health of the community?

The Steering Committee of stakeholders for the Page Avenue HIA identified seven priority impacts of the redevelopment on health. These seven impacts represent important social, physical, and economic determinants of health, as supported by scientific evidence and documented in the full report. In addition, several issues were identified that address the limitations, challenges, and opportunities associated with the redevelopment's capacity to improve community health and well-being. Using data from community assessments, scientific evidence, and stakeholder input, the full report documents (1) how each priority impact is connected to health, (2) what we learned about the community, (3) opportunities the redevelopment presents to maximize the health benefits for each priority impact, and (4) recommendations.



Overall, there was consensus across the HIA team, stakeholders, and decision-makers that the redevelopment will positively impact the health of the community. However, because of concerns about prolonged phasing or lack of detail in the current plan, some priority impacts were more certain (access to good, services, and recreation; access to healthy foods; housing) than others (employment, pedestrian safety, community safety, community identity). The only potential negative impacts concerned relocation of people's homes and businesses. Both business and homeowners have been and will be fairly compensated; therefore, deeming negative impacts to be minimal in light of many anticipated benefits.

WHY HEALTH MATTERS

Health is a measure of influence on what is known as quality of life. Individual health has far reaching effects on society, from economic vitality to social participation. Creating environments that promote health can play a significant role in reducing rates of chronic diseases, the leading causes of death and disability in the United States and internationally. 133 million Americans, representing 45 percent of the total population, have at least one chronic disease.² Supportive, healthy environments enable people to live healthier, more independent lives and attain their full potential to contribute to the social and economic well-being of their communities.

Understanding the relationship between health and planning or policy decisions allows decision-makers to “gain better insight of outcomes, balance health against other policy considerations, appraise options, and improve the trade offs.”³ Simply put, knowing more allows for more nuanced and comprehensive solutions to the complex problems decision-makers face.

What actions can be taken to maximize community health benefits?

The top five Page Avenue HIA recommendations represent common themes that emerged from the assessment of each priority impact, as well as a separate assessment of leading challenges and opportunities concerning the redevelopment and larger area. More detailed information about each recommendation can be found in the full report. Below briefly describes the meaning and importance of each of the top HIA recommendations.

- 1 Replace symbols of disinvestment and improve pedestrian infrastructure in the short-term.** The redevelopment will occur over many years during changing political landscapes, funding opportunities, and community priorities. Boarded up and deteriorating buildings are signs to both residents and outside observers that they are in a poor and struggling area. Tearing down boarded up buildings and soliciting funding from MODOT, Saint Louis County, and other resources for infrastructure improvements including medians, sidewalks, lighting, traffic lights and landscaping features would help support and attract investment. Moreover, such improvements have high likelihood of improving and sustaining perceptions of personal safety and pedestrian safety, encouraging walking in the neighborhood, and enhancing community identity.
- 2 Implement orchards and gardens.** An initiative is currently underway to implement a pilot project for turning vacant lots in Pagedale into community orchards and gardens. The Fruit Hill Initiative builds on a history and memory of fruit trees being prevalent in most neighborhoods in Pagedale, once known as Fruit Hill. Planting orchards and gardens has multiple benefits related to attracting investment in the redevelopment and to health outcomes: (1) provides spaces for public gathering to encourage social interaction and possibly improve perceived safety; (2) improves marketability and sense of community by creating physical features that convey an identifiable character and remedying concerns over vacant lots; and (3) promotes healthy eating by increasing access to and awareness of healthy foods.
- 3 Supplement physical improvements with education and programming.** Multiple strategies are required to change complex health-related outcomes – including changing environments and policies to make healthy opportunities and choices easier, enhancing social norms and social support, and educating and motivating individuals to take advantage of opportunities. The Page Avenue redevelopment will need to be supplemented with education and programming (e.g., nutrition classes, information about job training and job application, walking clubs) to have the greatest impact on community well-being.



4 Prioritize spaces and programs for youth recreation. Lack of opportunities for youth, especially those aged 12 to 18 years, emerged as a consistent theme from the qualitative data and stakeholder input collected as part of this HIA. Design that promotes accessibility for the youth is very important for addressing this existing disparity. Specific priorities aimed at resources that are utilized by youth include expanding park facilities and recreation opportunities. Such spaces and programs could have positive health impacts on youth physical activity, community safety, and social networks.

5 Foster stakeholder engagement. Plans for the Page Avenue redevelopment have the potential to change over time due to changing forces and opportunities. A periodic reassessment of stakeholder priorities will keep the public well informed about project progress and engage stakeholders in the planning process. Forming a chamber of commerce will organize business owners to be involved in the civic process and better integrate their concerns and needs into decision-making. Promoting civic engagement and social capital has health benefits. In addition, stakeholders can organize a task force to oversee actionable elements of the Page Avenue HIA and potentially increase the likelihood that recommendations are carried out in the implementation phase of the redevelopment.



REFERENCES

1. Gothenburg Consensus Paper: Health Impact Assessment: Main Concepts and Suggested Approach. Brussels, Belgium: European Centre for Health Policy, World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe; 1999.
2. Wu S, Green A. Projection of Chronic Illness Prevalence and Cost Inflation. RAND Corporation, October 2000.
3. Kemm J, Parry J. Health Impact Assessment. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004. 19.

CONTACT PERSON

Christine Hoehner, PhD, MSPH, Assistant Professor, Washington University School of Medicine
660 S. Euclid Avenue, Campus Box 8100, St. Louis, MO 63110, hoehnerc@wustl.edu