



Planning a healthy community starts here

Powell River Marches Forward with Walkability Forum

Community Story Snapshot

CATEGORY Active Transportation

INNOVATION Walkability Forum

LOCAL GOVERNMENT Powell River

PARTNER Vancouver Coastal Health Authority (VCH)

COLLABORATION VCH + C3 Forum



Powell River’s two-day Walkability Forum helped community members see the linkages between health and the built environment. The Forum is an example of local governments and a health authority working together on implementing a common priority – active transportation.

Chronic disease prevention isn't always about personal choice. That's one of the messages shared with residents at the **Powell River Walkability Forum**. Attendees of the Forum learned that 60% of population health outcomes are attributed to the places we live and social and economic determinants.

“Our tendency is to say ‘you’ve got to do your 150 minutes of exercise each week or eat your 6-8 servings of fruits and vegetables to be healthy’ and we forget to consider the context of their lives. Is this choice possible for everyone?” said Claire Gram, a Policy Consultant and healthy built environment Lead from the Vancouver Coastal Health Authority (VCH). “We need to look at the environmental factors as well as individual and make the healthy choice the easy choice.”

Gram was speaking to an audience of community-members wanting to improve community physical activity. They came together in three different events as part of a process to gather feedback and stimulate ideas to promote active transportation. Over two-days local and regional leaders discussed approaches to active transportation and walking.

The forum was organized by a partnership of VCH and three Powell River local governments. Together they planned a general public conference, a stakeholder meeting, and a discussion with the Tla’amin Nation to make up the overall Forum. These events encouraged open discussion regarding the current situation in Powell River.

Learning from the Process

Although Powell River is located in a mild climate on the beautiful upper Sunshine Coast and is interlaced with many accessible walkways, their community members are considerably auto-dependent. Promoting and improving walkability is a priority for local governments in order to improve community physical activity.

“Healthy neighbourhood design and healthy transportation networks can play a significant role in encouraging community members to make healthier choices and decrease the risk of chronic illness,” explained Gram, one of several presenters at the forum. She emphasized several linkages between planning principles and health outcomes.

The healthy planning linkages were echoed by Chris Morwood, the Vice President and Active Transportation Lead of the Powell River Cycling Association (PRCA).



Healthy People



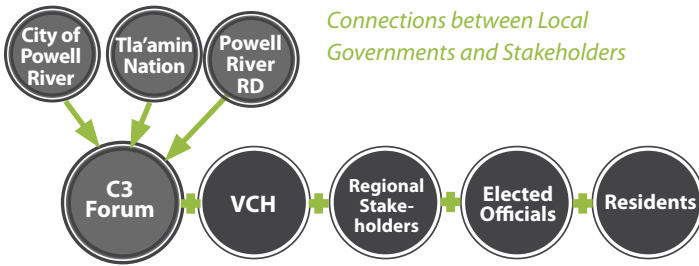
Healthy Society



Healthy Environments

BC Local Government Healthy Community Story

Healthy Community Story



Connections between Local Governments and Stakeholders

A World Café method was used to explore what improvements could be made in the area of active transportation. Valuable feedback was gathered over the two days. For

“Well-designed, inclusive streets can create economic, carbon, social and health benefits for a community,” said Morwood.

Other presenters shared further linkages such as the business case for improving walkability. “Trails add tremendous economic value to communities in that they make places more attractive to live. Generally, housing prices increase the closer they are to trail systems and they are often the most sought after amenity by people considering relocation decisions,” explained Nicole Vaugeois, BC Regional Innovation Chair in Tourism and Sustainable Rural Development at Vancouver Island University. A walkability strategy in Whistler was described by Val Litwin, CEO of the Whistler Chamber of Commerce.

For example, members of the Tla’amin Nation shared safety concerns such as unleashed dogs and wild animals. Members of the PRCA described streets as the largest public spaces in a city when discussing their work improving connections between existing trail and road networks both in the city and regional district. “Streets should be designed to accommodate both active and motorized traffic of all ages,” said Chris Morwood.

The discussion provided the partners that organized the event with significant insight to assess what the community wants and needs to improve walkability. The group discussed what infrastructure was existing which helped them put forward suggestions on improving walkability. Ideas were gathered and compiled for city officials and regional stakeholders to review the following day.

Connections Between Local Governments and Vancouver Coastal Health


The three local governments involved with authority in the Powell River Region include the Tla’amin Nation, Powell River Regional District and the City of Powell River. The three governments meet quarterly in a community-to-community forum known locally as the C3 forum. VCH met with the C3 forum early in 2014 and discovered a shared interest in healthy built environments in small and rural communities. “Walkability within Powell River was a natural choice in improving overall health of the region,” said Jennifer Kassimatis a Senior Helath Officer with VCH.

VCH worked to build connections with members of the C3 forum and other regional stakeholders. They invited residents and regional stakeholders to participate in a Powell River Walkability Forum. PRCA helped plan and implement the forum and their strong connections with community stakeholders were key factors that contributed to the success of the event.

Innovative Outcomes and Impacts

What made the partnership between VCH and Powell River successful was finding common ground, combining efforts, sharing resources and developing a more meaningful relationship that engaged the community in their initiatives. In the past VCH helped communities within the jurisdiction on high-level planning such as reviewing Official Community Plans. The Walkability Forum was the first collaborative effort between the different entities to implement activities on the ground. The Forum helped develop strong connections with community members and meaningful collaboration between organizers.

A number of innovations in active transportation have been initiated since the forum.

Visit www.planh.ca/powellriver in the community story section for the list of innovations and more resources. 

PlanH supports local government engagement and partnerships across sectors for creating healthier communities, and provides learning opportunities, resources, and leading-edge practices for collaborative local action.

PlanH is a partnership between BC Healthy Communities Society and Healthy Families BC and is informed by health authorities and other key stakeholders. Contact us at bchc@bchealthycommunities.ca



“It’s about building the relationships to make the interactions smooth. — Claire Gram, VCH”

Learn More

Healthy Built Environment Linkages Toolkit
How can local governments link planning principles to health outcomes? Find this guide and more resources here:
www.planh.ca/take-action/healthy-environments

