



Promoting Walkable Communities
740 13th Street Suite 220, San Diego, CA 92101

April 22, 2009

The California Endowment
600 W. Broadway
Suite 1250
San Diego, CA 92101

Dear Steve and Sid,

Re: Building Healthy Communities

WalkSanDiego is a non-profit organization dedicated to providing a safe, inviting, and convenient pedestrian environment throughout the San Diego region. For the last 10 years, we have worked with SANDAG, cities, developers, schools, neighborhood organizations, merchants, and individual residents to identify and fund improvements for walking safety and security and enjoyment. Our organization specifically focuses on improving streetscape designs, creating more accessible walking paths and installing traffic calming measures. We believe that doing so is a critical means of promoting healthy communities.

WalkSanDiego believes that two important elements in the creation of healthy communities are: (a) the enhancement of the built environment to promote walking as a means of transportation and a form of recreation; and, (b) working with neighborhood residents at the grassroots to develop a better understanding of the motivators and inhibitors of walking, and engaging them in the process of recommending and advocating for physical improvement and advocating for policy changes. Effecting changes in the built environment that are conducive to walking and appealing to pedestrians involves impacting land use policies and practices in ways that are at variance with prevailing planning norms which give preeminence to the automobile. Changing the emphasis in land use policies and practices involves targeted community development, providing the information and training needed by neighborhood residents to become effective, well informed advocates for walkable communities.

For these reasons WalkSanDiego is very supportive of the proposed Building Healthy Communities project in City Heights, and the formation of strong partnerships to produce policy and systems changes over the next decade, and significant health related outcomes.

WalkSanDiego is able and willing to commit staff time to project planning activities, as a newly formed 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and with no general reserves, it would be ill-advised at the present moment for the Board to commit in-kind staff time or other resources at no cost. However, WalkSanDiego is very committed to this project and would endeavor to secure the necessary resources to contribute to the successful achievement of outcomes.

WalkSanDiego is involved in three projects in City Heights that correspond with the following California Endowment outcomes. :

3. *Health and family-focused human services shift resources toward prevention.*
4. *Residents live in communities with health-promoting land use, transportation and community development.*
6. *Communities support healthy youth development.*
7. *Neighborhood and school environments support improved health and healthy behaviors.*

Health Equity by Design

It is well documented that an individual's address, zip code, and census tract greatly impact health equity. An individual's physical activity level, eating habits, and other health behaviors are impacted by the design of their neighborhood and their access to community resources such as transportation, parks, recreational facilities, and healthy food outlets. The goal of *Health Equity by Design* is to improve health equity in underserved neighborhoods through community-driven, transit-oriented development.

Health Equity by Design, delivered in partnership with the County health and Human Services Agency, will develop customized interactive health-indicator maps, a health planning tool, and community asset data maps for community members to identify barriers to health equity in their neighborhood. The project will produce disease-specific checklists and solution-oriented supportive materials to engage community members in the design of a healthier neighborhood. Utilizing these project tools, community members will develop a *Health Equity Blueprint* to propose solutions that promote health equity and outline steps for implementation. Solutions will vary based on the community's priorities, but may include improved public transit access, pocket parks, mixed-use redevelopment and pedestrian safety strategies such as sidewalk and crosswalk enhancements, traffic calming, complete streets, street and park lighting and greenway connectors.

Community members will work collaboratively with the City of San Diego Planning Department in City Heights throughout the process, and present their final *Health Equity Blueprint* to key decision-makers such as City Council and the Planning Commission to propose integration of solutions into the Community Plan. The entire process will be evaluated so *Health Equity by Design* can provide a model for community-driven, healthy development in underserved communities throughout San Diego County.

Pedestrian Enhancement Project

City Heights' grid street pattern, generous sidewalks, and traditional architecture make it a destination for pedestrians, but pedestrian-friendly attributes have been compromised by automobile access improvements and more recent, automobile-oriented buildings. To restore a balance between walking and vehicle access, the city and Price Charities could provide incremental but significant pedestrian improvements during construction of the mixed-use affordable housing project soon to get underway at the corner of 44th and University Avenue. The idea is to pair public investments with private investments, achieving together a more walkable location.

Land uses within City Heights are governed by the local Community Plan, building codes, parking requirements, etc. For the project about to break ground, facade details, and other important design aspects are not likely to change. However, there is an opportunity now to identify *where and what* pedestrian enhancements could be implemented in conjunction with this project, both by the developer and the city, to create a more vital node for pedestrians. At the same time, the city is conducting Phases 2 and 3 of the Pedestrian Master Plan, which in part will identify specific pedestrian improvement projects in City Heights. Where a developer offers to share costs with the City or provide complimentary pedestrian features, a project is more likely to receive priority. WalkSanDiego is a sub-consultant with Alta Planning + Design on the Pedestrian Master Plan. In addition to this plan, the City recently adopted the General Plan Update, which includes pedestrian friendliness as a major feature of future growth and development.

Visionary plans are important, but how do they help you cross the street this year or next? The purpose of the following menu of potential next steps is to utilize local experts -- the community -- to document the existing obstacles and opportunities for improved pedestrian circulation in the vicinity of this project. We find the best decisions are made when the public is included as much as possible in the decision process. The goal is to pinpoint design aspects that people care about, and begin to address them systematically.

City Heights Walks to School

City Heights, one of the most underserved communities in San Diego County is a working class community comprised of single and multi-family residential land uses, as well as pockets of industry, service, neighborhood-scale business, and two major commercial corridors. The diverse population consists of recent immigrants from across the globe and also a considerable group of long-time residents. With over 30 languages and dialects spoken, City Heights often is referred to as the 'International Village.' City Heights has a critical unmet transportation need that qualifies it for an environmental justice planning grant. Many local streets are unsafe for children walking to and from school. It is estimated that over half of the children in City Heights walk to school – two-thirds at some schools—because of the high density and low-vehicle ownership rates. Twice as many children were injured by cars in Mid-City during the 1998-99 school year than in the City as a whole.

The need for more pedestrian friendly streets is echoed by the fact that this community is highly transit dependent and lacks adequate transportation options. Twenty-four percent of the population in City Heights has no vehicle. The busiest bus route in the entire transit system, No. 7, is centered in City Heights along University Avenue (*Mid-City Communities Plan*, 1998). Creating safer streets will benefit not only the most vulnerable pedestrians, children, but the many other people that depend on non-motorized transport for their daily needs.

In partnership with City Heights CDC, WalkSanDiego provides outreach to parents, children, officials, community stakeholders, and residents to plan for safe routes to schools in City Heights revolving around National Walk to School Day events. Efforts are built on the curriculum in schools to educate students on traffic safety and create excitement around these types of events. This project intends to create and/or update SR2S maps for each school identified in this application with direct input from residents, parents, and school and city officials. In addition to the maps, a needs assessment will be done for each school that identifies deficiencies, solutions, and costs of implementing pedestrian safety improvements around the schools.

Outcomes include: community-wide National Walk to School Day event at 11 elementary schools; conducting walk audits and producing walkability checklists; outreach to parents of school children on walkable communities; initial survey to parents to measure knowledge on traffic safety; producing draft SR2S maps and needs assessments for identified schools with parent input and traffic engineering consultant assistance; updating parents upon completion of draft maps and using them for subsequent National Walk to School Day events; outreach to community stakeholders with draft maps and needs assessments to solicit further input; coordinating any changes/updates to maps and assessments; and evaluation through an end survey to measure parents' knowledge on traffic safety and safe routes.

Thank you for your interest in our work and I look forward to the opportunity to contribute to this exciting project. I hope the information I have provided is helpful. If you have any further questions or need more information, please don't hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Ken Grimes

Kenneth Grimes
Executive Director