

Weight of the Nation:

CDC's Inaugural Conference on Obesity Prevention and Control

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Innovative Policy Initiatives at the Local Level

Moderated by Casey Hannan, MPH

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CDC Division of Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Obesity

Joseph Curtatone, Mayor

Somerville, Massachusetts

Chip Johnson, Mayor

Hernando, Mississippi

Larry Bonderud, Mayor

Shelby, Montana

Sharon Hampson, President

National Association of Local Boards of Health

Health Director

La Crosse County Board of Health

Wisconsin

CASEY HANNAN:

This morning, we will hear from four elected local and dynamic policy makers, three of whom serve as city mayors, and one of whom is from a local board of health. Each of them will share their own story of innovative policy initiatives within their respective jurisdictions.

Our first panelist will be Mayor Chip Johnson from Hernando, Mississippi. Mayor Johnson served with distinction in the U.S. Submarine Service for six years. He is currently serving his second term as mayor and previously served as alderman for the city. Mayor Johnson is a member of the Mississippi Bicycle Advocacy Group and has been invited recently to give the keynote address at the Missouri Obesity Summit.

Our second panelist will be Mayor Joe Curtatone from Somerville, Massachusetts. As mayor, he successfully implemented a wide range of reforms and new programs that have earned Somerville many distinctions by regional and national organizations. These include the designation by the Boston Globe Magazine as the best-run city in Massachusetts, by America's Promise Alliance as one of the 100 best communities for youth, and as a finalist in the 2008 All-American City competition.

Our third panelist is Sharon Hampson from La Crosse, Wisconsin, County Board of Health. Ms. Hampson holds a master's degree in school counseling and was a public school teacher and counselor for 25 years. She was elected to the La Crosse County Board in 2002 and has been reelected three times, and she currently serves as Board president of the National Association of Local Boards of Health.

And our fourth panelist is Mayor Larry Bonderud from Shelby, Montana, a position he's held since 1989. He also serves as director of the Montana League of Cities and Towns. In 1994, Mayor Bonderud was presented the American Community Leadership Award in recognition of excellence in community leadership.

MAYOR CHIP JOHNSON:

I think I'm here today because I represent a large portion of our population that live in small towns. My city is only 15,000. And I think most of us live in small towns. We're all going to go home to a place where we may know our elected officials, where we can actually institute some change.

Intuitively, we know that we live in the most obese time in the history of the world. And we're in the most obese nation in this most obese time in history. And when I go home tonight, I will be in the most obese state in the most obese country at the most obese time in the history. So, if you don't think I feel the weight of that, there's a lot for us to do when we go home. And it's not just my state. It's every state. We all have that problem.

When the Surgeon General issued his opinion that no amount of second-hand smoke is safe, in Hernando, Mississippi, we took it seriously. And my Board voted for us to become the fifth city in the state to adopt the Clean Indoor Air ordinance. It may sound like I'm bragging, and maybe I am because we're doing some great things in Hernando. But I can't do it without a willing Board and without citizens that support us. And for you elected officials out there who wonder how to get these things done politically, just go do them because it works. We just had an election. All five aldermen and myself were put back in office, unanimously. So, the people want these initiatives.

We've all been comparing the way we got rid of the smoking issue, but the way we we're working on the smoking issue in trying to do the same thing. There's another example I want to give. There's a mayor in the town next to me, Nat Baker, in Horn Lake. He proclaimed his town as the greenest town in Mississippi, and it wasn't. But, you know what, two years later, he won the Mississippi Urban Force Council's Greenest City Award. And it's because he said it. And if you say it and then you do it, your people will back you up, and you can move ahead. So, I want us to all remember that. But we are all in the PR business when we go back home. We have to start talking about it and never let up.

James Marks with the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation said, "Local implementation of obesity initiatives is not occurring." And I think Tip O'Neil said it best when he said, "All politics is local." And that is truer in this issue than in another other.

So, what I want you to do is listen to some of the examples I'm going to give and then go home because every one of you lives in a town or a city. And we can go home and affect change starting in our own towns. There are some people that don't believe that this is the right thing to do. I think all of us in here know obesity is an epidemic, and the CDC has now put a voice to that. And we know it's just the right thing to do to try to help our people that live in our towns. But for those naysayers, we can put some dollars and cents with it.

When I first got elected mayor four years ago, I asked my economic development leader what we needed to attract corporate headquarters to our town. One of the top three things that we needed, he said we had to be a pedestrian friendly town because the type of people that move to a pedestrian friendly town are the type of people they want to work in these corporate headquarters. So, this is our economic development tool. We're putting in bike lanes and sidewalks and parks, and we're doing that as an economic development tool for those who don't believe it.

I'm going to give you some examples of things to do. So, I'm going to just show you some of the things we've done in our small town without any money because we don't have a lot of money. The first thing you have to do is create a Parks Department. You've just got to have one. I didn't have one when I got elected four years ago. We had three or four parks, and we had the Public Works Department mow them occasionally. I now have a Parks director, an assistant Parks director, and six staff members that work in that Parks Department, and you have to have those workers. And we built them a little at a time over four years. We didn't get them all at once. And, of course, I work them all 60 hours a week. So you have got to build a team of people who are loyal and willing to work.

You've got to replace your sidewalks. You've got to give people a way to get out and walk. And you can be creative about it. Our Girl Scouts came to us and said they wanted a project, and I said, well, how about mapping the sidewalks in our historic downtown. And next thing you know, they show up with this GPS map. And you could click on it, and it would show you a photograph of the crumbled sidewalk. And not that I understand politics or anything, but I had the Girl Scouts present their findings to my Board of Aldermen. And then that same night, we voted to budget \$100,000 for sidewalk repairs. So, you have to work it however you can work it. But it's the right thing, and my Board of Aldermen would have voted for it anyway. But it just gave them a little extra ammunition to do so.

So, we've literally been taking this map and replacing broken sidewalks. And I've been told that we need data. But the data I can tell you is we replaced a sidewalk outside of the window of my office. And it was crumbling before, and I saw the same two people -- and these were very athletic people because they had to be to walk on it. They would come by my office every morning at 6:30. Well, now, we replaced that sidewalk with one that's AEA compliant, and I can count 12 or 13 people everyday in the same period of time. So, it's kind of like if you build it, they will come. It works.

The mayor in Ocean Springs, Mississippi, fought our Department of Transportation to get a walking path on her new bridge after Katrina. And they said no one will walk on it. Well, the data I found was that I drove across it on a Tuesday afternoon at 2:00 in the afternoon, and there were 23 pedestrians on that bridge. So, I like that data.

We work without money. So, we have taken advantage of the Safe Routes to School application process, and we were just awarded \$213,000 to put sidewalks in our poorest neighborhood. And we have a condition there that's just awful, and they call it "hazard busing." I don't know if you-all are familiar with that, but what it means is these kids live close enough to walk to school, but it's not safe for them to do so. So, we're running a bus to kids houses three blocks from a school building. So, we're going to correct that problem. It's going to save our air because we're not running the bus and polluting the atmosphere with that anymore. It's going to get our kids exercising. We all know the benefits of it. But that's what we're doing.

The other thing is sidewalks seem to reduce crime. I haven't quite figured out why, but we know it does. So, we put in the sidewalks, and our crime is going to go down.

Some other quick examples, you have to go get grant money. That's just the bottom line. If you're in a small town, you've got to find it. One of my best examples is people came to me -- the tennis players came and said we need those tennis courts refurbished. And they were cracked and crumbling. But they said to me, we have found you some grant money to pay for half of it. So, those are the kind of partnerships you like. So, we've refurbished all of our tennis courts, and it only cost us half of what it would have.

Zoning, very quickly, you have to have some laws. We have a law in our town that if you develop a plan unit development, 10% of the land has to be given or set aside as open space.

So, here's one big example we did. We had a plan unit development that was going to have mixed use housing, Wal-mart, all those things. So, they had to give us 20 acres for park land. It cost our citizens nothing. We had Wal-mart give us \$25,000 to put the set of playground equipment in there for two to five year olds. We got a Wildlife and Fisheries grant for \$150,000 that put us in nine parking spots, a gazebo, and a quarter-mile walking trail. We just got awarded another grant from Wildlife and Fisheries also for another \$100,000 to create the rest of the trail network through there.

So, basically, we've got a \$275,000 park, and all we had to pay for was the \$3,000 sign out front. And that's not including the million dollar cost of the land that we would have had to purchase. So, you have to put these ordinances in place.

Very quickly, we have created a farmers market that just got USDA certified. We are working with USDA to get vouchers for our senior citizens so that they can spend money at that farmers market.

And I think I'll just about close with an example of how my morning went this past Saturday. I didn't plan this. I got up Saturday morning - I know we're not supposed to eat sausage - but I cooked sausage that I had bought at the farmers market the week before, and it was made 15 miles from my home. The eggs I ate were from Como, Mississippi. The tomato I sliced was from my next door neighbor. That was my breakfast. Then I grabbed my egg cartons to recycle, and I walked to my farmers market on sidewalks, recycled those egg cartons with the girl I buy the eggs from. And then I was able to walk to my eye doctor's office. So, when you put these things in place, you end up with an ideal living environment.

Every one of you lives somewhere, and I implore you to get up and go home and do something. And we are going to, together, create an atmosphere and an opportunity for all of our citizens to have a healthy lifestyle. Thank you.

MAYOR JOSEPH CURTATONE:

I'm the mayor of Somerville, Massachusetts, and it's really an honor to be here. Let me just tell you, over the last five years, I have had the opportunity to speak around the country and to officials around the world about Shape Up Somerville and what we've done in our community. And in every year, every instance, I've gone out and talked, I've seen more and more great local officials like the mayor here and people on this panel and like you doing something in their city and town. And that's where those state representatives and state senators and Federal members of Congress should come down and see what's happening where the rubber meets the road because we are the innovators. That is where society and social change is going to occur at the municipal level. So, congratulations, Mayor, and all of you for the fine work you're doing. So, a little backdrop here before I go into "Shape Up Somerville." And I'm going to give you the 30,000 foot overview, and then I'll be available for some questions.

Think about if your community, maybe a densely populated urban city, and think about what happens when they take all your transit away. Think about it in terms of communities planning. There's really no good access to dynamic and flexible open and green space, good and wholesome food choices, and on every corner, you have a Taco Bell, a McDonald's, a Burger King, a package store, a liquor store up and down the street. And you have high levels of traffic coming through your community. What do you think is going to happen to that community? Then put another layer that public safety is an issue. I'm referring to the consequential connectivity of policy development of policy failure. And children are the best indicators to tell you if your policy is succeeding or failing.

A few years ago, Dr. Christine O'Connor, who is a pioneer on childhood obesity and obesity prevention from the Freidman School of Nutrition at Tufts University, our partners in this endeavor, talked to me about what we have. Initial studies show that the elementary school children we examined were either

40 percent obese or risk of being obese, higher than the national average. We had to do something. For me, this has been the most fun I've ever had because this spoke more to making our community livable to healthier communities. Childhood obesity is just another consequence of policy failure or lack of vision.

So, as a municipal official, I agree with the mayor that more and more people are talking about it will result in that social change because this is what it's about. It's not about putting people on a diet. It's about change in behavior. Eat smart. Play hard. Get people out and active in the community. Talk about it to your decision makers at the local level. Don't let the finance people tell you what can or can't be done in your city or town. Don't let them run your community or drive policy. That can't happen.

The finance people are going to tell you about the data collected, the information, and the four corners of a document. That's important for the bond rating issues, the borrower. But it does not tell you how healthy your neighborhoods are. It doesn't tell you whether the kids are scared to go to the park. It doesn't tell you whether the most susceptible community in your neighborhoods can reach or obtain healthy food choices. Do not let them do it. Drive the policy. Drive the social change, and get everybody involved.

So, a little bit about us. We are the most densely populated city in New England, number five in the country. We have officially 78,000 people in 4.1 square miles, probably closer to 100,000 people. We border Boston and Cambridge. We used to have 17 rail and trolley stops. Today, we have one. That is changing.

In the next several years, Somerville, everybody in Somerville with the new expansion of light transit and other transit nodes will be within a 1/2 mile radius of walking or biking to a transit node. That's very important. We speak 52 languages that we know of in our schools and our neighborhoods. We have environmental justice communities because I go back to those 17 rail and trolley stops back in the '50s. Some officials with some great vision said, let's get rid of them. Let's bring in Interstate 93 and other secondary arterials so we have more particulates in the air, higher rates of respiratory illnesses, and it goes on and on and on. Neighborhoods are cut off from each other, cut off from open space, cut off to good and wholesome food choices. And the most densely populated city in New England and at one point in the world, we were the great example of suburban sprawl, believe it or not. Suburban sprawl. Somerville used to be part of Charlestown. We broke off over 100 years ago because they were becoming too urban for us. Go figure.

Now, what we did -- Shape Up Somerville is a community-based environmental approach. We changed the factors around how children made decisions to select foods, to become active. So, whether it was a change in curriculum and physical activity, whether it was training families and being sensitive into the ethnic makeup of our community and how they cook or what foods you've made available, having fresh fruits and vegetables available all day long for the kids, getting them to pick the vegetable of the month, that had an impact. After we made those environmental changes, we took that community-based approach, our kids in that time period over a couple of years gained one less pound than all the controlled communities.

But we saw right away when Christine O'Connor said, "I need you up front, Joe. You got to be an ambassador for this. You've got to lead the charge for me." And my background has been in fitness and athletics, coaching high school athletics. But I saw this, as the mayor said, as an opportunity to make our city more livable.

Who's going to want to live in your city? No one. So, we took immediate action, whether it's to deal with the built environment right away, transportation accessibility. We got a major commitment to extend the green line, which is a major transit line in the metro region, several new stops in Somerville, expand our bike systems, add bike lanes, just deal with the built environment, whether it's making our streets safer with

traffic mitigation measures, pedestrian safety enhancement measures, just to get people out to play hard, to walk to the squares, to walk to the parks.

And this also had a public safety component to it, and we had a new community policing deployment model, which is important. Because if parents don't feel they can bring their kids to the playgrounds and parks and leave them, they're not going to do it. They're not going to be as active.

We also had a very major focus on our green space and open space. Since 2004, we have either built, designed, or under construction in the process of designing 25 new parks, playgrounds, and community gardens, everything from a major athletic field, football stadium, down to a community park to a community garden where people can grow their own fruits and vegetables. We're very excited about that. Safe Start was a measure to a program which we're dealing with now in funding to increase the safety around major intersections and accessibility to our neighborhoods and squares. Our squares are fantastic.

If you walk out of your door in Somerville, only 4.1 square miles, you go to one of our major business districts or squares, you get a taste, a flavor experience from another part of the world. Up until now, you had to take your life into your own hands. So, we put a major focus on this.

Again, mapping out where our parks are, promoting that to the community. Out of any city in Massachusetts with a population of 50,000 people or more, we spend the least per capita. We made it a priority. We've gone after funding. We've gone after grants. We got the business community involved. We got developers involved.

Some of the things we accomplished in our food systems -- we have better local, healthier food options in our schools. We got our restaurants and businesses involved. So we got our Shape Up Somerville approved restaurants. And all we asked restaurants, you don't have to change your menu, just have a different option. Some of it is portions. Have different portions available for people. So, I did the right thing. I wanted to go out and make sure I had lunch everywhere at every restaurant in the city to show that they're a Shape Up Somerville approved restaurant. I gained weight through that process, by the way, and I lost it.

Farmers market, expanding that in the city in our most vulnerable parts where -- our most diverse parts of the city, that's under expansion now. We have our second farmers market in place, our third under development right now. And that's really an improvement and that's really important.

Part of what we're thinking down the road is with transit coming through our city, it's what are our neighborhoods going to look like, what are the types of uses around those transit nodes, what other types of businesses, open space, how do we make them accessible. Any new development project coming to the city must have a multi-module component to it. For example, IKEA is coming to Somerville and you'll be able to get there by bike, by foot, by car, by transit. Again, this is infiltrated all our policy and decision-making in development.

How have we done it? You need to get all the stakeholders involved. You need leadership. At the local level, you've got to drive it. But a good thing about Somerville, it has been easy to get stakeholders involved - the schools, social service agencies, business community. Who doesn't want to build new parks in their communities? Who doesn't want to improve their streetscape? And we sold this as an economic development component as well and making Somerville more livable. We've actually had families come to us and say how they moved to Somerville because of the focus around community wellness, making Somerville healthier, making Somerville greener. And that has many layers to it.

The Shape Up Somerville model has been a community based environmental approach. The community based partnership involved local institutions such as government, the Chamber of Commerce, the business community, main streets, academia. We have a local public health chain, the Cambridge Health Alliance, which is our public health institution in the City of Somerville. Those are all critical components.

Branding - we build a new park, Shape Up Somerville is on there: Eat Smart, Play Hard. Shape Up Somerville approved restaurants, Eat Smart, Play Hard. We want to expand or repair sidewalks we're branding. We're talking about Shape Up Somerville. All our policy development and decision-making, we know and we learned is interconnected. We learned that from failure and moving forward, and the tenants of eating smart, playing hard are embedded in every decision we make. Thank you very much.

MS. SHARON HAMPSON:

I'm from the Midwest and I'm an elected official. I chair the Health and Human Services Committee in my local county, and we set priorities and policies for the Health Department and the Human Services Department. I'm also currently president of the National Association of Local Boards of Health.

I joined the NALBOH in 2002, and I've been there ever since. NALBOH is the only national organization that serves local boards of health. We provide education, training, technical assistance, and advocacy. There are 3,200 boards of health nationally, and that boils down to 20,000 board of health members. They take many forms and some have more authority and power than others. NALBOH has a website, and on that website is a searchable database by state so you can look up your state, and you can find all of the state statutes that tell you what you need to do in your state for a board of health.

NALBOH is a very young organization. We're only 17 years old. We're small, but we have powerful partners. CDC is one of our major funders, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and we're partners with APHA, NAHO, ASTO, Public Health Accreditation Board, and the Public Health Foundation. And we have an office in Bowling Green, Ohio, because that's where the founders are from. But we have a Washington office too. And because of that, we're able to partner with all of those big guys, and we're the little guy. We're the little engine that could. We have Ned Baker lecture every April that's webcast. And we have an annual conference. We just finished ours this month in Philadelphia. And we have a quarterly news brief.

The other great development in NALBOH is that we have state associations of local boards of health. Oddly, we call them SALBOHs. And there are 15 so far, and several more are forming. So, we're building a network of communication from the local to the state through the national and back again.

Now, on my Board in La Crosse County, there are six elected officials and three who are appointed, one of whom is a doctor. We meet monthly. We approve the budget. We set priorities and policies for the staff, and we're considered an arm of the state government. So, they pass laws, tell us what we need to do, and then we put them into action.

My community is 110,000 people. It's in a rural part of the country, but it's kind of an urban center for that area. We're right on the Mississippi, and it's absolutely beautiful. So, put it on your vacation plans, La Crosse.

The public health initiatives that we have in our county that address obesity are Safe Routes to School, two community gardens, five farmers markets that occur on different days and different locations. We have a grocery store education program where public health personnel help shoppers to make wise choices. Our vending machine company, voluntarily of their own initiative, highlights healthier choices in

their vending machines with a green tag. And they price subsidize those by charging more for things like Snickers and Doritos.

We have a 500 Club that we developed with the two hospitals in town and the three universities and public health department. And restaurants and some of the grocery store delis participate, and they'll put a green 500 Club label on their choices that have less than 500 calories for a meal. And they'll break it down nutritionally about how many calories, how much fat, sodium, sugar, et cetera.

We hold a collaboration conference annually, and we bring community groups together. And we haven't done one on obesity or the built environment, but the point is we've established partnerships with the business community, with the education community, the hospitals. And through those collaboration conferences, we are ready, and we know who to contact and who can help us and who we can help when we're ready.

We have a Childhood Obesity Coalition, and we have a Hunger Task Force, which oversees free church dinners and handouts to the needy. Now, this is one obscure little county in the Midwest, and all that is happening. What's going on in your jurisdiction?

Now, as an individual, I ran for local office because I love government. It's always been a hobby. I became active in my state public health association. I was president for a year. And one of the major things that we did while I was in office there was to hire a lobbyist. And for only \$12,000 a year, we have direct access to state legislators. And they now consult us on pending legislation. They say what position would you like this to take. It's fabulous. And I'm just a former public school teacher and counselor. I live in a small county in a state that has less than two percent of the national population, and yet here I am in Washington, D.C. I'm president of a national public health organization, and I know people at the CDC and state and national legislatures. And that's what one person can do. I mean, I even inspire myself.

So, that's what an individual can do and what a small place in an obscure part of the country can do. To me, this is tobacco control redux, and the parallels are all there. There's a lack of knowledge about products and how they've changed. There's a need for public education about all that. There's corporate marketing with seemingly unlimited funds, and they target subpopulations. There are socioeconomic and racial inequities, the same social justice issues that are in the tobacco field. There's a need for new regulations, new laws, new taxes. And don't be afraid of taxes. Taxes are what fuel the engine of government and public education.

We inspire perceptions of big brother and anti-business, and we get resistance from the food industry. Now, that all sounds very familiar. And over the last 20 years, look at what we've done to the tobacco industry. I really think in this country we've broken the back of big tobacco. Now, we're not there yet, but as with tobacco, all these efforts started in the local jurisdictions. And the locals are the experimental laboratories. Ideas are tried there, and then the state and the national levels pick them up. And we do it through partnerships, coalitions, and taking a multi-faceted approach to a complex problem. We know what to do. All we have to do is apply that same knowledge to the obesity epidemic.

So, when you go home, one thing you can do is to look up your local board of health and find out how much authority and statutory power they have and enlist their help. We can pass local laws that make quite a bit of difference, and that gets the attention of the state and national levels. Thank you.

MAYOR LARRY BONDERUD:

What I want you to think about is in your community, what if you don't have one of these champions? What if local government says, shove it, we've got to fix potholes? And what do you really do to engage that

local entity because what this shows here is that this issue is going to be solved at the local level. So, it's going to be the local level, your city government, your county government, your tribal government, boards of health, where the rubber hits the road where it's really going to be solved.

And so what you're seeing and hearing here today is really important in that this is where this problem is being addressed. This is where it's really going to get solved. And how can you do that when you get back home?

Local government is interesting, needless to say. These folks here represent local governments from various parts of the United States, but the similarities are great. And those that are interested in developing a champion, developing this local coalition, really need to understand local government, how it works and what makes it tick, how it's financed. You need to understand things like growth policies and capital improvement programs because that's what really makes these folks stand up and dance.

And really, they should also have in their capital improvement program, the growth policy issues for health. And we need to add this as part of government's local role. What's the one-year plan for community wellness? What's the five-year plan? We do it for sewer lines. We do it for water lines. We do it for streets. Why don't we do it for wellness and health in our communities? And that's something that I think when you engage local government and find these champions and put these coalitions together that that can really occur and go on.

So, I'll quickly tell you a little bit about what's going on in this frontier place called Shelby, Montana. Shape Up Shelby, we put this coalition -- we're a frontier community, and I'm going to talk to you a little bit about this. And rural obesity, so, what are we going to do about it? Here the population of our county is 5,100. Shelby is about 4,000 now. Very rural economy. You know, we have our goals and our program, what we're trying to do and how we're trying to do it. We're a railroad town. Forty-four trains per day. And interstate highways, kind of out in the middle of nowhere. But there's a tremendous amount of commerce going through there as they serve the Oil Sands projects in Alberta to the north.

For step one, we developed a fitness center. Needless to say, it gets 40 below where we live quite a bit of the time in the winter like this. So, we started with our indoor recreation activities, and the community went together. We had a civic center, an old National Guard Armory that we converted into a fitness center. And then as I observed that for a year and saw how it was going, people were not really trained in how to exercise or really what to do like this. So, I convinced the city council to hire a trainer. And people could come in. This person could put them on a program of how to properly exercise, how to properly do things. We started feeding a little nutrition, and this was just us on our own kind of floundering around, wandering what we're doing. Pretty soon a lot of folks stepped up and helped us put things together like this. Our next project was a 6.3-mile walking trail, became roller blading, and biking trail.

And, you know, this money issue. It's always money, money, money in these things. But we were able to figure out how to do this. This is the same programs that some of the other folks from their communities have used. This is Fish, Wildlife, and Parks Trail Program in Montana, and we were successful in getting grants to do this.

And, you know, you do it a piece at a time. It's just like plowing a field. Well, you make a furrow and you get that done. And you turn the mule in front of you and you pull it back and you complete another furrow. Then you turn it and go the other way.

Our usage of these trails are going up. Then we were publicizing the trail. You know, when you put these things in place, you've got to have a marketing program. It's key to get your community to use these things. You know, use the Road Run Recreation Trail everyday. You know, more publicity for it. So, our

trainer made this part of her training classes. There's five or six classes per day that we put on in our civic center. And several times per week as they do their workout routines, they are on the trail.

Then we got into our school. So, here comes another part of the coalition. You know, talking to the schools, bringing them in. And our Safe Routes To School program. Walk and Wheel Wednesdays when everybody had these walking school buses, and we got the mayor and city council people and county commissioners and school board members out to walk with these kids to school.

And then we found out what they did in their town. Man, these sidewalks are lousy. And the kids really don't have a safe place to walk. So, that led to this five-year program for sidewalk improvement in the community, and that's undergoing now.

Now we're into our restaurants and our grocery stores to encourage them. They participated freely and came forward with a lot of good ideas, became part of our coalition, and, you know, children menu choice. Free civic center day pass, if you choose a salad in one of our restaurants. So, a lot of unique marketing concepts and ideas that we put together. And the kids love it. The Walk and Wheel Wednesdays, the class that had the most participants, and they had grandmothers and grandfathers and uncles and aunts and everybody walking to school.

More nutrition things that are becoming very, very important in the community there led to a community garden where the city put the land together and the water. The MSU extension service, another partner in this coalition, brought together their folks and put together a community garden. And now, this is two years old, and all the spaces are rented. And they pay \$10 for a 20-by-20 patch. And all the money goes to improve the park. And now we need to expand it because we're out of space. But it's really good, and we provided a whole new source of nutrition in our community just by bringing some other partners in.

And publicity. What you're doing, how you're doing it, why you're doing it, and you've got to keep hammering this. Our monthly newsletters, each of our monthly newsletters that goes to every household in our community now has nutrition stuff in it: Exercise, obesity information, things of this nature. And, you know, more partners coming such as The Maria's Medical Center.

And then how you track it, how you monitor it. We have good baseline data. We did BMIs on every kindergartner, first, second, third, fourth grader. And now we're monitoring this as how we go along. Sharing Plow helped us do our adult population. We've got a great sampling of our adults. So, as we monitor our program, we can have a measurable success rate.

Also, the city employees, who all now participate in a wellness program -- in a mini-sample, we now have the insurance data for our health care costs based upon that pool and their BMIs and other things of this nature. We're in our third or fourth year of tracking health care costs versus BMI in a little micro thing inside this frontier community.

So, we're watching things closely. These are great programs. They can be placed in any community where you can find your champion and bring all these sources together from your state, your region, and the CDC has been great where a lot of this stuff comes from. And unfortunately, local officials are basically unaware that this is probably the number one thing they should be doing in their community. The wellness of their citizens will do more to improve their community than anything else they can do. And so this is a great investment. Thank you.

CASEY HANNAN:

I'll start with a question: Of the tools in the toolbox, the offices and the positions you hold, presumably confers to you certain laws and/or legal authorities, for example, authorizing or regulatory controls. What of these, if any, did you utilize to develop and/or implement your local policy initiatives?

MAYOR LARRY BONDERUD:

If you can convince your government to do this, any time a building permit is issued, there's an evaluation of the sidewalks, if it's a renovation or new. There has to be an evaluation of the existing sidewalks if they're there, or there's a requirement to put in the new ones. It is a big thing because we used our ordinances to improve our sidewalks. And if it's on the frontage of a highway that there has to be spacing for a bicycle trail and things of this nature.

MAYOR JOSEPH CURTATONE:

If I can add to that, along the same lines, obviously everybody has planning departments, your zoning tools, your board of health, regulating your overall health policies in the community on the planning side. I'm sure everyone has used that or thought about banning trans fats. But on the built environment side, we've done two things. One in terms of trying to set an expectation of developers coming into the city. Most communities have open-space requirements making sure that open space is connected into the neighborhood is actually usable, not just a bench with some green grass and a parking lot. So, it's very dynamic; it's very usable. Also, how bike lanes are connected to community paths. But also we've used zoning in this way in terms of having access to good and wholesome food choices. We had a supermarket that closed. The owner of the property brought in a developer, wanted to open a giant flea market to one of our most needy neighborhoods. We used zoning to stop that, put on a moratorium, and we're doing master planning now to encourage a neighborhood market there.

MS. SHARON HAMPSON:

One thing I would suggest is that you ignore all the rules and regulations. Even though I'm in government and I know what their regulations are, it's easier to ask forgiveness than permission. And you can have influence even if you don't have power. But stay away from any ordinances. Start a new ordinance, sometimes it's really sticky, especially if it has anything to animals, stay away from it. But even when you lose in an effort to change a local ordinance, sometimes change follows that anyway because you've started people thinking. And I've seen that happen several times. I've backed a lot of causes that never went anywhere, and yet, change happened afterwards.

MAYOR CHIP JOHNSON:

I'll just give an example of how the sidewalk policy works. We have the policy that requires sidewalks in all new developments and in any existing redevelopment if there's any substantial work done on the outside of the building. And the way this has worked for us, one of our main streets, we call it Commerce Street, did not have adequate sidewalks. We built a new church. They were required to put in a green break and a sidewalk. There was a bank that redeveloped. They were required to put in an ADA sidewalk. And right next to it, an old supermarket was turned into a Good Will, so now they put in a sidewalk. What that's done for us since we don't have much money, it's filled in a lot of gaps for us. Now we do have enough money that we'll be able to come back in this budget year and just connect everything together. So, it's almost like a public/private partnership there.

QUESTION:

I'm Sonia Calmeyer from the World Health Organization's regional office for Europe. I want to applaud Mayors Johnson and Curtatone that pointed out so nicely that improving environment and health does not have to be the enemy of economic development, in fact, it can be an economic opportunity. And I think that's a very important message, especially at these times. I was also impressed by the very strong environment and transport approaches and urban planning approaches that you both presented. And I wanted to invite you to expand a little bit on how you were able to forge these alliances for these types of approaches and whether the health sector was involved at all in these or whether these were carried forward independently.

MAYOR JOSEPH CURTATONE:

We like to pride ourselves as an incubator for urban planning and smart growth. I talked about looking forward with several new transit nodes coming through our community. We have a community corridor planning process where we're thinking using transit analysis. What are those neighborhoods going to look like? How are they going to be shaped? How do they further overall sustainability, livability, and wellness goals as a city?

In terms of health organizations, they really weren't part of that, though I think they're intertwined. I think the tenants are smart growth and transit node is so complimentary to what we're trying to do here. And we just set an expectation for our future planning, for our visioning, and also for major development projects. And I mentioned one earlier with IKEA. That's assembly on the Mystic. That's the largest marked growth project on the East Coast right on the river. So, we're setting those expectations, those policies, and that standard in place now.

MAYOR CHIP JOHNSON:

And another thing you have to do is educate your people. When I first took office, we took 50 key people, the preservation committee, the planning commission, the newly elected aldermen, myself, bankers and developers. We put them on a bus and took them to a community that was doing planning correctly. And we drove around, did a big day-long tour, and they came back educated. And we all need that because it's just been 10 years ago that I thought acre-and-a-half lots were the best thing since sliced bread.

So, we all learn, and we grow. And that education is a big thing. We still have problems. Even though we feel like we're progressive, our elected officials, our aldermen in our town, have a lot of public pressure to totally separate uses because, for years, the building industry has almost brainwashed the average citizen into thinking that if there is something retail anywhere near your home, your property values will decline. That's absolutely not true. But we have to change those perceptions and get back to the mixed use and traditional neighborhood developments.

QUESTION:

My name is Debra Kibbe and I'm with the LC Research Foundation and the Take 10 Program. So, I grew up in a town of a thousand in Western New York, and I now live with four-and-a-half million of my closest friends in Atlanta, Georgia, and I'm interested to know based on your personal experience as well as discussions you've had with other leaders around the United States if there are certain actions that are more bang for your buck in rural areas versus those in large, metropolitan urban areas. And if so, how would you prioritize them for each of those areas, the rural versus the urban?

MAYOR CHIP JOHNSON:

I'm maybe not as rural as some, certainly not as rural as Montana. But bang for your buck, it obviously depends on density. The further your people are spread out, the harder it is to get a good bang for your buck. One thing we're doing in our town that I think is very cost effective is "road diet." For a long time, we were building roads 50 foot wide and nobody can quite remember why we did that. So, we have these wide roads, and I get calls every day from people in the neighborhood saying people are speeding down my road. They must think it's the interstate. And I say, well, yeah, they do. It's as wide as an interstate.

So, what we do is we buy some paint and we hire a contractor and we stripe bike lanes six-foot wide on each side. It's very cost effective. It gives you places for your bikers. And the added attraction is it slows down speeders because it visibly decreases the size of the road. So, that's one small thing we're doing.

MAYOR JOSEPH CURTATONE:

I serve on a task force, one of two elected officials, for the Institute of Medicine, and we're about to release a report, strategies to advise local government in preventing obesity. And I serve with a woman from Montana, Peggy Beltrone, from Great Falls, Montana, County Commission. And part of that is gauging there are different needs whether you are rural, suburban, or urban. But I think there's many more similarities. So, you could say that your priorities are based on your local needs. I think anything to incentivize your population is to get out and eat smart and play hard, I think those are very particular to community. But I'd offer to take a look at that report when it comes out. And there's a lot of Best Practices that you'll find here that we all share and we're all implementing to a different degree.

QUESTION:

My name is Joni Eisenberg and I work with the local health department in the District of Columbia. And I had a question for the panelists of how would they advise using local media, TV and radio, to get the word out. And then I also had a question for the Mayor of Somerville. You talked about Somerville approved restaurants. Did you do anything to educate people about selections -- selecting healthy food items on the menus, and did you approve any of the large food chains such as McDonald's?

MAYOR JOSEPH CURTATONE:

In terms of trying to get buy-in from the local businesses, we just wanted them to understand why it was good to give people choices. We're not putting people on a diet. We're asking people to make good choices and incentivize them and give them those options. That's what we did. You know, that may be part of the next step as we move forward in our future planning and expand on that program.

On the media piece, we were fortunate when Somerville and Tufts University unveiled our results, we got worldwide coverage: Wall Street Journal, CNN, you name it, around the globe. And we've hosted people from around the world. But in the local media, we've been quick, and we've pressed on the local media to cover much of what we're doing. And if we're covering the opening of a park, we make sure we talked about Shape Up Somerville. And if we covered the opening of a new roadway or adding bike lands, we made sure why we're doing that about Shape Up Somerville and how that also is connected to all of our other policy and long-term goals.

MS. SHARON HAMPSON:

Well, I consider media an important partner in whatever you do. But I've got to tell you, I think investigative journalism is long dead. I think you really have to carry along the media. You have to tell them this is what we're doing, this is why it's important, please come and cover it. And then if you want to get it in print, you say something outrageous. But that's how you get people's attention. But there are certain

reporters in town that I will call and that I will give interviews to and others that I won't. But I know the ones that will promote and put in a good light what we're trying to do.

MAYOR LARRY BONDERUD:

We do a weekly radio program in Feature Wellness and the newspaper is always great in carrying stuff. But what we did that was kind of unique was that we went to the newspaper, which has 15 or 20 employees, and the radio station, which has 15 or 20 employees. And we said, you know, you should have a wellness program for your workers. And I'll tell you what, we have these passes to the civic center. We'll give you a wellness program where you can use our trainer. You can have access to our swimming pool and our civic center and all this good stuff. But we want that paid back to us in advertising; therefore, we can be on the airways and in the newspapers a whole bunch. And then we got them to develop wellness programs and in a trade-out situation with the City to pay for heavy advertising in print and radio for it. And so it worked really well. And so we have these advertisements that are every hour and then good coverage in the newspaper.

QUESTION:

I was going to ask, do you have dedicated staff who help you coordinate and move forward the initiatives that you are describing; and if so, how many and in which city, town, department, or town departments do you located them in?

MAYOR CHIP JOHNSON:

Like I said, we hired a parks director and he basically worked alone for a little while. He had a couple of guys to cut grass. So, he was our dedicated employee. Then we were able to hire an assistant parks director, and so she helps in that avenue. You just need to let people step up to what they're willing to do. Because, really, a lot of our initiatives are farmers market, the North Mississippi Land Trust, big picture items were developed by my deputy director of planning. And she comes in at 6:00 in the morning, and she's writing grants and doing things. And you find people who will do what is their passion, and you try to adjust their job description to allow them to do that.

MAYOR JOSEPH CURTATONE:

I'd say you have more people in your community than you can imagine that are vested on this issue, and it's easy to find them as long as you facilitate that. One, we kicked it off with Tufts University and the CDC's help on a grant that they received. That was important. We assembled a task force which has 23 stakeholder agencies and members of our community institutions. That's also important. We eventually did bring on staff for our long-term goals. We are one of nine leading cities that have been announced on a Healthy Kids Healthy Communities grant from Robert Wood Johnson. We will be a mentor for 41 communities around the country to facilitate and help them assess and develop their own initiatives. So we eventually got the staff, but there are so many people engaged on community wellness, safety, overall health of your children and your constituents that it will be easy to get them around the table and start talking about it.

CASEY HANNAN:

So, imagine if you will, of the rich learning opportunities that each of these four communities have provided and multiply that number by about 100 and that probably gives you a low side of the potential learning of addressing healthy eating, and active living in communities across the country.