MLK District Healthy Community Evaluation

September 2012

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1. Executive Summary

MLK District: A Healthy Community Assessment

The MLK District is a community with a rich and diverse history. The last twenty years have seen positive growth, but more must be done for this community to be the prosperous, healthy place it can be.

For any community to be successful, it must have healthy residents. Any long-term community plan should look at the health impacts of proposed alterations to the community concerned. All changes to building, transportation, housing, open spaces, and healthy foods must be examined in a way that will question the impact these changes will have on the community members.

2. Introduction

The Purpose of this Healthy Community Evaluation is to assess the current health condition of the MLK District and identify some policies and measures that could be implemented over time that would further the desire to grow in a healthy way and help produce better health outcomes in this community. This evaluation may serve as an additional lens through which to view the long term plans for the MLK District and support the kind of growth consistent with many of the principles of healthy, livable communities.

The City of Tacoma is working with residents, businesses and property owners to prepare a plan to encourage development and economic revitalization in the MLK district. A public scoping meeting was held in January 2012 to ask citizens and organizations for their concerns, comments, and ideas. The preliminary list of health determinants in this evaluation was collected from the comments given during the initial scoping process. In August 2012, a Community Open House and a Stakeholder's Workshop provided additional input to narrow the health determinant focus to three categories that could be most affected by city planning: Access to Healthy Food, Physical Activity, and Housing.

August 2012 Stakeholder's meeting. Discussing the social determinants of health.

3. Assessment Findings and Recommendations

3.1 MLK Subarea Demographics

The demographic information in this report is taken from summaries and reports from the City of Tacoma, gathered from 2010 census data, with the exception of the income data, which is from 2011 data.[1]

Race/Ethnicity: This area has a dense minority population, with nearly half of residents (48.8%) identifying as non-white.
Gender: The majority of residents are male (56.9% vs. 43.1%).
Age: The majority of residents are between the ages of 20 and 49 years (55.8%).

Housing: Of all the households, 84.5 % are renter-occupied, whereas only 15.5% are owner-occupied.

Income: This area is disproportionately low-income, with 41.3% of residents reporting an annual income of below $15,000.[2]

[1] City of Tacoma, *Census 2010 Summary Profile Report.* (January 3, 2012).

[2] See footnote 1

MLK 2010 Census Demographics

Population by Race		**Number**		**Percent**
Total		2,744		100.0%
Population Reporting One Race	2,520		91.8%	
White		1,404		51.2%
Black		722		26.3%
American Indian		75		2.7%
Asian		218		7.9%
Pacific Islander	25		0.9%	
Some Other Race		76		2.8%
Population Reporting Two or More Races	224		8.2%	
Total Hispanic Population		306		11.1%
Population by Sex				
Male		1,561		56.9%
Female	1,184		43.1%	
Population by Age				
Total		2,745		100.0%
Age 0 - 9		336		12.3%
Age 10 - 19		268		9.8%
Age 20 - 29		611		22.3%
Age 30 - 39		489		17.8%
Age 40 - 49		431		15.7%
Age 50 - 59		357		13%
Age 60 - 69		153		5.6%
Age 70 - 79		72		2.6%
Age 80 - 84		21		0.8%
Age 85+		9		0.3%
Households by Tenure and Mortgage Status				
Total		1,349		100.0%
Owner Occupied		209		15.5%
Owned with a Mortgage/Loan	179		13.3%	
Owned Free and Clear	29		2.2%	
Average Household Size	2.10			
Renter Occupied		1,140		84.5%
Average Household Size	1.50			
Households by Income				
<$15,000		589		41.3%
$15,000 - $24,999		264		18.5%
$25,000 - $34,999		179		12.6%
$35,000 - $49,999		157		11.0%
$50,000 - $74,999		129		9.1%
$75,000 - $99,999		42		2.9%
$100,000 - $149,999		50		3.5%
$150,000 - $199,999		6		0.4%
$200,000+		9		0.6%
Median Household Income		$18,601		
Average Household Income		$30,225		
Per Capita Income		$18,820 [3]		

[3] See footnote 1

3.2 Access to Healthy Food

3.2.1. Research Connecting Access to Healthy Food to Health

Research shows that people living in communities with a high number of convenience stores and fast-food restaurants have higher rates of obesity and diabetes. The quality of food in a typical convenience store or fast-food restaurant is high in fats, simple carbohydrates, and sodium, all of which –when consumed in large quantities – can contribute to health conditions such as Type II Diabetes Mellitus, High Blood Pressure, Hyper-cholesterolemia, and Heart Disease.[4]

3.2.2. Existing Access to Healthy Food in the MLK District

Approximately 72% of people residing within the boundaries of the MLK Subarea live within a half-mile of a grocery store. Only 31% live within a half-mile of a farmers' market, yet 100% of these residents live within a half-mile of a convenience store. [5]

High quality nutritious food can be attained at Tacoma's farmers markets; however, each market (including the one closest to MLK residents) is only open one day per week, and only during the months of May through October. Many of the produce stands at the Farmers' Markets accept WIC checks, which is a great help to mothers and young children, but these young families still rely on grocery stores to provide bread, meats (meats at Farmer's Markets can be prohibitively expensive for low-income families), and other basics.

The only grocery store in the MLK District is Safeway. It is located on South M Street, and is within walking distance to a bus stop. The route 28 bus runs in front of the local Safeway, but only runs every half hour during commuting times, and every hour during midday and evening (perhaps the most convenient times for working adults and parents of children to grocery shop).

3.2.3. Recommendations

For Grocery Stores

Since this community relies on public transportation, more frequent bus service along Route 28 may encourage residents to get their nutritional needs met at a grocery store instead of at a local convenience store. Another possible motivator to choosing

[4] *Designed for Disease: The Link Between Local Food Environments and Obesity and Diabetes.* California Center for Public Health Advocacy, PolicyLink, and the UCLA Center for Health Policy Research. April 2008.
[5] *What's in Our Neighborhoods*, 2010

grocery stores would be to make the store more attractive–more aesthetically pleasing–to shoppers. Community members have commented on the unattractive nature of the Hilltop Safeway, as well as the limited amount and poor quality of produce and healthy food choices.[6] It was suggested at a stakeholder's workshop in August of 2012 that Safeway relocate to a more central location within the MLK Subarea, and build a newer, more attractive store. This store would likely attract more business, and would be able to remarket itself as the community's healthy place to shop.[7]

Local Food Options

Farmers' Markets are a wonderful way to support local community members, as well as provide healthy food choices for individuals and families; however, for these nutritional benefits to have the greatest impact, access to and from the markets must be convenient and affordable for community members. One way to ensure this is to increase the frequency of busses during the markets' hours of operation, from May to October. There might even be an option of free bus service to all residents that shop at the market.

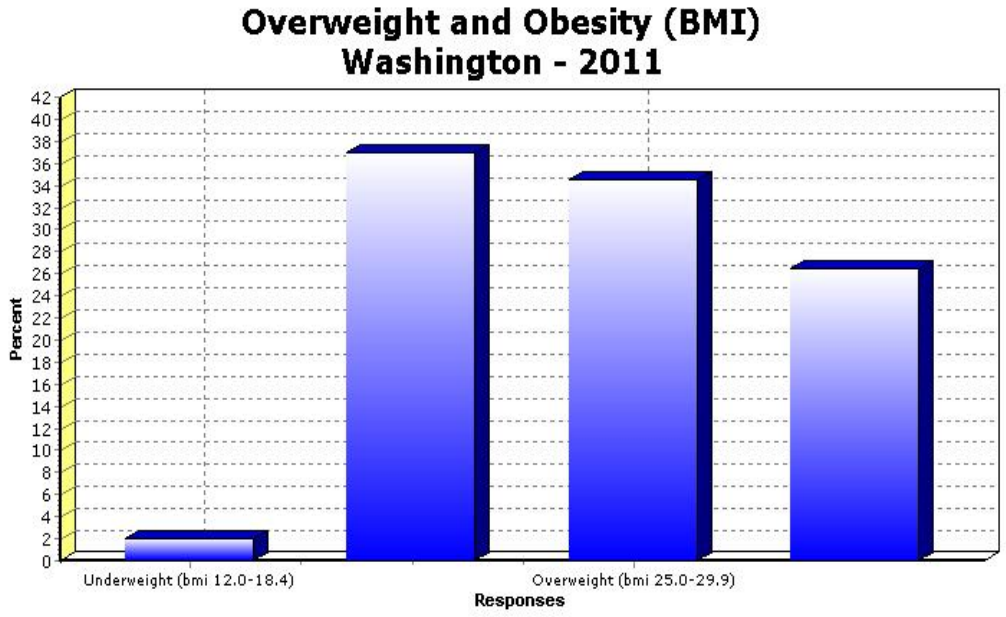
Lastly, individual and community food gardens can contribute to providing fresh food to families and the greater neighborhood. McCarver Elementary has a summer program that involves students in gardening, while teaching them the importance of healthy food choices. The MLK Subarea planning should include community garden space throughout the MLK district to support urban farming and local food production.

[6] August 2012 Stakeholder's Meeting
[7] See footnote 6

3.3 Physical Activity

3.3.1. Health Indicator- Obesity

The health of Pierce County and the city of Tacoma, WA has a connection to the rate of obesity and individual weight. People with weight above the recommended Body Mass Index (BMI) or height/weight proportion scale have an increased risk for high blood pressure, heart disease, and diabetes. According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) Behavioral Risk Factors Surveillance System (BRFSS) 2011 data, of the persons residing within the state, 26.5% are obese and 34.5% are overweight[8]. Residents of Pierce County by comparison have a rate of 31%[9]. Obesity is known to contribute to a variety of diseases, including heart disease, diabetes, stroke, certain cancers and general poor health[10]. The medical care costs for treating obesity and obesity-related health issues are overwhelming. In 2008, it was estimated that $147 billion dollars was spent on obesity-related direct and indirect medical care costs.[11]



[8] Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, *Trends and Prevalence Data for Washington State 2011.*
http://apps.nccd.cdc.gov/brfss/display.asp?cat=OB&yr=2011&qkey=8261&state=WA
[9] County Health Rankings and Roadmaps, A Healthier Nation, County by County.
http://www.countyhealthrankings.org/app/washington/2012/pierce/county/1/overall
[10] Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Overweight and Obesity.
http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/obesity/
[11] Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Overweight and Obesity.
http://www.cdc.gov/obesity/causes/economics.html

3.3.2. Health Indicator-Lack of Physical Activity

One-third of all adults--globally amounting to about 1.5 billion people--face a 20 percent to 30 percent greater risk for disease due to lack of routine physical activity (150 minutes of moderate exercise per week) typically recommended by public health authorities.[12]

The ability for people to participate in physical activity is dependent on many factors. The surrounding environment where one lives may pose barriers; for example, the perception of lack of personal safety, and the unavailability of parks, playgrounds, well-maintained sidewalks, and bike pathways. According to the CDC's website on Physical Activity:

- Less than half (48%) of all adults meet the 2008 Physical Activity Guidelines.
- Less than 3 in 10 high school students get at least 60 minutes of physical activity every day.
- Physical activity can improve health. People who are physically active tend to live longer and have lower risk for heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes, depression, and some cancers. Physical activity can also help with weight control, and may improve academic achievement in students.
- Inactive adults have a higher risk for early death, heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes, depression, and some cancers.[13]

Regular physical activity is one of the most important–and simple–actions a person can do for their health.[14]

It can help:

- Control your weight
- Reduce your risk of cardiovascular disease
- Reduce your risk for Type 2 diabetes and metabolic syndrome
- Reduce your risk of some cancers
- Strengthen your bones and muscles
- Improve your mental health and mood
- Improve your ability to do daily activities and prevent falls, if you're an older adult
- Increase your chances of living longer[15]

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[12] Inactivity May Kill as Many Worldwide as Smoking: Report. U.S. News and World Report, July 18, 2012. http://health.usnews.com/health-news/news/articles/2012/07/18/inactivity-may-kill-as-many-worldwide-as-smoking-report

[13] Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Physical Activity. http://www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/data/facts.html

[14] See footnote 13

[15] See footnote 13

The ability to participate in physical activity greatly enhances a person's physical and mental health. Additionally, exercise can decrease an individual's prevalence for disease and improve mortality rates. Washington State's ranking within the United States for physical activity within the previous 30 days was 5th for 2011.[17]

3.3.3. MLK Subarea Plan Impact

The MLK Subarea Planning process is considering a design that addresses the health of the community by creating a built environment that will allow the residents to work and play in their home neighborhood. In particular, the plan should create an environment that would encourage people to walk, and/or bike to and from their destinations. These types of built environments promote the physical activity that will have significant impact on the health and well-being of residents. The built environment could provide proximity to shopping, employment, and services through adequate and well maintained pedestrian and bicycle pathways as well as providing an aesthetically pleasing physical environment.

3.3.4. MLK Walkability

According to the website Walk Score, the MLK corridor rates 83 out of a possible 100. The score is based on the criteria that accounts for access to necessary services required in daily living. Walkability offers surprising benefits to our health, the environment, our finances, and our communities.[18]

Walk Score statistics:

Health: The average resident of a walkable neighborhood weighs 6-10 pounds less than someone who lives in a sprawling neighborhood. Cities with dependable public transit and access to amenities promote happiness.
Environment: 82% of CO2 emissions are from burning fossil fuels. Human feet are zero-pollution transportation machines.
Finances: Cars are the second largest household expense in the U.S. One point of Walk Score is worth up to $3,000 in property value.
Communities: Studies show that for every 10 minutes a person spends in a daily car commute, time spent in community activities falls by 10%.[19]

[17] See footnote 13
[18] Walk Score. http://www.walkscore.com/

[19] See footnote 18

Additionally, Walk Score defines a walkable neighborhood as follows:

- **A center:** Walkable neighborhoods have a center, whether it's a main street or a public space.
- **People:** Enough people for businesses to flourish and for public transit to run frequently.
- **Mixed income, mixed use:** Affordable housing located near businesses.
- **Parks and public space:** Plenty of public places to gather and play.
- **Pedestrian design:** Buildings are close to the street, parking lots are relegated to the back.
- **Schools and workplaces:** Close enough that most residents can walk from their homes.
- **Complete streets:** Streets designed for bicyclists, pedestrians, and transit.[20]

The MLK subarea planning could include many incentives and upgrades to improve the walkability of the area.

3.3.5. Neighborhood Design and Healthy Activity

The subarea plan should address the need for open space and parks, as well as other necessary features that will promote physical activity. For example, improvement of the sidewalk infrastructure and bikeway networks throughout the area could connect residents with area parks, the MLK business district, schools, and other important destinations via walking and cycling.

Other infrastructure innovation ideas are the creation of Hill Climbs-similar to the grand stairway on the UW Tacoma campus that turn steep hills into open space with stairs and benches. These areas could also be visually interesting and pleasing with the addition of artwork, green belts and even restaurants and cafes. Hill climb areas could be created from existing right-of-ways or by converting existing walkways.[21]

Additionally, the subarea plan should include expansion of the existing trail systems that would link the MLK sidewalk system to the Prairie Line trail and the UW Tacoma campus, as well as the Thea Foss Waterway.[22]

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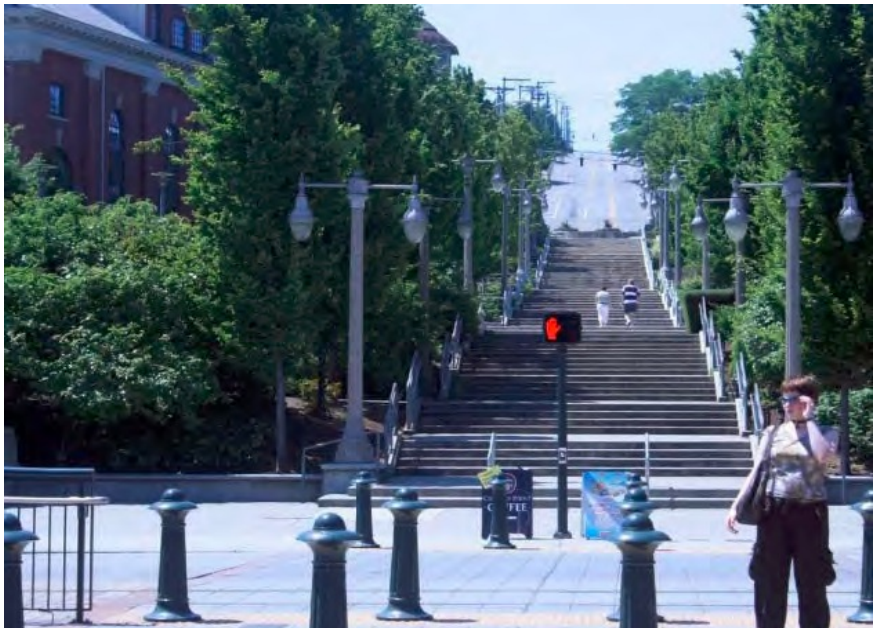
[20] See footnote 18

[21] MLK Subarea Plan – Subsequent to Open House 24 May 2012. Actions, responsibilities, and performance measures. http://cms.cityoftacoma.org/planning/Hilltop-MLK%20Subarea/0-subarea%20plan%20actions%20-%2024%20May.pdf

[22] See footnote 21



University of Washington Tacoma Grand Staircase

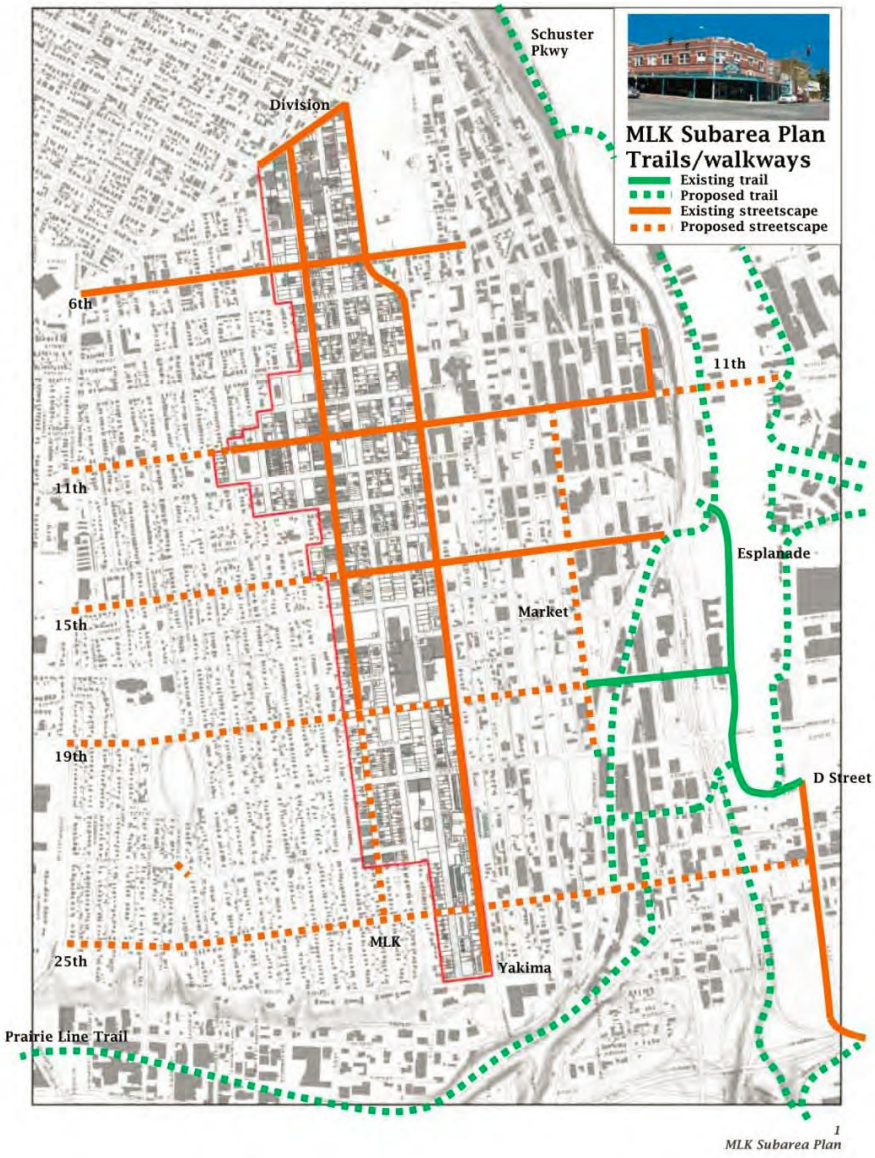
3.3.6. Public Transportation and the MLK Subarea Plan

Research has shown that the use of public transportation greatly increases physical activity levels by providing an opportunity to extend the distance traveled by walking or biking. The National Household Travel Survey found that people who use transit systems spend approximately 19 minutes walking to and from their normal transit stop thereby increasing their daily physical activity.[24]

The MLK plan could also include the return of the Tacoma streetcar system to extend the neighborhood and increase accessibility for residents to other parts of the city. The streetcar could travel the length of MLK Way from Division Street in the North end to 25th Street in the South end. Additionally, the streetcar system could revive a historical character for the MLK corridor. Also, there is potential to extend the LINK rail system to the MLK corridor that would allow residents access to Amtrak rail system and bus services.

Pierce Transit currently operates a full schedule with approximately 60 bus stops throughout the MLK district with approximately 1500 rides daily. The subarea plan should address possible expansion of services to include extended hours that would allow for those working later shifts, especially those who work for the two hospital systems within the MLK district.[25]

[24] The National Household Travel Survey. Our Nation's Travel. http://nhts.ornl.gov/download.shtml
[25] See footnote 10



3.3.7. Recommendations

The need to improve or enhance existing neighborhood infrastructure with regard to walking and biking should be addressed in the MLK Subarea plan. Additionally, the Metropolitan Parks District of Tacoma currently has a plan[28] in place to correct and maintain parks and open spaces to encourage people to experience the outdoors and improve participation in physical activities.

[28] Strategic Parks and Program Services Plan. Metro Parks of Tacoma, WA. August 2006. http://cms.cityoftacoma.org/planning/Hilltop-MLK%20Subarea/StratPlanWithCoverWithAmendments.pdf

3.4 Housing

3.4.1 Research Connecting Housing to Health

Adequate and Healthy Housing

Housing contributes to the health outcomes of individuals and greater communities by design and structure. In unhealthy housing, mold, mildew, toxic building materials, dust mites, rodents and unsafe structures can contribute to negative health outcomes causing a higher percentage of asthma, lead poisoning and environmental health and safety hazards.[29] In healthy housing, family members are provided with protection from extreme weather conditions and surrounded with a safe structure designed to promote overall physical and mental health, and foster a sense of well-being. Evidence indicates housing with an inadequate structure or containing unhealthy elements, disproportionately affects people based on race/ethnicity, education level and socioeconomic status. [30]

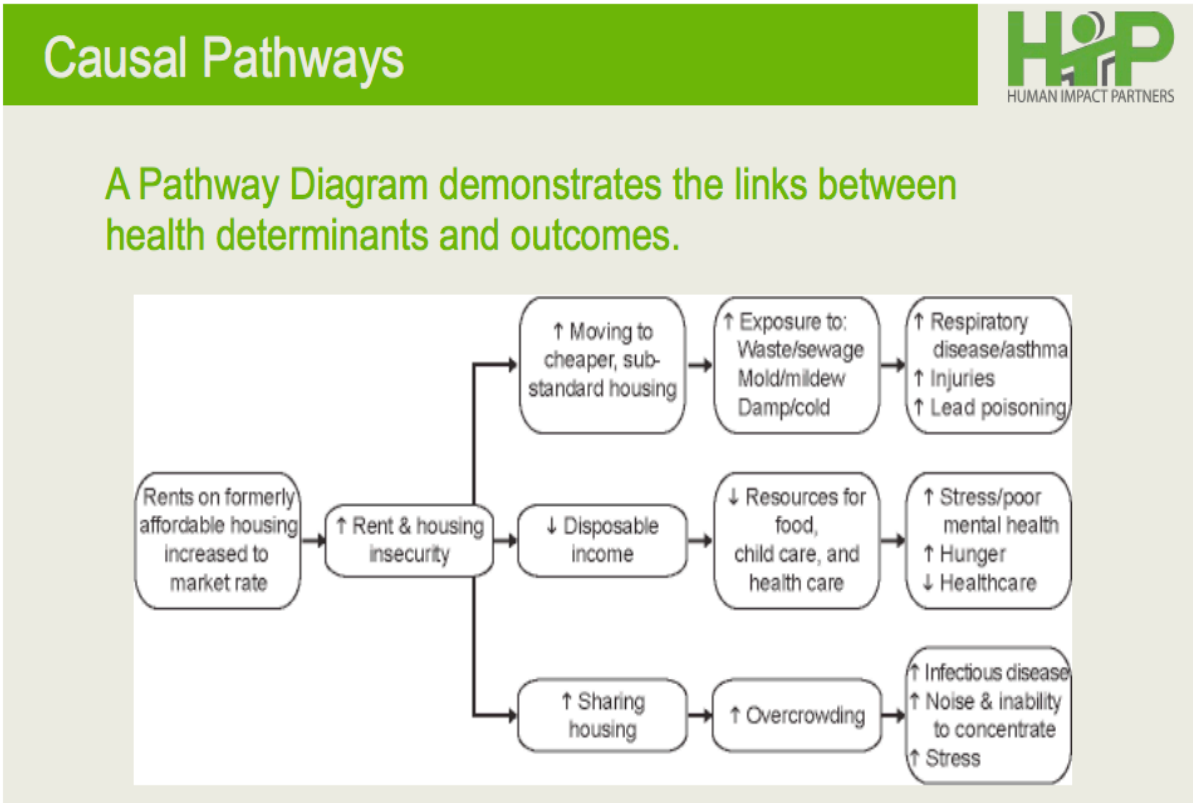
Affordable Housing and Home Ownership

According to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), housing is considered affordable when the cost of housing and utilities does not exceed 30% of the household income. [31] Access to affordable housing affects the mental health of individuals as well as the overall well being of neighborhoods. Individuals may be affected by the quality of the affordable housing available, as well as by the quality of the surrounding neighborhood. For those with lower incomes, the cost of housing can decrease the funds available for food, transportation, utilities and health care with direct and indirect health effects. In extreme cases, homelessness can occur without access to affordable housing for those most in need. [32]

Home ownership has been valued as a source of wealth accumulation and housing stability. Some evidence connecting home ownership with health does exist, yet greater evidence supports the connection between home ownership and the educational success of the children of low-income homeowners, as well as with behavioral problems, future employment security, and chances of becoming

[29] David Shipler, The Working Poor: Invisible in America (New York: First Vintage Books, 2005), 226.
[30] Jaime Raymond, William Wheeler, Mary Jean Brown, Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report: Inadequate and Unhealthy Housing, 2007 and 2009 (Washington D.C.: CDC, 2011).
[31] City of Tacoma, *Consolidated Plan For Housing and Community Development 2010-2015,* (City of Tacoma, 2010), 58
[32] Rebecca Bentley, 2011. "Association Between Housing Affordability and Mental Health: A Longitudinal Analysis of a Nationally Representative Household Survey in Australia." American Journal Of Epidemiology 174, no. 7: 753-760.

homeowners themselves. Evidence indicates that the social benefits of a *home-centered lifestyle* enjoyed by some low-income homeowners can support the nurturing development of children and increase their chances of successes associated with positive health outcomes. Overall, home ownership over time can be seen as a benefit associated with positive health if the mortgage and maintenance remain affordable and the house maintained adequately. [33]



From *A Health Impact Assessment Toolkit: A Handbook to Conducting HIA*, 3rd Edition. Oakland, CA: Human Impact Partners. February 2011. Adapted with permission. http://www.humanimpact.org/

3.4.2 MLK Subarea Existing Housing Conditions

The MLK Subarea 2010 census data reports a total of 1,645 housing units with 1,327 units occupied. Of those occupied units 186 are homeowners and 1,142 are renters. [34]

[33] U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, *The Homeownership Experience of Low-Income and Minority Families: A Review and Synthesis of the Literature.* (Washington, DC: 2006), 4-7.
[34] See footnote 1

3.4.3 MLK Subarea Plan

The MLK Subarea planning continues to address housing issues through a series of actions created with the input of community members through the results of surveys, focus group sessions and charrettes.

MLK Subarea Plan – Subsequent to Open House 24 May 2012
Actions, responsibilities, and performance measures

Community Development-Housing:

Housing options: Increase housing choice by type, price, tenure, and location to house current and potential employees in or near employment centers, transit corridors, and recreational sites to provide live/work/play sustenance in MLK.

Affordable housing Permit additional density, reduce parking requirements, reduce permit fees, and/or other measures to promote rental and sale workforce housing for moderate income working households employed within MLK

Distribution affordable housing: Incorporate moderate and low income housing opportunities in mixed use and mixed income building and project developments to avoid creating "housing project" concentrations and market image associations.

Special populations: Continue to provide social services and housing assistance for homeless, addicted, mentally ill, and domestic violence individuals and households by MLK social service agencies and organizations.[35]

[35] City of Tacoma, *MLK Subarea Plan – Subsequent to Open House 24 May 2012 Actions, responsibilities, and performance measures MLK Subarea Plan,* (Tacoma, 2012), 8 & 9.

3.4.4 Recommendations

The MLK Subarea plan should include provisions for affordable housing that integrate mixed use and mixed income buildings into the fabric of the neighborhood along with economic development and transportation plans to support a vibrant community. [36] It is recommended that the plan also include provisions for Green Building materials and methods to create healthy housing associated with positive health outcomes and healthy neighborhoods.[37]

4. Conclusion

The MLK District remains a diverse community in the heart of Tacoma. By considering the health impacts for long term planning by specifically addressing Access to Healthy Food, Physical Activity, and Housing, the City of Tacoma's MLK Subarea plan could positively contribute to the health status of community members.

Contributors:

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Special thanks to Tacoma -Pierce County Health Department and City of Tacoma

[36] City of Tacoma, *MLK Subarea Plan – Subsequent to Open House 24 May 2012 Actions, responsibilities, and performance measures MLK Subarea Plan,* (Tacoma, 2012), 2, 24, 27.
[37] Environmental Protection Agency, *Why Build Green?* (Washington DC, 2010), http://www.epa.gov/greenbuilding/pubs/whybuild.htm

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Walk Score. http://www.walkscore.com/

August 2012 Community Open House: Health Determinant Tree
Watercolor by Heather Brown