

Integrating Health & Environment

GuideBox

How does where we live impact our health?

Is the community designed in a way that enhances the natural environment?



Integrating Health & the Environment



Our natural environment includes soils, water, air, and climate; the way we live and develop within our natural environment can have a direct impact on our ability to live healthy lives. Places that are designed to work with nature have reduced environmental damage and are healthier for people and animals. Communities can have a healthier outlook by repairing past environmental harm and using practices that are friendly to the natural environment as they continue to develop. Ensuring that we develop in harmony with nature and in a healthy way is important for assuring our own health.

The initial set of questions that follow offer discussion points for planning a meeting or session with a focus on health and environment. A second list is provided for more detailed discussions on health and the environment. These lists are not exhaustive and should be discussed when thinking about your community.

Note, some of these questions may require some advance preparation and research on the part of the organizers or facilitators.

Questions for Discussion

1 How do land uses interact with the natural environment and community?

What kind of land use patterns best characterize the community?

- Urban, medium to high density
- Urban, low density
- Small town
- Rural community

How do residents feel about the overall condition of the environment in the community, both in developed areas and natural areas?

- Poor condition; significant pollution or environmental damage
- Moderate condition; some areas that are polluted or contaminated
- Good condition; few areas that are polluted or damaged

Is the community located in an environmentally vulnerable area?

- Floodplains or frequently flooded areas
- Steep slopes, erosion, or landslide areas
- Fire-prone areas
- Mining or natural resource extraction areas

Are there hazardous land uses in the area?

- Industrial sites next to residences
- Extraction activities near residential areas or streams
- Landfills near neighborhoods
- Brownfield areas adjacent to residential areas
- Superfund sites next to homes

Is development constructed in a manner to withstand natural and human-caused hazards?

Are there large areas of concrete, asphalt, or other impervious surfaces?

- Parking lots
- Highways and thoroughfares
- Rooftops

Do plant species require a lot of maintenance?

- Native species, require less maintenance
- Non-native species, that can kill native plants or demand more water
- Large shade trees

2 Is water safe, clean, and plentiful for the community?

Is water delivered to homes and buildings safely and reliably?

Are there efforts to conserve and/or recycle water?

- Greywater systems
- Water reclamation systems
- Rain barrels

Are there systems to provide for natural filtration of water runoff?

- Bioswales
- Rain gardens
- Tree canopy

3 Is there air or noise pollution?

Are there frequent days of poor air quality in the community? Is poor air quality concentrated in local areas?

Are there efforts to reduce air pollution? If no, what can the community do to improve air quality?

- Work to incentivize using alternatives to driving alone
- Identify sources and work together on a solution
- Advocate for stricter air quality standards
- Plan bike-or-transit to work events

Is there regular exposure to noise within the community? If yes, what are the main sources?

- Roadways or highways
- Heavy or light industry
- Trains

Are there efforts to control noise pollution in the community? If no, what can the community do to reduce noise pollution?

- Plant additional trees in noise-prone areas
- Advocate for stricter noise restrictions
- Working with local officials or nonprofits to install noise barriers

Questions for Discussion (cont.)

4 Is there enough access to parks and open spaces?

Do residents have access to natural areas?

- Parks and open space within a 10 minute walk or less
- Greenbelts or natural paths throughout the community
- Recreation areas within a short driving distance
- Natural areas by a half hour drive or more

What types of natural areas do residents have access to?

- Formal parks with planted gardens and plazas
- Multi-use parks
- Open space, natural, or conserved areas

Additional Discussion Points

The following are in-depth discussion topics with a focus on the relationship between health and the environment.

- Discuss how your everyday actions impact the environment. Discuss ways the community or group can individually and collectively reduce their impact on the environment. Discuss ways the community can work with local officials and nonprofits to achieve environmental goals.

- Reducing miles traveled alone in a car
- Incentivizing the use of native plants and vegetation for landscaping
- Enhancing or establishing recycling and composting programs
- Incentivizing use of alternative energy sources

- Discuss ways the community can promote and improve its ability to prevent and withstand environmental hazards.

- Advocate for changes to the zoning code, include building standards to resist hazards

- Advocate for hazard free and environmentally friendly infrastructure
 - Retention or detention ponds
 - Bioswales, designed to capture stormwater
 - Rain gardens

Additional Discussion Points (cont.)

- Discuss ways the community can promote and improve its ability to prevent and withstand environmental hazards (cont.)

Retrofit buildings and homes

- Using sustainable building materials

- Using previous paving techniques

- Adding green roofs

- Including design concepts that take advantage of natural features and harmonize buildings with nature

- Discuss the importance of access and transportation to safe disposal sites for household products and hazardous materials. Discuss ways to implement a program for safe disposal of hazardous materials.

- Discuss ways that landfills or other incompatible land uses impact the health of a community.

- Health of residents

- Water and air quality

- Noise pollution

- Heat island effect, where there are large paved areas

- Discuss how health is impacted from increasing temperatures caused by climate change. Discuss ways to reduce the impacts of heat on the health of residents.

- Fewer hours spent outside

- Fewer days spent outside

- Isolation

- Heat-related illness

For Further Discussion and Research

- Use the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Floodplain Maps website to investigate flood risks in the community. Research the risk areas and ways to lower flood risk in the community.

- <https://msc.fema.gov/portal/home>

- Use the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Cleanups in my Community website to investigate contaminated areas in the community. Use the information to understand which areas in the community may contain contamination and the risks associated with the contaminants.

- <https://www.epa.gov/cleanups/cleanups-my-community>

For Further Discussion and Research (cont.)

- Use the EPA's Environmental Justice Screening and Mapping tool to evaluate which groups in the community are impacted by various environmental conditions. <https://www.epa.gov/ejscreen>
- Use the iTree tool to evaluate the tree canopy coverage in your community. Research and discuss the importance of trees in communities. <https://canopy.itreetools.org/>
- Use the World Air Quality Index website to investigate air quality trends in your community. Determine if air quality has been listed as Moderate, Unhealthy, or Hazardous and discuss potential reasons for lower air quality. <https://waqi.info/>
- Investigate how water is transported to your community and how storm water is treated. Discuss the impacts of practices on the environment.
- Research and discuss different green infrastructure improvements that could be made in your community.

Additional Resources



Learn more about HEAT IMPACTS and NOISE in Section 2 of the *Creating Healthy Places Guidebook*

https://coloradohealthyplaces.org/wp-content/themes/Divi-child/files/Creating-Healthy-Places-Guidebook_Chapter2_Web.pdf



Learn more about ACCESS TO PARKS in Section 7 of the *Creating Healthy Places Guidebook*

https://coloradohealthyplaces.org/wp-content/themes/Divi-child/files/Creating-Healthy-Places-Guidebook_Chapter7_Web.pdf

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