

# Wellness Opportunity Zones

Consumer Health Foundation Speakout Recommendation #6:

***“Designate neighborhood Wellness Opportunity Zones where incentives are provided for innovative connections between and among all public and private policies, programs, and practices affecting health and well-being.”***

**BIG IDEA:** Residents understand that health is more than health care, and they have a vision for healthy communities where there are grocery stores selling fresh fruits and vegetables; clean, safe parks and other places to walk and exercise; affordable housing; reliable public transportation; and businesses that pay employees a living wage. New strategies are needed to ensure that all of our communities reap the benefits of the tremendous growth and development occurring in our region.

**RECOMMENDATION:** Local governments should designate neighborhood Wellness Opportunity Zones in areas where residents’ health, well-being, and potential are at greatest risk. In these areas, financial and other incentives would be available for projects that seek to improve residents’ quality of life and health of the community. Government policies, regulations, and programs would reinforce these actions. The underlying assumption would be the integration of planning, policies, regulations – to cross traditional sectoral boundaries (“silos”) to create healthy, vibrant neighborhoods.

## Wellness Opportunity Zone strategies:

- Coordinated health, economic, human, community and physical development plan in/for Wellness Opportunity Zone, with resident input and engagement
- Every policy, regulatory decision affecting Wellness Opportunity Zones are inter-related; very intentional, e.g. Health Impact Statements required for all policy/regulatory decisions affecting the Wellness Opportunity Zone(similar to Environmental Impact Statements)
- Intention around all the public decisions affecting growth and development is integrated, e.g. form-based zoning; code auditing
- Economic development/tax incentives for greenspace/parks, grocery stores, education or job training programs, farmer’s markets – programs that could positively improve the health and life of the community
- Comprehensive, quality and accessible health care services, including mental health, substance abuse treatment
- Safe walks to schools, farmer’s markets at schools
- Tax incentives for businesses that pay a living wage
- Transportation – adequate, accessible, affordable, integrated, infrastructure – bus, rail
- Affordable Housing – integrated moderately price dwelling units
- Safe, quality schools
- Performance grants to Community Based Organizations (including Community Development Corporations) that work to promote healthy eating, active living

- Draw upon national resources (knowledge, expertise, access) located in DC to assist in the development and implementation of the zones, e.g. Smart Growth America, Place Matters, university urban planning/MPH programs
- Draw upon national legislation such as Senator Obama's Healthy Places Act of 2006; Rep. Donna Christensen's Health Empowerment Zone Act of 2005
- Draw upon local foundation knowledge and resources

Contact: Rachel Wick, [rwick@consumerhealthfdn.org](mailto:rwick@consumerhealthfdn.org) or  
Margaret O'Bryon, [mobryon@consumerhealthfdn.org](mailto:mobryon@consumerhealthfdn.org)  
Phone: 202.939.3390