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\$20,000 Grant for First Health Meets Transportation Project

The Lehigh Valley Planning Commission is embarking on a project that will use transportation design to improve public health.

With help from a \$20,000 grant from the state-funded WalkWorks Program, LVPC will identify locations across the region where there are pedestrian, bicycle and transit injuries or deaths, and areas with negative health issues, such as obesity and diabetes.

Then it will suggest design changes aimed at improving health and saving lives.

It's the first such project in the region that seeks to use data linking health and transportation as a tool to create a safer and healthier environment.

"This gives us a chance to make a real difference in locations and neighborhoods with negative health outcomes," said LVPC Executive Director Becky Bradley. "It's a way of targeting resources where they can have the most impact. We're very excited about our increased commitment to active transportation in the Lehigh Valley."

The WalkWorks Program is a collaboration between the Pennsylvania Department of Health and the University of Pittsburgh Graduate School of Public Health, designed to create safer walking routes and promote the benefits of walking. The LVPC grant is among 11 receiving grants ranging from \$3,000 to \$20,000, awarded statewide to promote active transportation and improve safety.

The project will entail identifying the right locations, and then proposing redesigning those intersections, streets or sidewalks to improve safety and ultimately public health. Renderings will be created to accentuate the potential benefits, whether they be by preventing injuries and deaths, or by encouraging more walking, biking and transit use.

The LVPC used a similar method to propose safety improvements in a study it performed for Bath Borough last year.

Not only will the new project be designed to improve safety, but to encourage more walking and biking in neighborhoods where such health risks of obesity, diabetes and heart disease are prevalent.

The results of the WalkWorks project will become an addition to FutureLV: The Regional Plan being drafted this year by LVPC, serving as part of the goals, policies and actions that will become the official planning and funding strategy for a region of two counties and 62

municipalities. And the WalkWorks results will help LVPC make decisions on how and where to invest \$2.8 billion on transportation projects over next two decades.

“Having access to areas for recreation, such as walking and biking, is essential in helping to keep Pennsylvanians healthy,” said Pennsylvania Secretary of Health, Dr. Rachel Levine. “Physical activity can lower the risk of type 2 diabetes, heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure and premature death. Being active also helps prevent weight gain, reduce depression and improve cognitive function in older adults. These communities should be applauded for their efforts to review how they can make physical exercise part of transportation planning in their community.”

The WalkWorks project also fits well with the LVPC’s current yearlong project to create a masterplan for pedestrians and bicyclists. WalkRollLV will be a comprehensive blueprint with the goal of filling the gaps in the existing road, trail and transit system, creating a seamless network connecting every community in the region. WalkRollLV is expected to be released this summer.

Others awarded WalkWorks grants were Bristol Borough, Morrisville Borough, New Britain Borough and Plumstead Township in Bucks County; Hatfield Township, Montgomery County Planning Commission and Upper Dublin Municipal Authority in Montgomery County; Lower Allen Township in Cumberland County; Springettsbury Township in York County and Wilkins Township in Allegheny County.

The release of FutureLV: The Regional Plan is scheduled for late summer.