

Health Impact Assessment for the Westwood Neighborhood Plan

JULY 2016



What Makes a Healthy Neighborhood?

Parks and Open Space

Neighborhood Services & Local Employment

Safe and Connected Sidewalks and Bike Lanes

Transit Access

Gathering Spaces

Housing Choice

Safe Routes to School

Healthy Food

GROCERY STORE

COMMUNITY CENTER

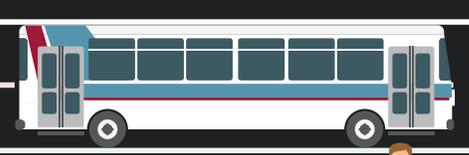
SCHOOL

HEALTHY CORNER STORE

PHARMACY

BANK

Cafe



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Acronyms Used

Denver Agencies

City Council	Denver City Council
CPD	Community Planning and Development
DEH	Department of Environmental Health
DPD	Denver Police Department
DPR	Denver Parks & Recreation
DPW	Department of Public Works
Ex & Lic	Department of Excise & Licenses
HRCF	Human Rights & Community Partnerships
Mayor's Office	Denver Mayor's Office
OED	Office of Economic Development

Other Acronyms

BuCu West	Nonprofit Business and Cultural Development Association for Westwood
CDOT	Colorado Department of Transportation
DPS	Denver Public Schools
NGOs	Non-governmental organizations such as Westwood Unidos, Re:Vision, Trust for Public Land, etc.
OoS	Office of Sustainability
RTD	Regional Transportation District
SRTS	Safe Routes to School
Xcel	Xcel Public Service Company



Photo by Denver Parks & Recreation

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Methodology and Limitations

This HIA used a mixed-methods research approach, employing both quantitative and qualitative data including surveys, community listening conversations and health surveillance datasets. Some nonprofit stakeholders graciously shared their datasets including resident pedestrian counts and physical activity surveys.

As with most HIAs, there were limitations in data and resources. The survey respondents were often self-selected versus randomized. Existing data was used rather than collecting any new primary data.

Finally, Denver Community Planning and Development generously shared the Westwood Neighborhood Plan Steering Committee as a guiding entity for the HIA as well. Many of the same Westwood stakeholders are involved in multiple community improvement activities, and sharing a Steering Committee served to streamline the two related efforts and respect the time and effort contributed by Westwood stakeholders.

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APPENDICES

 Can be viewed online at www.denvergov.org/environmentalhealth



From Mayor Hancock

Dear Neighbors,

There are few neighborhoods in Denver that are as vibrant and culturally diverse as Westwood. Over the past few years, the area has undergone a resurgence, thanks in part to public, private and community investments that have attracted new residents, families and businesses. Along with them has come a renewed sense of community and optimism.

And now, as the home to the highest population of youth in our city, Westwood is showing it truly represents Denver's past, present and future.

Even with this renewed sense of optimism, Westwood is still underserved in critical ways. Disconnected or broken sidewalks and few parks, recreation amenities and green spaces for children to play in all contribute to the public health, safety and economic concerns that linger in the community.

Similarly, few options for healthy foods and a lack of access to transportation choices create challenges for reducing health disparities through healthy lifestyles that begin with physical activity and good nutrition.

We know that well-planned neighborhoods that support bike and pedestrian right-of-ways, with good access to public transportation, improve not only health, but safety as neighbors come together to create a sense of community.

As we embark on creating the first neighborhood plan in Westwood in more than 30 years, we are excited to release this Health Impact Assessment as the first step in creating a healthier, more livable and sustainable community.

Respectfully,



Michael B. Hancock, Mayor



Photo by Denver Parks & Recreation

From Councilman Lopez

Dear Neighbors,

Westwood is a soulful, colorful neighborhood, full of culture and life. But there was a time when being from Westwood carried a negative stigma. Decades of work by residents tirelessly fighting the serious challenges they face – poverty, health disparities, lack of city services, public health and safety concerns – is rapidly changing that.

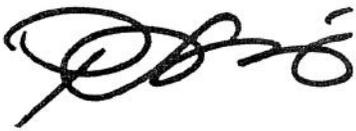
Westwood is now a focal point for Denver’s public and private investment. Nearly every street has been paved. Alleys were converted from muddy, trash-filled dumping grounds to paved alleys with modern trash collection. Blighted and vacant lots have been turned into new parks and affordable housing.

In place of liquor stores we now have a café, an early education center, and a nearby grocery store. No longer is the neighborhood filled with graffiti, instead murals adorn façades, transforming graffiti-vandalized walls into outdoor art galleries.

South Federal Boulevard’s Little Saigon District is emerging into one of Denver’s top cultural destinations. Over the next decade, Morrison Road will transform into a pedestrian-friendly Mercado, inspired by Latin American cultures. The cultural district will be lined with residences, shops, local restaurants, plazas and public art reminiscent of Mexico’s open air markets and its people.

Our community is creative, strong, and resilient. To say “I am from Westwood” is a badge of honor, with the goal of children growing up there, to feel the same. We will continue to build neighborhood pride through the implementation of this Health Impact Assessment and the Neighborhood plan, which vision was set out by current residents. Their continued participation is paramount to this community’s success.

¡Que Viva Westwood!



Councilman Paul D. López



Photo by Denver Parks & Recreation

Health Impact Assessment for the Westwood Neighborhood Plan

Executive Summary

The Westwood neighborhood is one of Denver's most vibrant and diverse neighborhoods. In 2016 Westwood will complete a year-long effort to develop its first Neighborhood Plan in 30 years. This plan offers a tremendous opportunity to integrate health into the neighborhood design to shape the way Westwood residents live, learn, work, and play – and in turn improve their health.

Key Findings

This HIA report shows that larger proportions of Westwood residents suffer from chronic health conditions related to a lack of physical activity compared with residents of other Denver neighborhoods. This is especially concerning given that Westwood has among the highest youth and highest Hispanic populations in Denver. However, the report also finds opportunities to improve land use and transportation in ways that promote and encourage healthier lifestyles.

Demographics and Health:

- **Density:** Over the past few decades, Westwood has changed from a low-density area of single family homes and small businesses to a densely populated multicultural community, including a majority Hispanic (81 percent) population of many families with young children as well as a “Little Saigon” hub of Vietnamese businesses and restaurants.
- **Income and Education:** Westwood households only earn an average of \$27,000-\$34,000 annually, which is a little more than half of the Denver median household income. Also, almost half (46 percent) of Westwood residents lack a high school degree versus just 14 percent of Denver residents who lack a high school degree.
- **Age:** Westwood has the youngest population of any neighborhood in Denver, with 39 percent of residents aged 18 and younger, compared with 21 percent in Denver overall. Trends show that

Westwood will continue to have a large youth population in the years to come.

- **Unhealthy weight:** Westwood residents suffer from higher rates of obesity than residents of other Denver neighborhoods. The child obesity rate in particular is one of the highest in the City.

Built Environment:

- **Multimodal transportation:** Westwood's transportation network poses challenges for pedestrians and bicyclists to get around safely. Over the last four years Westwood saw many vehicle crashes that resulted in pedestrian injuries or deaths. High traffic speeds, broken or missing sidewalks, lack of bicycle lanes and poor intersection quality impacts residents' safety and mobility, especially for the highest density of children in the City who live within one mile of their local schools.
- **Parks, recreation and open space:** Westwood is underserved for parks, recreation facilities and outdoor space, falling far short of the City's per-capita standards both for parkland and for recreational facilities. This is a critical need for children and youth in particular.
- **Community safety:** Residents feel unsafe due to many traffic crashes resulting in pedestrian injuries and fatalities, loose dogs, a concentration of alcohol and marijuana outlets near the middle school, and fear of unsafe places due to poor lighting and other physical conditions.
- **Essential resources:** The community of almost 17,000 people does not have a local grocery store or adequate health-related services. Westwood households are larger than the City average and families are doubled up due to affordability issues, leading to overcrowding. Residents experience barriers to accessing basic City services (trash pickup, street light repairs, and animal control) including language and concerns about interacting with government.

Why This Matters for Health

Research shows a strong relationship between the built environment – the settings and surroundings where we live, learn, work, eat, play, and worship – and our health. Our surroundings shape how physically active we are, how well we eat, and whether we have good access to schools, jobs, transportation, health care, and opportunities to prosper. Environments that lack amenities and services to support healthy lifestyles can contribute to chronic diseases such as diabetes, heart disease, and obesity. Well-designed neighborhoods can improve health, and poorly-designed communities can harm health.

Differences in public infrastructure, such as the quantity and quality of parks and neighborhood amenities, is often associated with differences in the health of residents in those communities, resulting in **health inequity**. For example, Westwood has 1/8th of the recommended parkland per capita by City standards, and one of the highest rates of child obesity in the City.

Changes in Neighborhood Design Can Improve Health and Equity

Multimodal transportation. Repairing and connecting sidewalks, improving pedestrian crossings, adding bicycle facilities, slowing vehicle traffic, and adding amenities to transit stops are likely to increase walking and biking. As safety increases, residents have the opportunity to become more active, reducing their risk of chronic diseases related to physical inactivity.

Parks, recreation and open space. Increasing the amount and accessibility of parks and open spaces and enhancing recreational facilities and programming can help increase residents' physical activity. Having more places to be physically active is particularly important in Westwood, given the higher than average youth obesity rates.

Community safety. Changes in road engineering, traffic enforcement and education will likely reduce vehicle crashes that lead to pedestrian and cyclist injuries and deaths. Increased education and enforcement of animal regulations will increase residents' physical safety, and allow more physical activity for exercise and students walking to school. Installing or repairing street lighting can help to reduce crime and increase feelings of community safety. Locating alcohol and marijuana outlets at an appropriate distance away from schools can reduce conflicts and help reduce youth access to these substances.

Access to essential resources. Designating areas for adequate housing supply, size and type; designating commercial areas that can accommodate healthy food outlets and other critical goods and services; and creating connections to key services and destinations including health care clinics and pharmacies, can help to support residents to attain their full health and socioeconomic potential.

Recommendations and Next Steps

The advancement of the following recommendations in the *Westwood Neighborhood Plan* and in other City policies, plans, or projects will help to improve the health of Westwood residents and reduce health inequities related to the built environment.

The *Westwood Neighborhood Plan* will be adopted by the Denver City Council in 2016, and include the findings and recommendations described here. Furthermore, these HIA recommendations can be used to inform other plans, policies or projects in Westwood and Citywide. Stakeholders including City departments, other governmental agencies, local nonprofits, and community groups can work together or independently to implement the various recommendations. Progress should be monitored and evaluated to track changes in Westwood's built environment, and in short- and long-term health outcomes.

Introduction

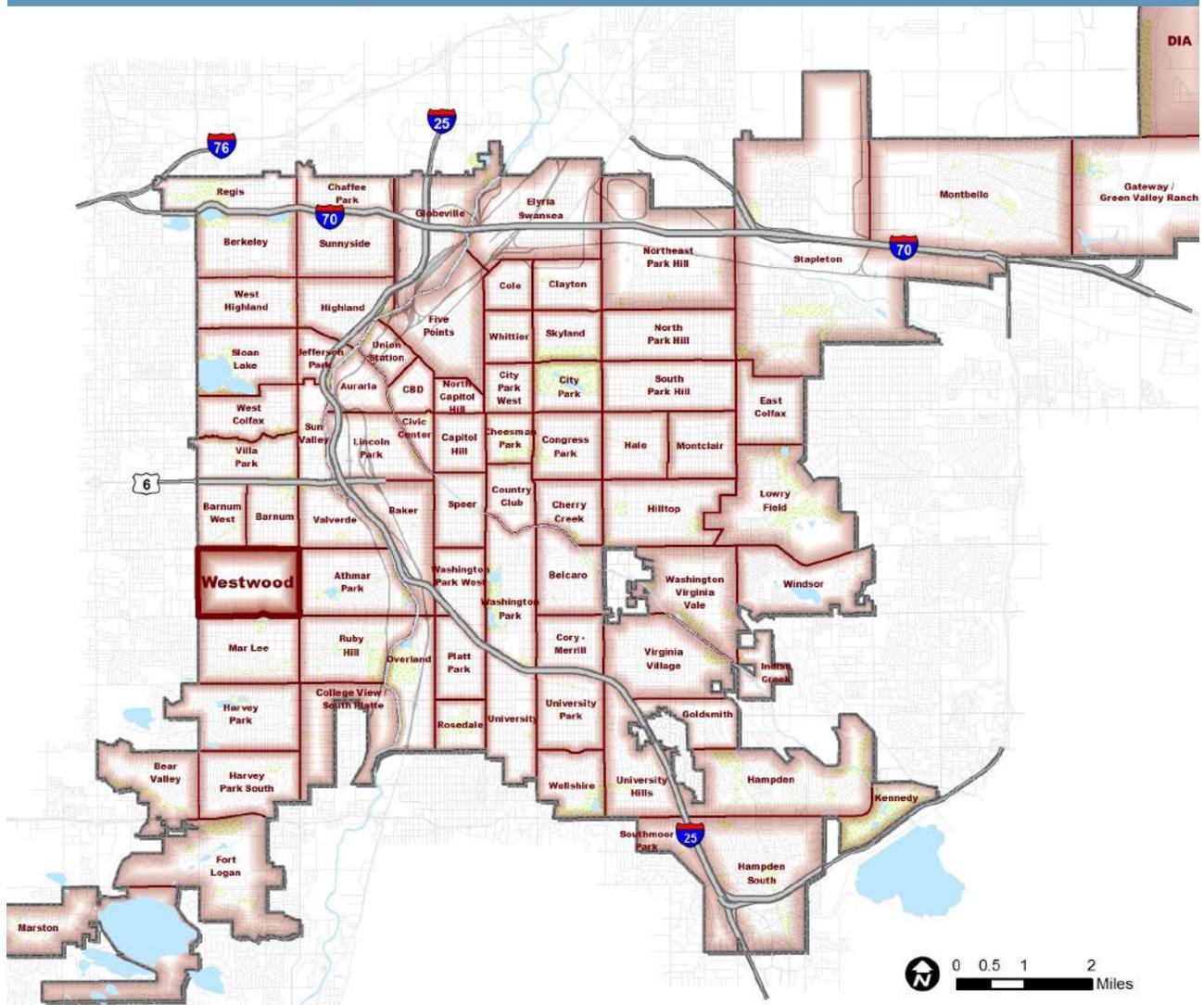
Research has revealed a strong relationship between the design of our communities and our health. The way we design and build our neighborhoods impacts how we live, work, eat, travel, shop, worship and play on a daily basis.

Physical activity is a key component of health. A lack of physical activity contributes to chronic diseases such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and obesity. (Source: NACCHO 2009). Opportunities to be active are often influenced by how easily we can move around in our communities. Well-designed neighborhoods can improve our health, and poorly-designed communities can harm our

health. Community design particularly impacts children and youth, who tend to spend more time in their immediate surroundings at home, school and play.

Denver's Westwood neighborhood is less than five miles southwest of downtown and is predominantly residential, with a mix of single family (60 percent) and multi-family (40 percent) homes, and several commercial corridors along its larger streets. Prior to its annexation into the city of Denver in 1947, Westwood was a rural farming community. More than half a century later, Westwood is home to a multi-cultural and multi-generational community

FIGURE: Westwood Statistical Neighborhood



Source: Denver Community Planning & Development, 11/29/12

of almost 17,000 residents within its compact, 1.5 square-mile boundaries. The neighborhood is made up of predominantly Hispanic families (81 percent) many with young children, and a strong Hispanic cultural influence. Many residents are recent immigrants from Mexico, and are monolingual Spanish speakers. There is also a small but significant Vietnamese community in the “Little Saigon” business district with shops and restaurants along Federal Boulevard. Another cultural amenity in Westwood is the Denver Indian Center, which serves as a cultural and educational center for Native Americans from across the Denver metro area. Additionally, Westwood is home to the Southwest Improvement Council (SWIC), which provides a range of services for local seniors, including healthy living programs, daily lunch, and affordable housing.

Westwood is unique among Denver neighborhoods as it has the highest concentration of children and youth of any neighborhood in the City, with 39 percent of the population aged 18 and younger. This has implications for health and neighborhood planning that are discussed throughout this report.

Denver’s Community Planning and Development (CPD) is collaborating with Westwood community members to develop a new *Neighborhood Plan*. When complete in 2016, it will be Westwood’s first neighborhood plan in 30 years, and will shape future community development and redevelopment for decades to come. The recommendations included in the Westwood HIA are designed to inform and strengthen the *Westwood Neighborhood Plan* by considering community health in the future design and development of the neighborhood.



Photo by Jess Kornacki, Art of Her - Photography

The Westwood Health Impact Assessment is the latest HIA conducted by the City to inform neighborhood planning in Denver. The Globeville and Elyria Swansea Neighborhood HIA was completed in 2014 and many of the recommendations are now being implemented through City and partner collaboration.

About this Report

This HIA was developed through a collaborative effort between City agencies and community members. Led by Denver’s Department of Environmental Health, the HIA process is intended to inform the *Westwood Neighborhood Plan* and engage the community around the topic of health.

Stakeholder meetings and community workshops were held through 2015 in partnership with Denver Community Planning and Development and included the following groups and individuals from the neighborhood:

- BuCu West Development Association
- Westwood Unidos
- Healthy Places Westwood
- Trust for Public Land
- Police District #4 Citizens Advisory Group
- Office of Councilman Paul Lopez
- Denver Sustainable Food Policy Council
- Westwood Neighborhood Plan Technical Team
- Westwood Steering Committee
- Southwest Improvement Council
- Re:Vision

As a result of the community engagement process, residents and stakeholders identified the following four priority areas that impact health:

- Safe Multimodal Transportation
- Parks, Recreation and Open Space
- Community Safety
- Access to Essential Resources (housing, healthcare services, healthy food)

About Health Impact Assessment

The health impact assessment (HIA) process provides a framework for collaboration to understand how environmental, physical, economic, and social conditions determine health. It is an emerging practice that aims to bring a greater

understanding of human health consequences to public policy and decision-making.

(Source: *Human Impact Partners 2015*) Health impact assessments strive to achieve the following principles:

Democracy – involve and engage the public while informing and influencing decision-makers.

Equity – provide a fair opportunity for all people to attain their full health potential regardless of socioeconomic and environmental factors.

Sustainable development – judge the short-term and long-term impacts of the proposed plan to meet the needs of current and future residents.

Ethical use of evidence – use unbiased evidence to judge impacts and inform recommendations; be rigorous and transparent.

Comprehensive approach to health – emphasize that health is determined by a wide array of factors in environment and society.

(Source: *Human Impact Partners 2015*)

HIA assesses the potential effects a proposed plan, policy, or project can have on health, and makes recommendations to maximize health benefits and minimize negative effects. HIA uses a six step process:

1. **Screening:** Determine the need and value of a HIA for the plan or decision.
2. **Scoping:** Identify key issues (health determinants) that can impact the plan, policy or project alternatives.
3. **Assessment:** Analyze baseline conditions and predict health impacts based on existing data, empirical research, expert and local knowledge.
4. **Recommendations:** Develop practical solutions that can be implemented within the limitations of the plan or project, to maximize health benefits.
5. **Reporting:** Disseminate the findings to decision makers, affected communities and other stakeholders.
6. **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Monitor the changes in health or health risk factors and evaluate the effectiveness of the measures that are implemented, and the HIA process as a whole.

When policymakers, project planners, community organizations, and advocacy groups participate in and have data from a Health Impact Assessment, decisions are better informed. Decision makers have the opportunity to provide the best outcome for communities, especially those facing health inequities.

Source: *Human Impact Partners, 2015*



About the Westwood Neighborhood Planning Process

A **neighborhood plan** provides a vision and policy guidance for the future growth of a community over the next 10 to 20 years. Neighborhood plans are developed in collaboration with community members and provide specific recommendations that are implemented through zoning, design standards, transportation projects, economic development investments, etc. Many neighborhoods in Denver have neighborhood plans or are updating their plans to reflect their current and future visions for growth.

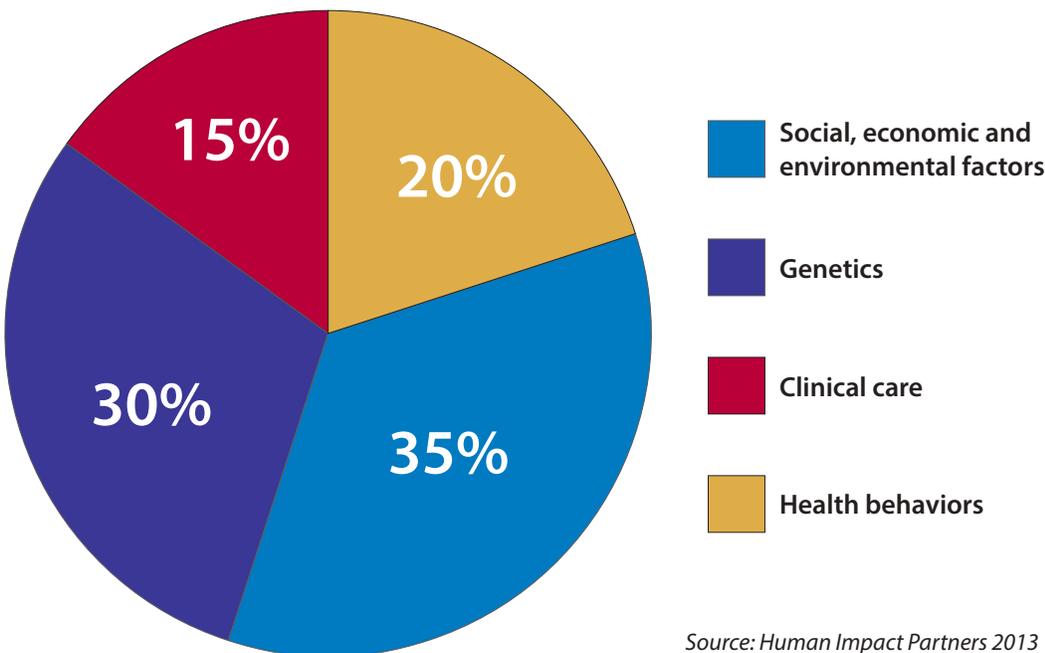
The 2016 *Westwood Neighborhood Plan* considers existing City assessments and plans, including *Denver's Comprehensive Plan 2000*, *Blueprint Denver 2002* (the citywide integrated land use and transportation plan), the *Strategic Transportation Plan 2008*, and *The Game Plan 2005*. A community stakeholder-led Westwood Steering Committee and a City Agency Technical Team provided guidance for the *Neighborhood Plan* and HIA throughout the process. Once adopted by City Council, the *Plan* will help guide implementation of the community's vision.



Factors that Impact Health

There are a variety of factors that shape health. Genetics and family health history only influence about 30 percent of a person's health. The rest is influenced by behaviors, as well as environmental and socio-economic conditions such as education, income, and access to health care. These factors are considered 'modifiable' because they can be changed.

FIGURE: Factors Influencing Health



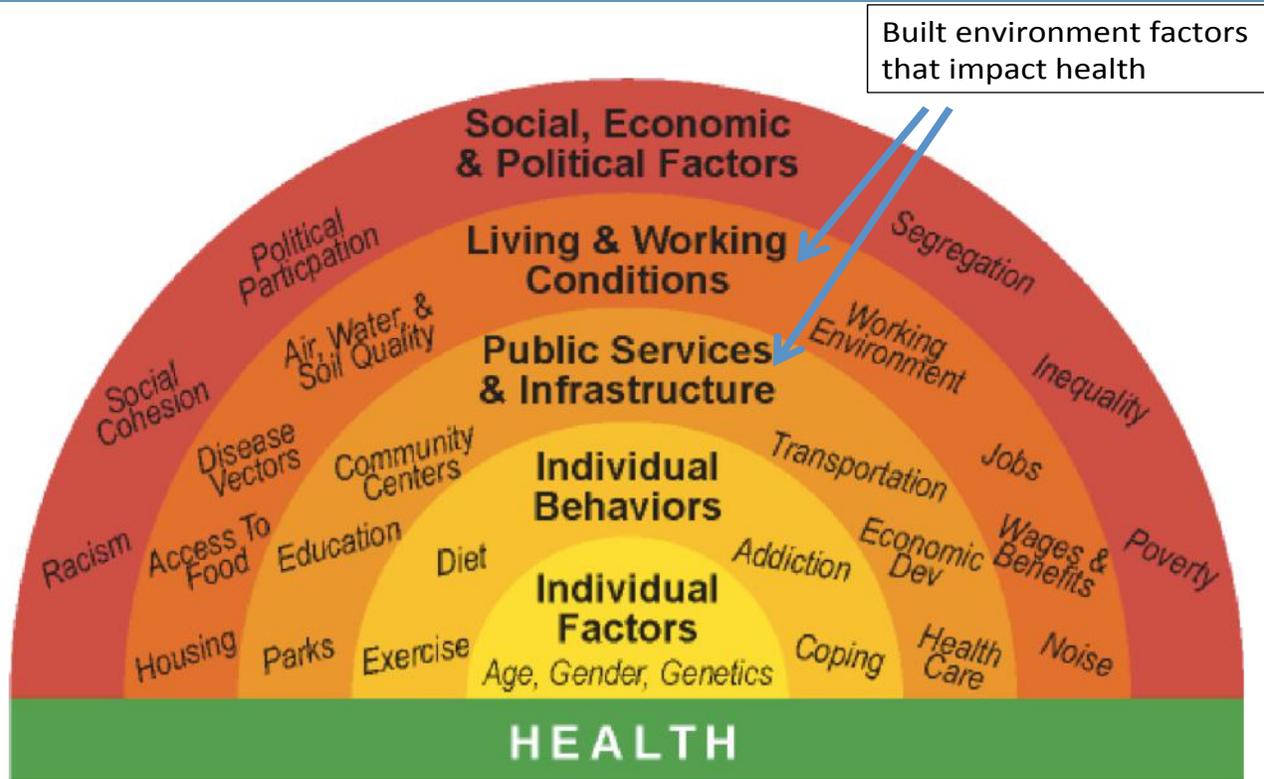
Source: Human Impact Partners 2013

Education and economic status are the strongest predictors of health in the United States. Those with higher incomes and education levels have access to good jobs and economic opportunities, and also have longer life expectancies and better overall health outcomes. Living in a safe environment with healthy foods, health care and opportunities to be physically active also leads to better overall health. These **social determinants of**

health have a significant effect on individual and community health. (Source: *CDC Social Determinants of Health*)

This broader approach to health includes changes to the **built environment** – our physical communities including homes, schools, parks, food sources and transportation systems. (Source: *Dannenberg 2011*). The figure below shows the many factors that influence health.

FIGURE: A Socio-Ecological Model of Health



Source: World Health Organization

Health Equity

Differences in social, economic and environmental conditions significantly impact equity. As each community's challenges are unique, solutions to balance the inequities must be based on the communities' individual needs. Addressing health inequities requires targeting resources to those communities that have the poorest health outcomes, in order to achieve equity versus equality (see infographic). (Source: *Kresge 2013*)

There are various studies that have shown significant inequities between the infrastructure in largely Hispanic communities, versus infrastructure in largely white communities. For example,

81 percent of majority-Hispanic neighborhoods lack recreational facilities, compared with 70 percent of African-American neighborhoods and 38 percent of White neighborhoods. (Source: *Active Living Research 2011*)

Such disparities in the distribution of recreational facilities can be linked to disparities in physical inactivity and obesity, which communities of color experience at higher rates than others. (Source: *Active Living Research 2011*).

Improvements in the built environment, such as those identified in neighborhood plans, can help to reduce these health disparities.

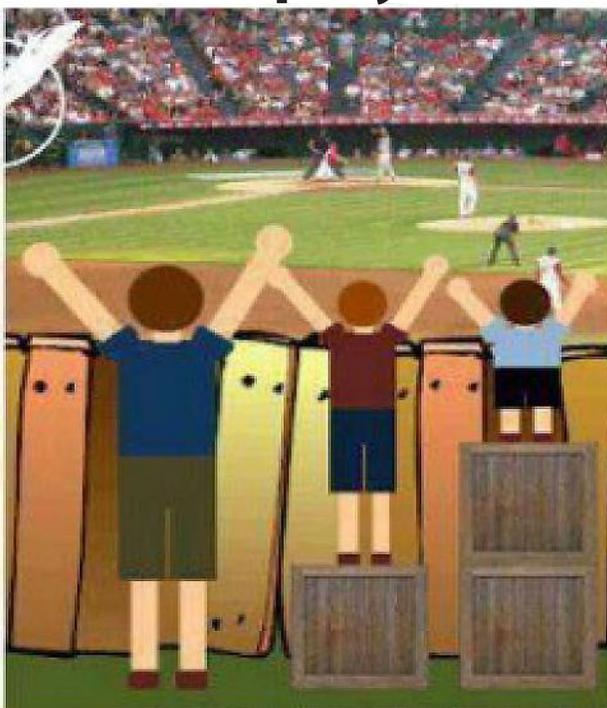
Health equity is “the fair and equal opportunity to lead healthy, productive lives regardless of race, ethnicity, income or where we live.” Health inequities arise because of the differences in social, economic and environmental conditions in which people grow, live, work and age. (Source: The Colorado Trust)

INFOGRAPHIC: Equality vs. Equity

Equality



Equity



Adapted by City of Portland, Oregon, Office of Equity and Human Rights.

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Demographics & Health in Westwood Today

Summary of Key Findings

The built environment plays a key role in shaping the health of a community. This is particularly relevant in Westwood, as residents have fewer economic opportunities and access to resources when compared to Denver overall, as well as poorer health.

Demographics and Socioeconomics

Overall, Westwood residents face greater socioeconomic barriers than residents of other Denver neighborhoods. When compared to Denver overall, Westwood residents earn just over half the median household income, are substantially less educated, have larger and more crowded households, and many more Spanish-only speakers.

TABLE: Select Demographics for Westwood

Demographics	Westwood	Denver
Population ¹	16,884	633,777
% population Hispanic ²	81%	33%
Median household income ³	\$26,900 - 33,900	\$51,800
% of families with children under the age of 18 living below the poverty level ⁴	25% - 53%	22%
% of population with less than a high school diploma or equivalent (age 25 and older) ⁵	46%	14%
Median age ⁶	24 - 28	34
% of population 18 and younger ⁷	39%	21%
Average household size ⁸	3.5 - 3.6	2.3
Housing overcrowding ⁹	18%	3%
% housing units with no vehicle available ¹⁰	14%	12%
% Owner-occupied units	38%	50%
% Renter-occupied units ¹¹	62%	50%
Population Density per Acre ¹²	18 people/acre	6 people/acre
% speaks Spanish at home ¹³	63%	21%
% speaks Spanish at home AND English 'not very well' ¹⁴	26%	9%

Source: US Census Bureau, 2010-2014 American Community Survey - 5 year estimates.

¹ Form DP05

⁸ Form S1101

² Form DP05

⁹ % of Living Units with more than 1 occupant per room; Table B25014

³ Form DP03

¹⁰ Form B08201

⁴ Form S1702

¹¹ Form B25003

⁵ Form B15003

¹² City of Denver=154.9sm * 640ac/sm=99,136ac. Westwood=1.496sm*640ac/sm=957.4ac.

⁶ Form S0101

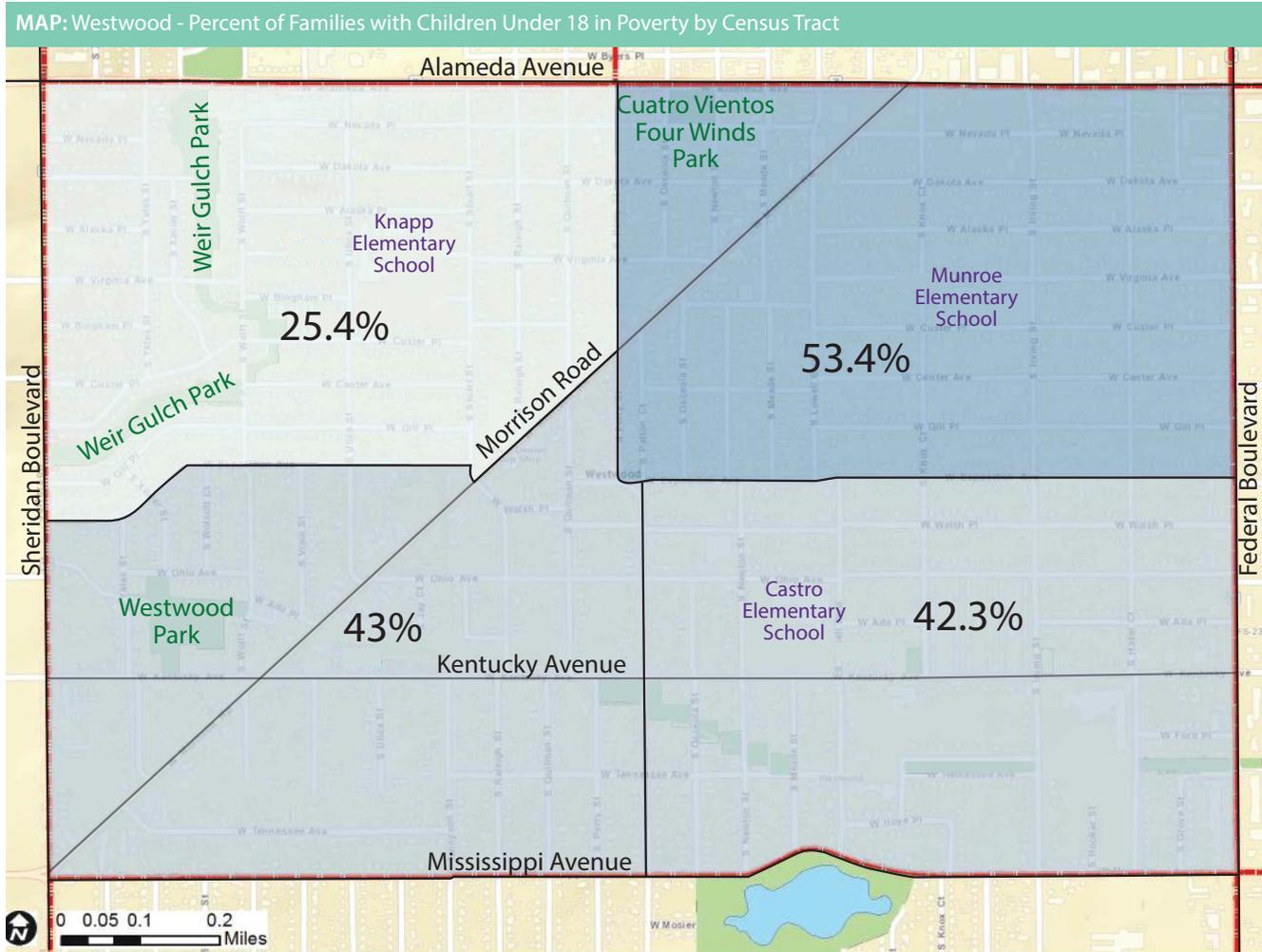
¹³ Form B16001

⁷ Form S0101

¹⁴ Form B16001

Westwood in particular has a high percentage of families with children living below the poverty level. Children who live in low-income or chronically disadvantaged neighborhoods often experience significantly lower health outcomes, lack access

to early childhood education, and struggle harder to achieve post-secondary success than their more affluent peers. (Source: Status of Denver Children 2016) These challenges indicate a lack of resources for Westwood children and families.



Source: US Census Bureau 2010-2014 American Community Survey - 5 year estimates.

"It is not about one group doing something wrong....it's about the environment we have built that sets people up to fail."

Source, Dr. Donald Lloyd-Jones, NPR interview 2015

Largest Youth Population in Denver

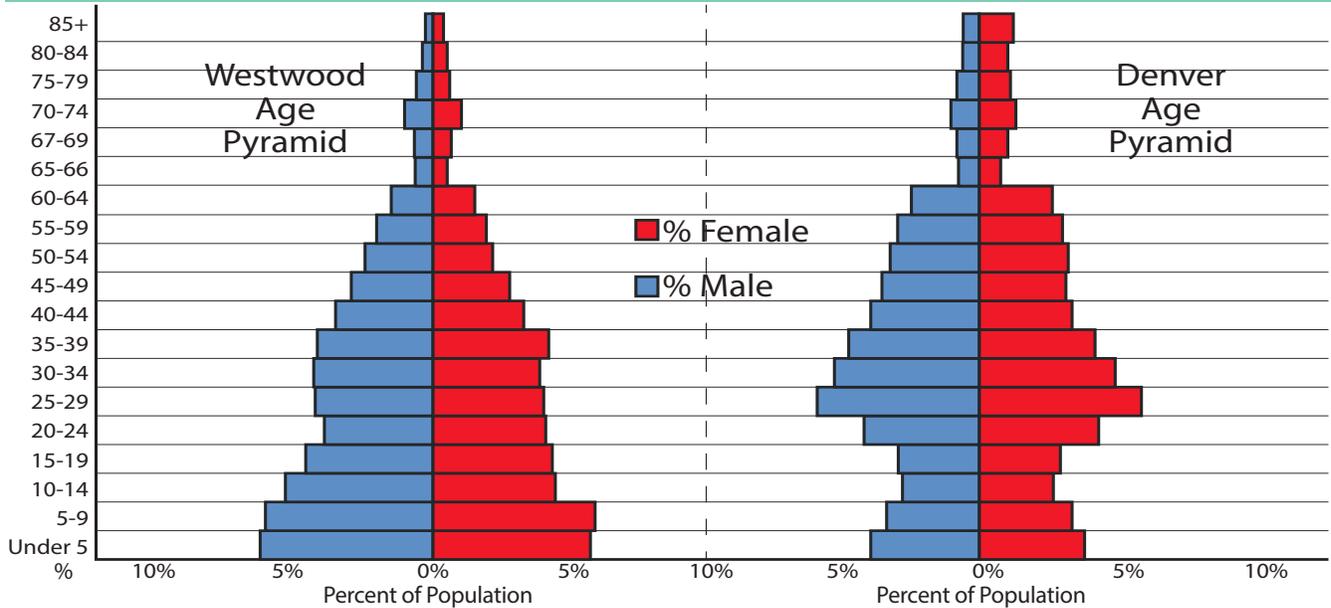
One of the most notable characteristics of Westwood is the size of the youth population. Westwood is home to nearly 6,500 children and youth, more than any other neighborhood in Denver. The two figures on page 18 compare the

age distribution of Westwood and Denver overall. The high number of children currently under age five in Westwood indicates that the youth population will continue to grow in the future.

Westwood's large youth population further underscores the need for improved infrastructure such as parks, recreation, and green space, healthy food sources, quality housing, and safe routes to school. Educational resources like English classes, science-technology-engineering-math (STEM) curricula, and after-school recreation and arts

programs are also important for children and youth. Providing youth with environmental and economic opportunities now can reap future benefits in workforce development, entrepreneurship, neighborhood stability and a multigenerational community, all of which can also contribute to better health.

FIGURE: Percentage of Population Under Age 18



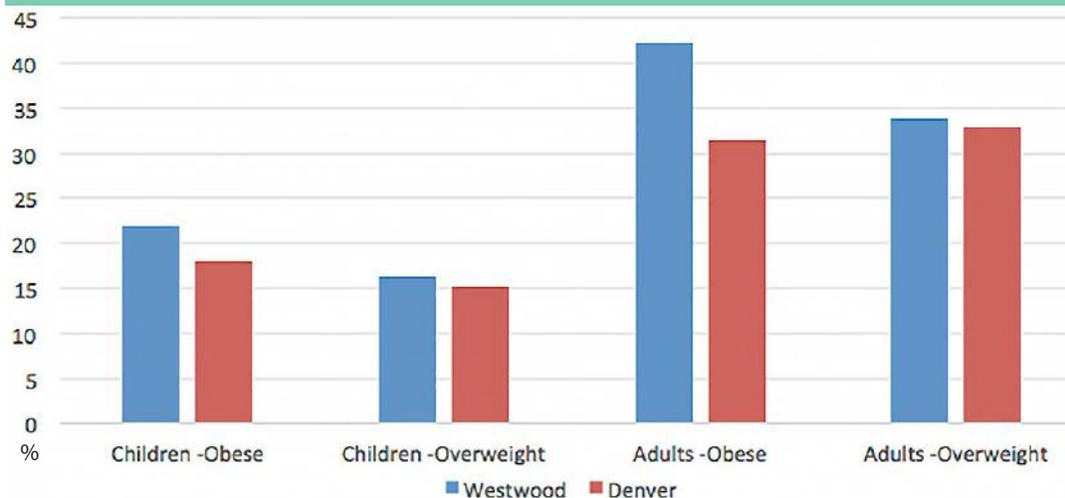
Source: US Census Bureau, 2010-2014 Community Survey, 5-year estimates

Health

Obesity rates are higher in Westwood for both children and adults when compared to Denver overall. Obesity and overweight are defined as weight that is higher than what is considered healthy for a given height. Obesity is associated

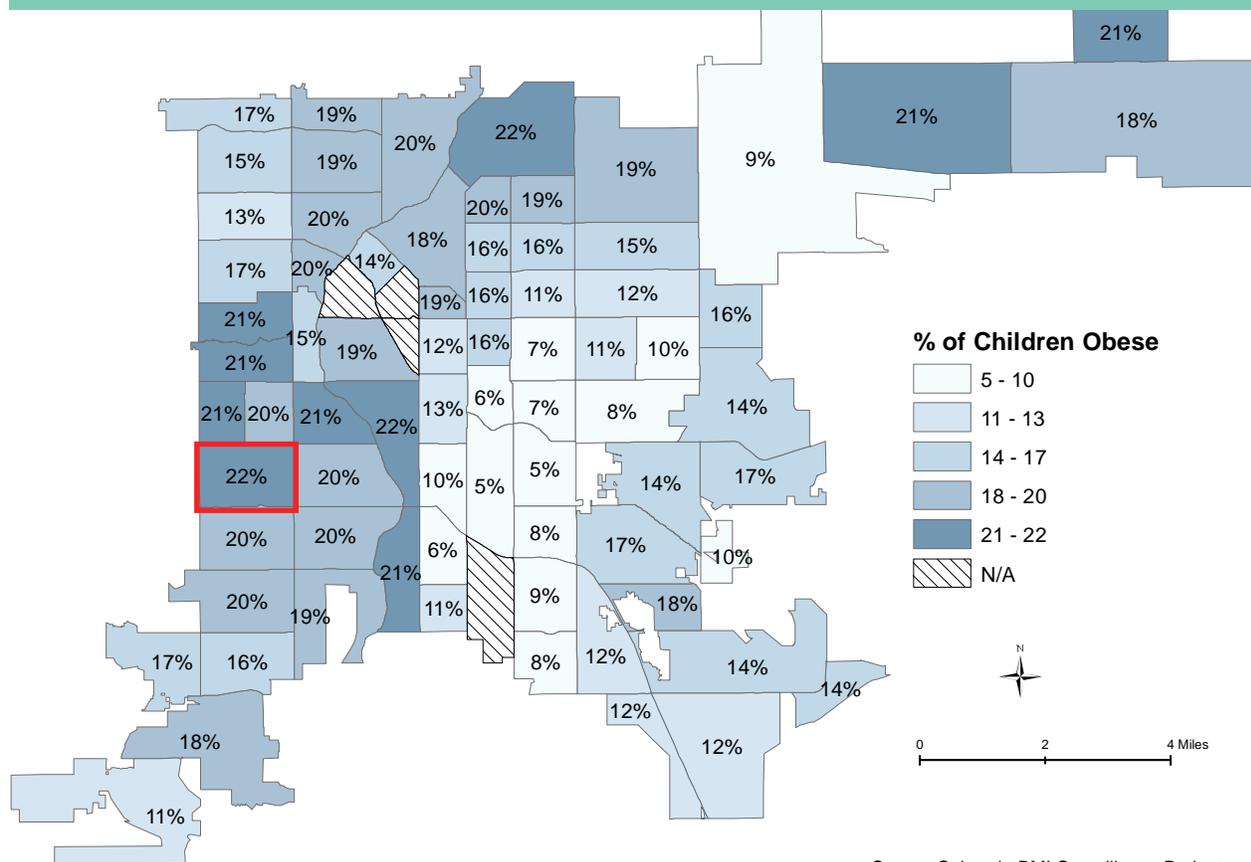
with a number of serious chronic diseases in adulthood, including diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure, stroke, some cancers, and mental disorders including depression (Source: CDC 2008).

FIGURE: Percentage of Overweight and Obese Adults and Children in Denver



Source: Colorado BMI Surveillance Project

MAP: Childhood Obesity in Denver by Neighborhood



Source: Colorado BMI Surveillance Project

Westwood is among the top three neighborhoods in Denver with the highest number of children that are at an unhealthy weight.

Children and youth who live in neighborhoods with poor access to healthy food are more likely to be overweight. Obese children can experience early-onset adult obesity complications such as Type 2 Diabetes. Childhood obesity is progressive, meaning that most children who become obese are likely to stay obese. Progressive conditions like childhood obesity are easier to prevent than to treat. (Source: Denver, Vital Signs, April 2015)

Children and youth can be more influenced by their physical environment than adults, as they are generally less mobile than adults and often spend more time at home, school, and in nearby parks. Early lifestyle behaviors including physical activity and nutritional habits are shaped by these local surroundings in a positive way if they include:

- Safe, accessible parks, playgrounds, recreation centers, trails

- Adequate sidewalks and safe routes to nearby schools
- Bike infrastructure
- Sources of healthy food in and outside of school
- Clean air for outdoor physical activity
- A social network of adults looking out for the overall safety and wellbeing of children and youth.

Research shows that in lower income, ethnic communities like Westwood, the strongest correlation between obesity and built environment elements are the presence of supermarkets and places to exercise safely. (Source: Lovasi, 2009) Having a healthy built environment is particularly important for the large youth population in Westwood given the higher than average childhood obesity rate. Furthermore, Hispanic children in Denver have higher rates of early childhood obesity than other groups and could benefit the most from preventive measures such as safe places for physical activity and healthy food sources. (Source: Denver Vital Signs April 2015)

How the Westwood Neighborhood Plan Can Impact Residents' Health

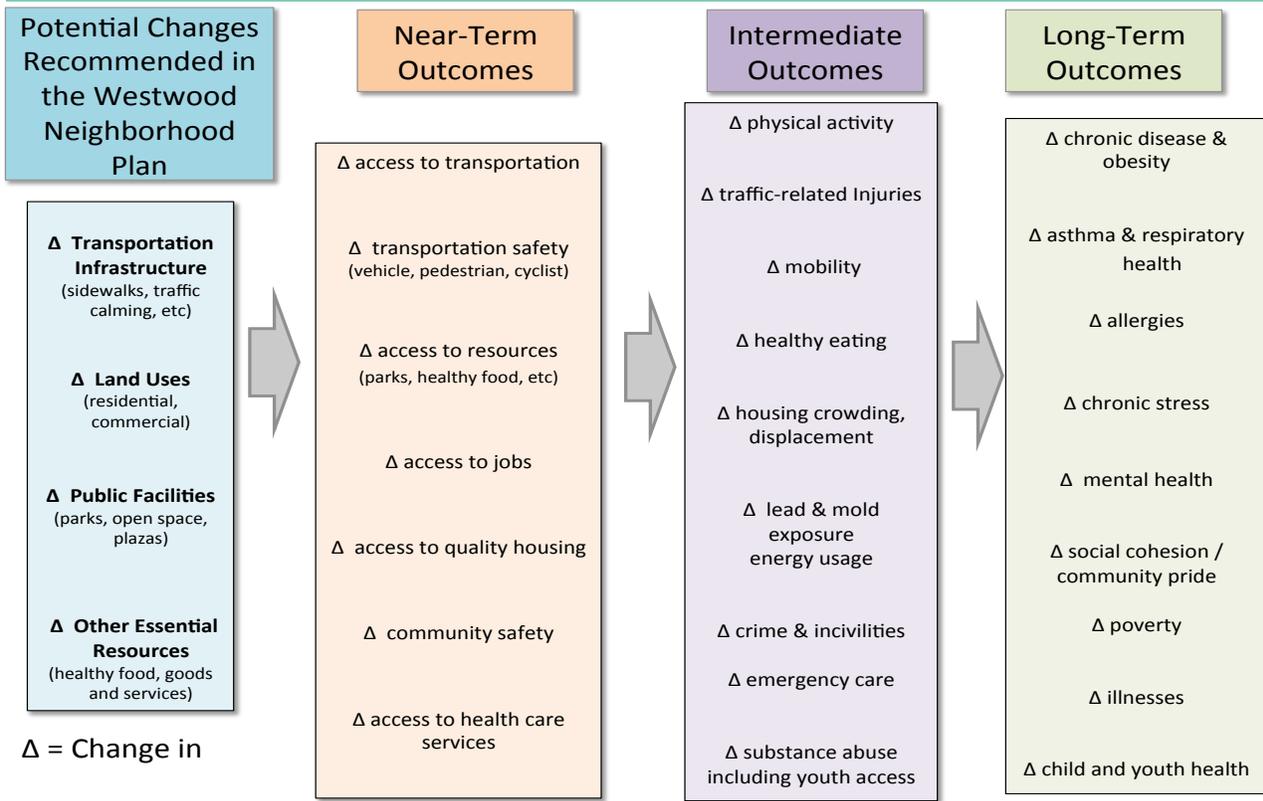
The Westwood Neighborhood Plan recommends changes to the physical environment that can lead to improved health for residents. A few of these changes include:

- increasing the quantity and quality of parks, trails, recreation and natural areas;
- Improving multimodal transportation and pedestrian safety;
- creating places and incentives for more healthy food choices;

- Increasing housing units, small businesses, employment and commercial services.

Ultimately, these changes will result in increased physical activity, better nutrition, reductions in injuries from vehicle crashes, and reductions in chronic disease and poverty over the near- and long-term, as shown by the HIA Pathway Diagram below. Policymakers can use this information in deciding how and when to allocate and prioritize City resources in Westwood.

FIGURE: Westwood Neighborhood Plan HIA Pathway Diagram



Source: Denver Environmental Health 2016

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Safe Multimodal Transportation

Summary of Key Findings

- Westwood’s transportation network poses challenges for pedestrians and bicyclists. From 2011 to 2015, Westwood saw a high number of vehicle crashes that resulted in pedestrian injuries or deaths. High traffic speeds, broken or missing sidewalks, lack of bicycle lanes and poor intersection quality impacts residents’ safety and mobility, especially for the highest concentration of children in the City who live within one mile of their local schools.
- Westwood’s poor walkability could be a key contributor to high obesity rates among Westwood residents, which can lead to chronic diseases including diabetes.

How the Westwood Neighborhood Plans Can Improve Safe Multimodal Transportation

Improving pedestrian, bicycle, and transit infrastructure could positively impact health by increasing physical activity, reducing chronic diseases, reducing injuries from vehicle crashes, and increasing the likelihood that residents can safely access neighborhood and regional destinations

IMAGE: Passenger boards the #3 bus at a stop on West Alameda Avenue in February, 2015



Photo by Westwood Unidos

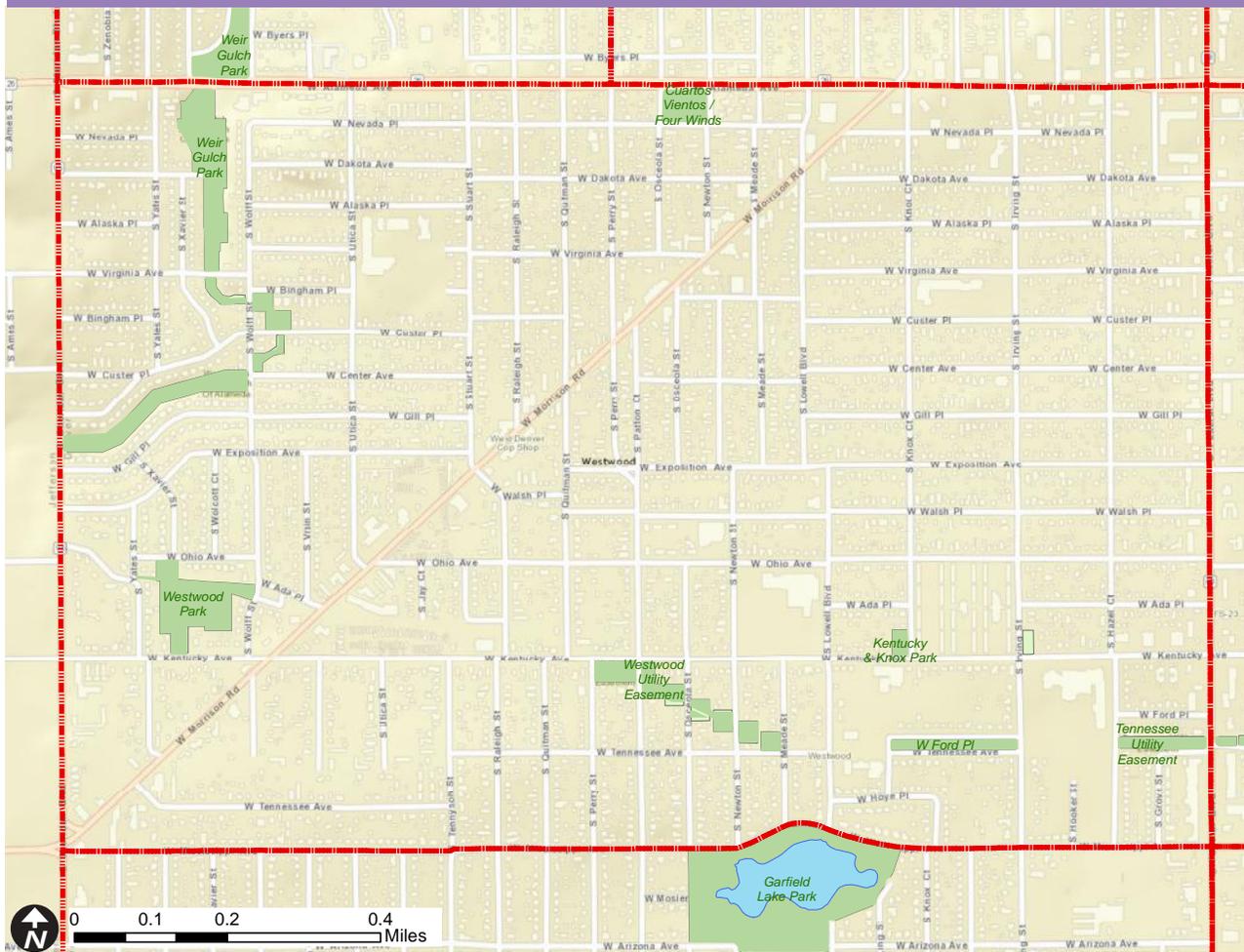
Multimodal Transportation in Westwood Today

Street Network

Westwood is organized on a fairly uniform street grid system, bounded by Alameda Avenue on the north, Federal Boulevard on the east, Mississippi Avenue on the south, and Sheridan Boulevard on the west. Morrison Road runs diagonally through the neighborhood, from Alameda Boulevard on the northeast to Sheridan Boulevard on the southwest. The diagonal road design, paired with

frequent curb cuts for driveways, results in many offset intersections with poor visibility for crossing Morrison Road, both for vehicles and pedestrians. Also, the uninterrupted design and lack of traffic signals and traffic calming measures lead to high, unsafe vehicle speeds. An improved access management strategy would increase safety for pedestrians and bicyclists.

MAP: Westwood Street Map



Public input from Westwood residents similarly shows concerns about unsafe pedestrian infrastructure and poor connectivity between the neighborhood and the rest of Denver. Alameda Avenue and Federal Boulevard in particular pose significant safety concerns for vehicles, pedestrians, cyclists and transit riders. In neighborhood planning meetings, residents commented:

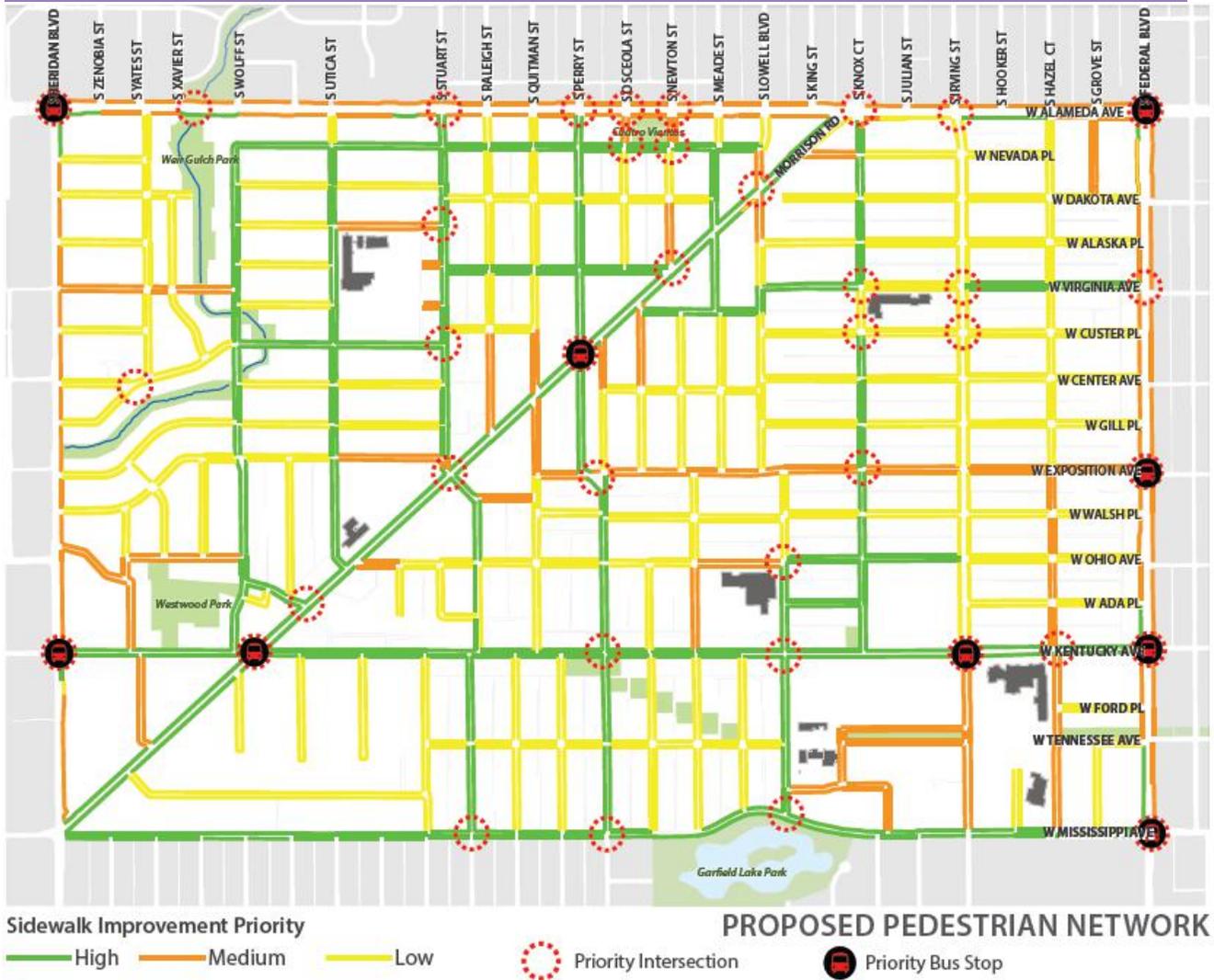
- “You never cross Morrison Road, even in a car. It’s scary.”
- “Speeding traffic is a problem on Morrison Road, Alameda Ave. and Federal Blvd.”
- “Cars are the only option for transportation in the neighborhood, and especially if you want to get out of Westwood.”
- “Federal Boulevard has a lot of pedestrian injury crashes, maybe the most in Denver.”*
(Source: Westwood HIA workshop, 3-26-15)

* Injury crashes discussed in “Community Safety.”

Sidewalks

The condition of sidewalks in Westwood varies, though many are narrow and in poor or unsafe condition. Critical gaps exist near schools, parks and along key travel corridors such as Federal Boulevard, Kentucky Avenue, and Morrison Road.

MAP: Westwood Pedestrian Network



Safe Multimodal Transportation

While the neighborhood has a street grid with small block sizes that could encourage walking, sidewalks are often narrow, broken, too close to traffic, or nonexistent. Residents report:

- “The sidewalks are too narrow and not used.”
- “You can’t walk side by side or push a stroller on the sidewalks.”
- “You are not protected on the sidewalk (from cars).”
- “There aren’t many places to walk safely.”

(Source: Westwood HIA workshop, 3-26-15)



Bicycle Infrastructure

Denver's bicycle network is designed to promote physical activity, alleviate traffic congestion and provide options for alternative transportation. Depending on the area, bike lanes often share the road with vehicles, or are in separate lanes. In Westwood, there is one designated bicycle lane (a painted lane along both sides of Morrison Road) and one regional bicycle route (a shared lane with vehicle traffic) along West Kentucky Avenue. There are also two signed bicycle routes (shared lanes with vehicle traffic) on South Stuart Street and South Irving Street. Construction on a new neighborhood bikeway along South Knox Court between Kentucky and Alameda Avenues is currently underway.

Currently, cyclists in Westwood tend to ride on the sidewalks, even on roads where there are

*Denver Moves identifies **neighborhood bikeways** (formerly known as bicycle boulevards) as streets that are designed to give priority to non-motorized users and discourage through traffic by motorized vehicles. On neighborhood bikeways, a separate space in the street (such as a bike lane) is not necessary because non-motorized users' preference is communicated through the roadway design, signage and traffic calming measures.*

bicycle lanes. While there may be various reasons for this, one resident said, "The Morrison Road bike lane is scary because of speeding cars." (Source: Westwood HIA workshop 3/26/15)

IMAGE: Bicyclist on sidewalk



Photo by Denver Environmental Health

Transit

Public transportation is critical for accessing jobs, schools, and services such as health care. An accessible public transit system can also help to reduce traffic congestion, improve air quality, and reduce instances of asthma and respiratory emergencies due to high ozone levels from single occupant vehicles.

While Westwood is served by bus transportation along its outside borders, routes are infrequent, indirect, and bus stops are poorly maintained. Many bus stops lack sidewalks or loading areas, benches, shelters, or any buffer from high-speed traffic. This makes it difficult for riders to safely and comfortably use the bus system, especially those with limited mobility, strollers or young children. Adding benches and other amenities could improve safety and increase use.

IMAGE: RTD Route 4 bus stop in Westwood

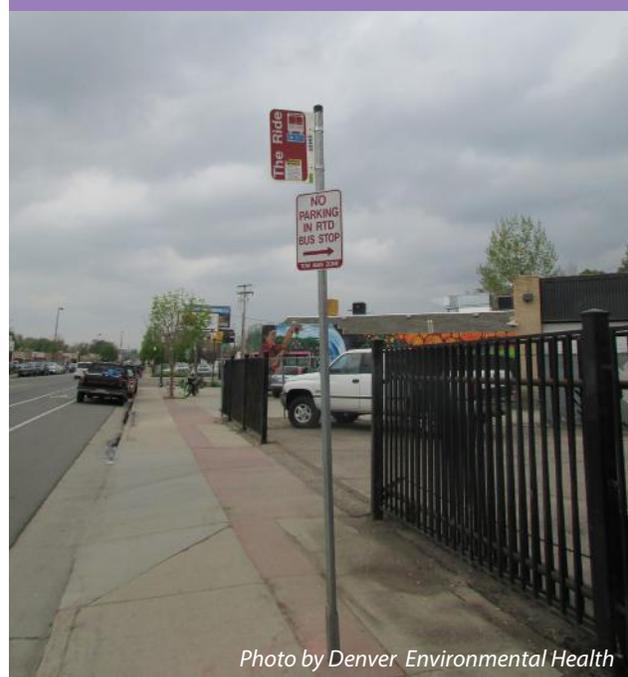


Photo by Denver Environmental Health

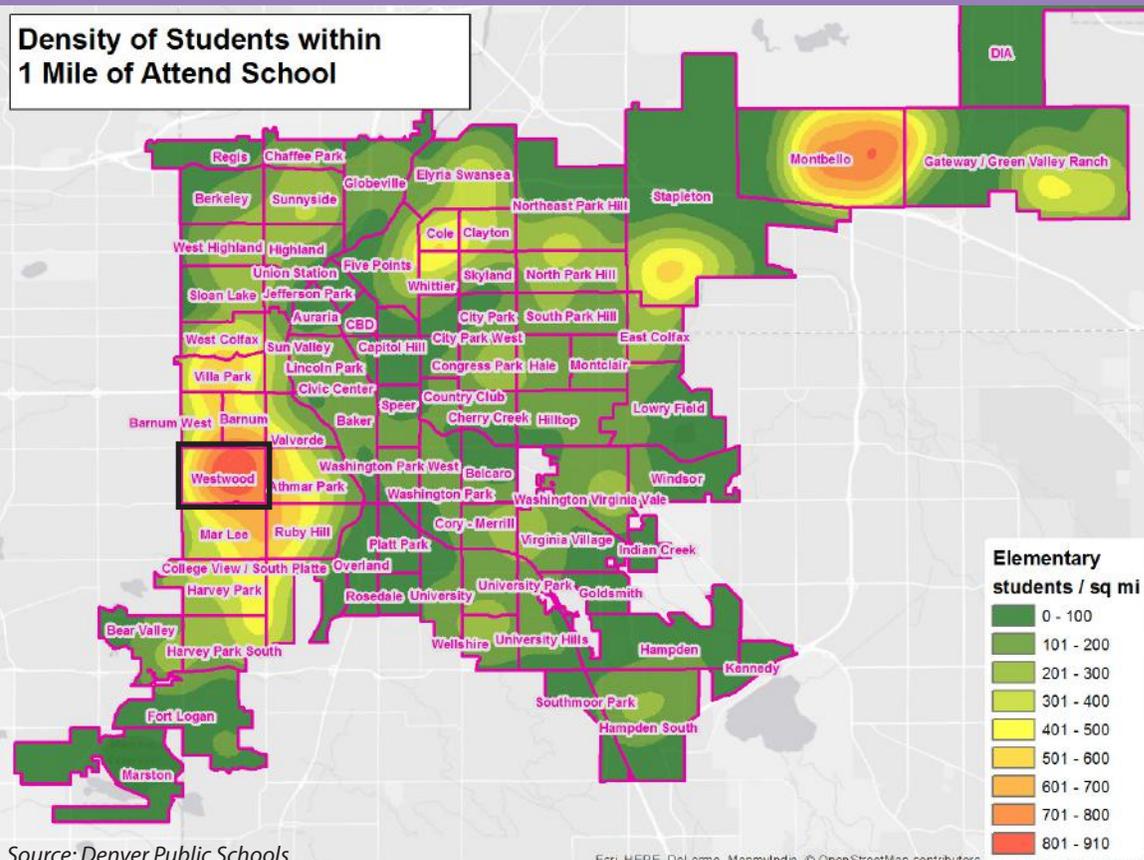
School Zones and Safe Routes to School

Westwood has several Denver Public Schools within its borders: Munroe, Castro and Knapp Elementary; Kepner, STRIVE Prep, and Compass Academy Middle Schools, and several early childhood learning centers.

Westwood has the highest concentration of

elementary students in Denver who live within a mile of the school they attend (see map). This is significant because the physical environment plays a critical role in how more than 1,300 elementary school students and 500 middle schoolers travel to and from school safely on a daily basis.

MAP: Elementary School Students Who Attend School Within A Mile of Their Home



Source: Denver Public Schools

Esri, HERE, DeLorme, MapmyIndia, © OpenStreetMap contributors, www.openstreetmap.org

Despite the the fact that a significant number of students live within walking or biking distance of the school, many parents still drive their children, due to safety concerns.

While designated 'school zones' exist, parents expressed concerns about speeding and reckless driving. Residents report there have been several near-misses of cars hitting children, particularly near Munroe Elementary.

IMAGE: Children unloading in the street between vehicles at Munroe Elementary



Photo by Denver Environmental Health

Munroe parents have said:

- "The number one safety issue is traffic enforcement at drop off and pickup zones."
- "It's not safe for kids to walk to school... we need to drive them."
- "We need a DPS resource officer to help with safety. The problem is not fixed."
- "We need school zone enforcement, like other cities do, to keep kids safe."

(Source: Westwood HIA workshop, 3-26-15)

In an effort to improve safety at Munroe Elementary, in October 2015 parent volunteers established a "Kiss and Go" drop off zone in the morning. A Kiss and Go zone is a protected area with signage to direct drivers to a specific drop off location, and volunteer staff that help students get safely to and

from vehicles. Police officers support the effort through encouragement and enforcement of safety and traffic laws. While the program is still new, it seems to be off to a good start. It will take a continued focus on education and enforcement to improve safety for the long-term.

A school zone is a designated safety area on a street near a school or crosswalk that leads to a school. School zones generally have a reduced speed limit during certain hours.

Chapter 54, Section 1 of Denver's Revised Municipal Code (61.5) School zone shall mean any portion of the street or highway designated as such by the City Traffic Engineer, where traffic signs, traffic control devices, or both are in place to indicate the start and end of the zone, the times that the location is deemed to be a school zone, and that the penalty for a violation within the zone is doubled.

Alleyways

Like many Denver neighborhoods, Westwood has alleys along the rear property of residences. The publicly-owned alleys are paved to City standards, but several privately-owned alleyways remain unpaved and poorly lit. As a result, the alleys can be dark, poorly maintained, and often attract illegal dumping. Residents have also expressed concerns about safety. Well-maintained and properly lit alleyways could enhance pedestrian access to neighborhood destinations, recreation opportunities, as well as help improve stormwater drainage and water quality. A recent survey of alleyway usage adjacent to Knapp and Munroe Elementary showed that up to 50 kids and parents use the alleyway near the schools each day. (Source: Kaiser 2014)



Local community organizations have successfully cleaned up and activated some alleyways for public use (Source: Trust for Public Land 2015). However, additional resources need to be identified to make improvements to other priority alleyways.



How Safe Multimodal Transportation Affects Health

In September 2015, the U.S. Surgeon General issued *Step It Up!*, the Surgeon General's call to action to promote walking and walkable communities. "Designing communities that make it safe and easy to walk for people of all ages and abilities" is one of the five strategic goals to improve public health. Walking as a public health strategy achieves multiple benefits (Source: *Step It Up!*):

- Prevents the development of chronic diseases such as heart disease, high blood, pressure, some cancers, and diabetes
- Reduces obesity
- Improves mental wellbeing and reduces depression
- Improves cognition, concentration and learning, particularly in children
- Requires no special skills, facilities, equipment or financial resources
- Has low risk of injury
- Is multipurpose (transportation, recreation, leisure, socializing)
- Promotes social interaction
- Reduces air pollution and greenhouse gases
- Creates active, attractive places for businesses to locate and economies to thrive.

Increasing physical activity significantly reduces the risk of chronic disease and related risk factors. A safe multimodal transportation infrastructure can promote increased physical activity and reduce pedestrian injuries.

Research shows that physical features of the walking and bicycling environment can improve health:

Street Scale Features	lead to	Changes in Health Outcomes
Sidewalks		Increases walking frequency and distance *
Bicycle facilities		Increases biking distance and number of trips*
Traffic calming to reduce speeds		Reduces the frequency and severity of injury crashes**
High intersection density (full grid street pattern) (Source: Marshall et al)		Lower risk of obesity, diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease*
Crosswalks, pedestrian refuge islands, pedestrian signals		Increases compliance by pedestrians and drivers **
Benches, bicycle racks, street lights, bus shelters, signs		Increases walking and biking*
Street trees		Safer pedestrian environment* **
“Safe Routes to School” (marked crosswalks, sidewalks, pedestrian crossing signals, etc)		Increases walking and biking to school*
“Walkable neighborhood” (attractive environment with nearby destinations including transit)		Increases walking*

* physical activity
** injury prevention

Source: “The Benefits of Street-Scale Features for Walking and Biking”, American Planning Association, 9/2015

Traffic speed, traffic volume and road design are key factors that affect the number and severity of injuries in a crash. Reducing vehicle speeds reduces the probability of serious or fatal injury. Traffic crashes involving vehicles that were traveling below 20 mph were 20 percent less likely to have injuries than those traveling above 35 mph, where injuries are often fatal or incapacitating (Source: Leaf 1999).

Designated bicycle lanes keep bicyclists safer. One study found the risk of injuries to cyclists was lowest on roads with on-road bicycle routes, marked bicycle lanes, and off-road bicycle paths, as compared to roads without any of these features. A protected bicycle lane has a physical barrier exclusively for cyclists – such as plastic posts,

bollards, planters, curbs – to protect cyclists from vehicle traffic. Street lighting and paved surfaces also improve cyclist safety (Source: Conor 2009). When protected bicycle lanes are added to a street, bicycle traffic rises by an average of 75 percent in the first year alone, according to another recent study (Source: Lessons from the Green Lane 2014).

Many studies also show co-benefits of street-scale features, including improved public safety, increased social cohesion, and improved mental health. Additionally, this infrastructure has economic benefits, including higher property values, increased spending at retail businesses, and increased jobs (Source: “The Benefits of Street-Scale Features for Walking and Biking” 2015).

Safe Routes to School and Health

Safe Routes to School (SRTS) is a federal program proven to increase student biking and walking to school. A study of more than 800 schools in four states found that infrastructure improvements increased walking and biking by 18 percent. Outreach efforts (education, enforcement, community support) increased walking and biking by 5 percent per year, leading to increases of 25 percent after five years. The health benefits of physical activity extend to family members as well, because they often walk their children to school (Source: McDonald 2014).

SRTS has also been shown to help reduce travel-injuries to students who are walking or biking to school – a 44 percent reduction in a comprehensive 10-year study.(Source: DiMaggio 2013).

In general, physically active children tend to perform better academically, and evidence suggests that physical activity among children is related to better mental health (Source: McDonald 2014).



Photo by Denver Community Planning & Development

Health Disparities and Health Equity

Racial or ethnic segregation can influence neighborhood conditions as well as individual, household and neighborhood level health (Source: Williams 2001). Historically, lower-income neighborhoods have been more vulnerable than affluent areas to cuts in municipal services, parks and recreation, public schools, employment opportunities, and housing quality. These communities are often more likely to experience pollution, noise and crime as well. These differing conditions can contribute to health inequities (Source: RWJF 2011).

Safe, convenient and affordable transportation is a core component of upward mobility, as residents need to be able to travel to education and employment centers. Without transportation, residents can remain trapped in poverty. Families in the lowest economic quartile spend 42 percent of their total annual income on transportation, while middle-income households spend only 22 percent (Source: Walk On 2013). Having

good access to safe, multimodal transportation can be a strategy for achieving equity both by reducing unequal burdens of disease and by reducing transportation costs.

How the Westwood Neighborhood Plan Can Improve Safe Multimodal Transportation

Repairing, constructing and connecting sidewalks, improving bicycle and public transportation infrastructure, and reducing vehicle speeds all can contribute to better health and safety in Westwood. Opportunities for safe physical activity are particularly significant in Westwood as both

children and adults suffer from higher rates of obesity than Denver residents overall. Also, reducing transportation costs, through a shift to less expensive modes, can free up resources for other household expenses including health care services, recreation, or healthy foods.

Denver's transportation strategies emphasize the need to "move people rather than cars." In order to do this, Denver should provide convenient, comfortable and affordable mobility options that encourage residents to choose transportation modes with a lower greenhouse gas footprint such as mass transit, carpooling, bicycling, and walking.

Source: Denver 2015 Climate Action Plan

Moving In the Right Direction

Recent Improvements, 2011-2015

Over the past five years, improvements have been made to increase safety and mobility in Westwood. Additional improvements slated to take place over the next 1-2 years will further promote and expand mobility options.

In 2011, Denver's Safe Routes to School program funded sidewalk widening and curb ramp upgrades near Munroe Elementary School.

- The City added bike lanes to Morrison Road in 2013.*
- In September 2015, the City installed a new traffic signal at the intersection of Morrison Road and Perry Street with crosswalks and pedestrian crossing signals.*

Current and Future Projects Underway

A number of construction projects will commence in 2016 to upgrade multimodal conditions:

- Concrete bulb-outs (curb extensions that shorten the walking distance across the road) will be constructed at five intersections across Morrison Road, in Spring 2016 as well as on some medians. Additional improvements are being made at the intersection of Alameda Avenue, Knox Court, and Morrison Road that will help residents cross the intersection more safely. Following these improvements, the speed limit on Morrison Road will be reduced from 35 to 30 mph.*
- A neighborhood bikeway will be installed on Knox Court from Alameda Avenue to Kentucky Avenue, improving mobility and increasing safety for cyclists*
- The City will install wayfinding signage along the signed D-1 bicycle route on Stuart Street.*
- BuCu West, the Westwood business development organization, is initiating a Morrison Road streetscape improvement plan in 2016 to install landscaping and median improvements, with funding from both the City and the Healthy Places Westwood nonprofit.*
- In mid-2016, the City will begin a study of the Federal Boulevard Corridor to analyze safety and mobility, and recommend improvements.*

Recommendations to Improve Safe Multimodal Transportation

Westwood Neighborhood Plan	Lead Agencies	Other City Plans/Policies/Projects	Lead Agencies
<p>A.1 Fund and build multimodal infrastructure as prioritized in the <i>Westwood Neighborhood Plan</i> including sidewalks, bike infrastructure, intersection improvements and bus stop amenities to improve safety and connectivity to key local and regional destinations. Coordinate with BuCu West’s <i>Morrison Road 2016 Streetscape Improvement Plan</i> in upcoming City projects.</p>	DPW/ CPD	<p>A.1.a Complete installation of safety improvements per the <i>2015-16 Morrison Road Project</i> and other City plans including bump-outs, medians and crosswalks to reduce vehicle speeds and pedestrian injuries.</p> <p>A.1.b Take steps to reduce pedestrian and cyclist injuries and fatalities along Federal Boulevard, Alameda Avenue, Morrison Road and Kentucky Avenue by increasing enforcement, improving street design, and installing traffic calming devices.</p>	DPW DPD/ DPW/ CDOT
<p>A.2 Prioritize areas around neighborhood schools for infrastructure improvements to create <i>Safe Routes to School</i>. DEH will work with Public Works to provide walk-audit data for priority locations for sidewalks, crosswalks, pedestrian signs, flashing beacons, etc.</p>	DPW/ DEH	<p>A.2.a Secure additional funding for <i>Denver Safe Routes to School</i> education and outreach program to increase safety and physical activity among Westwood children and youth.</p>	DEH/ Mayor’s Office/ City Council
<p>A.3 Facilitate the development of alternate transportation options in the neighborhood including bicycle-share, car-share or discounted transit passes.</p>	DPW/ DEH/ OoS		
<p>A.4 Work with transit partners to improve transit connections to key destinations including light rail stations as identified in the <i>Westwood Neighborhood Plan</i> “Transformative Projects”.</p>	CPD/ RTD		
<p>A.5 Prioritize ‘green alleyway’ construction for pedestrian and bicycle connectivity, improved storm drainage, water quality, recreation and placemaking per the <i>Westwood Neighborhood Plan</i>.</p>	DPW/ DEH/ NGOs	<p>A.5.a Complete paving and lighting of City-owned alleys and private alleys (with owner permission) through the City alleyway improvement program.</p>	DPW/ City Council/ Xcel
		<p>A.6.a Engage Westwood community members and other interested stakeholders in the <i>2016 Federal Boulevard Corridor Study</i> to help identify issues of concern and opportunities to improve pedestrian safety and reduce injury crashes.</p>	DPW/ NGOs
		<p>A.7.a Integrate Westwood HIA recommendations into 2016 Citywide planning initiatives including <i>Blueprint Denver</i>, <i>Denver Moves Transit Master Plan</i>, <i>Denver Moves Pedestrian & Trails Master Plan</i>, <i>The Game Plan</i>, and the <i>2016 Federal Boulevard Corridor Study</i>.</p>	DPW/ CPD/ DPR/ DEH

Safe Multimodal Transportation

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Parks and Recreation

Summary of Key Findings

- Westwood residents have less access to parks and open space than other Denver neighborhoods, including total acreage and proximity to parks. In addition, there is no recreation center within the neighborhood. For most residents, the nearest recreation centers are several miles away.
- This is significant for Westwood, with the largest number of children and youth in any neighborhood in Denver, and also the highest rates of childhood obesity.

How the Westwood Neighborhood Plans Can Improve Parks and Recreation

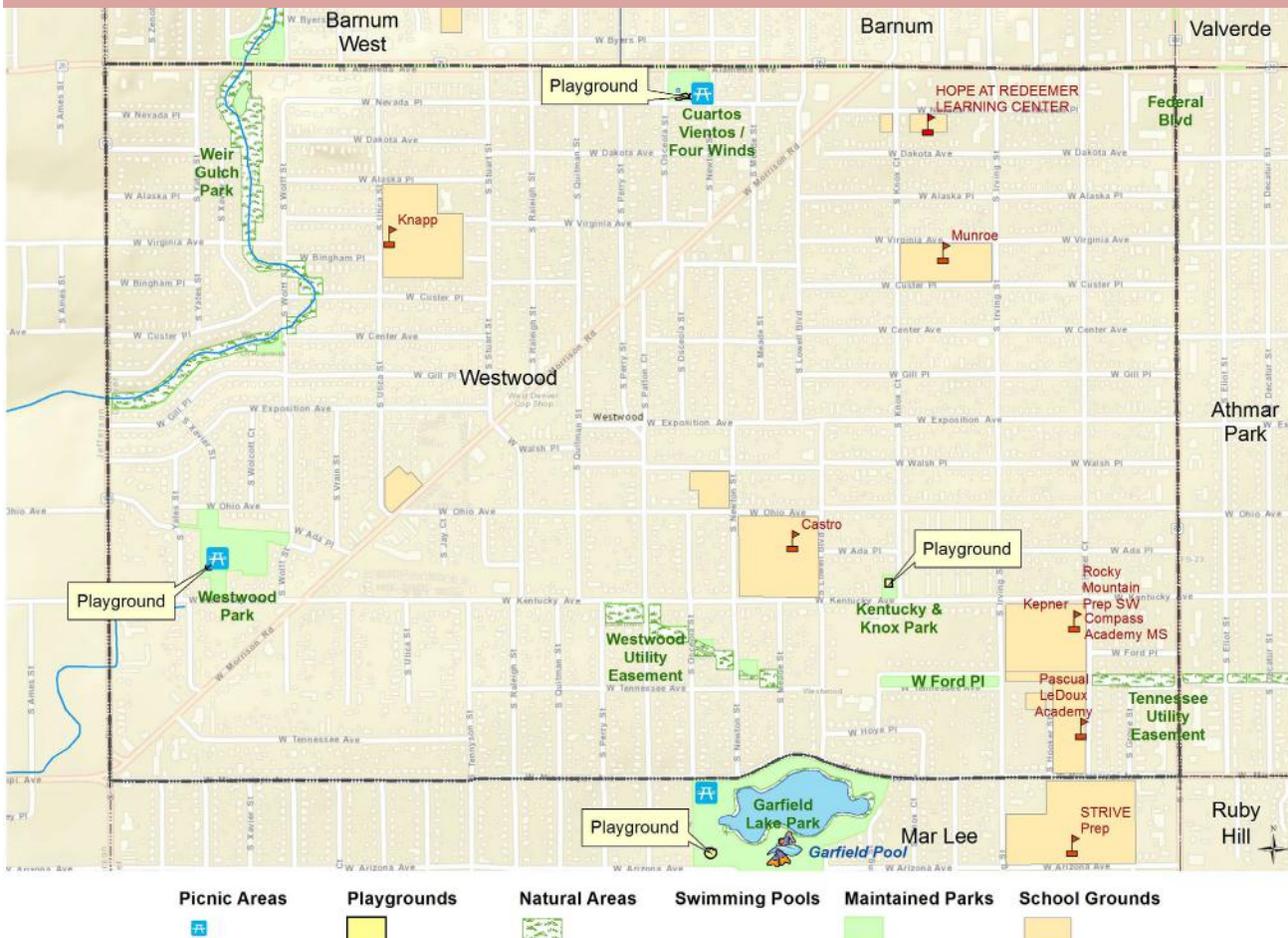
Adding new parks and open spaces, increasing access and improving park safety will give adults and children in particular more opportunities to be physically active. Adding neighborhood recreation facilities and enhancing the programming of existing facilities can also increase interest and participation in physical activity, helping to reduce obesity and other chronic diseases.

Parks and Recreation in Westwood Today

There are five park and open space areas in Westwood, totaling about 23 acres (see map). Neighborhood parks include Westwood Park in the southwest corner, Cuatro Vientos (Four Winds) Park adjacent to Alameda Avenue, and an unnamed pocket park at Kentucky Avenue and Knox Court. There is also open space provided by several utility easements along and north of West Tennessee Avenue, as well as the section of Weir Gulch Park

located in the northwest area of the neighborhood. The City recently obtained a small amount of land to develop into a pocket park at the corner of Kentucky Avenue and Irving Street, just east of the Kentucky and Knox Court Park. While not within the boundaries of the Westwood neighborhood, Garfield Lake Park is in close proximity to the South and provides additional recreational opportunities.

MAP: Existing Parks and Play areas in Westwood

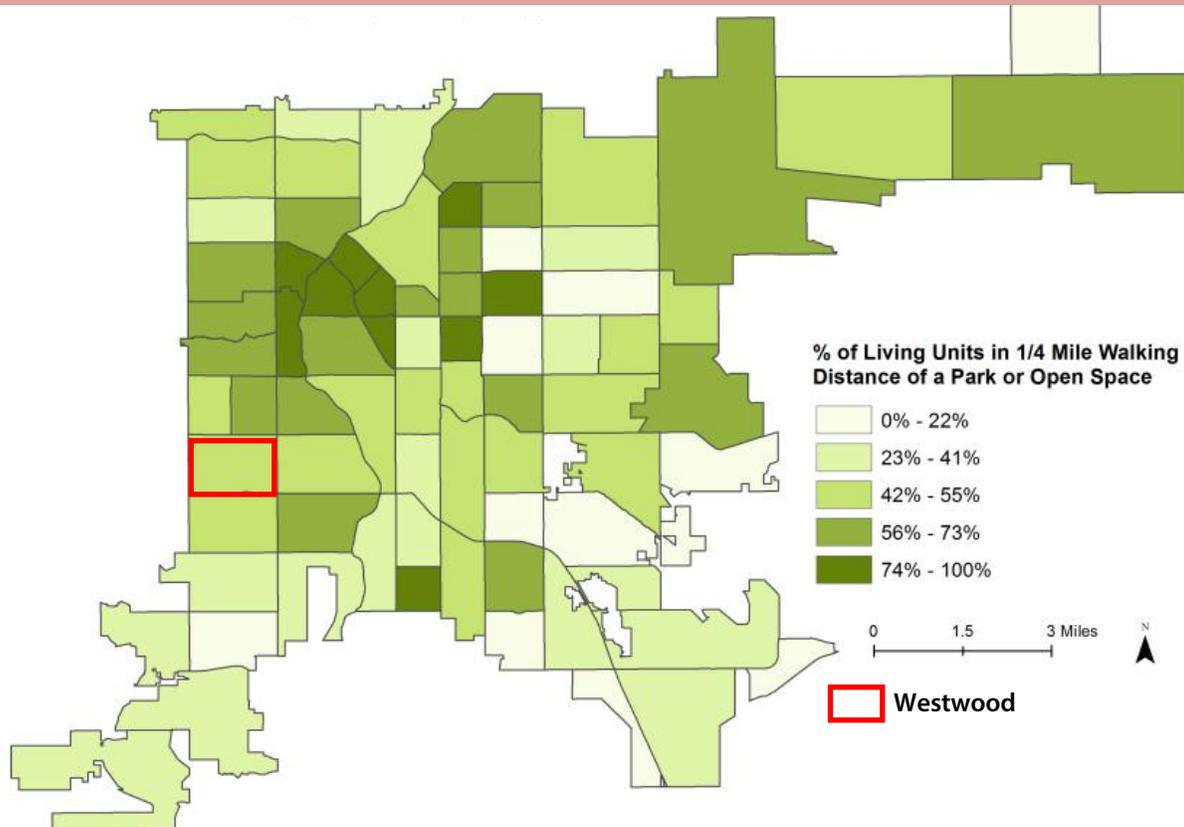


Denver Parks and Recreation measures parkland acres per 1,000 residents with the goal of having 8 to 10 acres per 1,000. Using this measure, Westwood is significantly underserved with 1.5 acres per 1,000 residents.

Another more widely accepted measurement is proximity to a park or open space within a ¼ mile of one's home.

By this measure, about half of Westwood residents are further than a 1/4 mile from a park or open space. This is particularly significant for the 6,500 children and youth who live, learn and play in Westwood.

FIGURE: Percent of Residences Within ¼ Mile Walk of a Park or Open Space



Source: US Census 2010, City and County of Denver Parks and Recreation 2015, Analysis by Department of Community Development and Planning.

During the HIA public input process, many Westwood residents voiced desire for additional green space and recreational opportunities in the neighborhood. Residents relayed how important it is to have gathering spaces for families to picnic or host celebrations, which is also an important part of Hispanic family culture. They stressed the need for facilities that serve multigenerational family members, with restrooms and water fountains, which the current parks lack. Shade was also cited as an important amenity for park use. Finally, some residents expressed safety concerns in the existing parks due to illegal activities such as drug use and vandalism.

The following comments were made by attendees at recent community meetings for the neighborhood planning process when asked about park conditions:

- “Too few! Need more parks, no playing fields, more biking/walking trails, especially if they connect to important destinations”
- “Not enough open spaces like parks”
- “They are small and there is not enough room”
- “Lack of good play areas and safe parks”
- “Most frequent thing to do at the park is to picnic and have a BBQ”
- “People love their parks and want to be there as long as they feel safe”
- “Dark, no bathrooms, and not enough trees to give shade”
- “At night many people using drugs in the parks”
- “There is not enough lighting”

(Source: Westwood Neighborhood Plan meeting, 2/26/15; Westwood Unidos community meeting, 4/9/15)

Westwood Park

Westwood Park is located in the southwestern quadrant of the neighborhood, just west of Morrison Road. Park amenities include a ball field, basketball court, playground and picnic tables. Despite being the largest in the neighborhood at approximately five acres, Westwood Park lacks a defined entrance

and is relatively hidden behind residences. While residents have stated they appreciate its large amount of greenspace, they would like to see updated and added amenities, such as drinking fountains and bathrooms. Some have expressed safety concerns due to its secluded location.

PHOTO: Westwood Park



Photo by Denver Environmental Health

Cuatro Vientos Park

Cuatro Vientos (Four Winds) Park is, located along Alameda Avenue on the northern boundary of the neighborhood. Built in 2014 on slightly more than an acre, Cuatro Vientos' amenities include a

playground, water play feature, turf field, and a shade structure. Residents like the new facility and have expressed the desire for more spaces like it in the neighborhood.

PHOTO: Cuatro Vientos (Four Winds) Park



Photo by Denver Parks & Recreation

An additional unnamed pocket park is located at Kentucky and Knox Court in the southeastern quadrant of Westwood. Located on less than a half-acre, park amenities include a playground and a picnic shelter. While it provides additional park space, the area has limited amenities.

In addition to park space, Xcel utility easement park areas are located in the southeastern quadrant of the Westwood neighborhood, along and just north of Tennessee Avenue. These areas offer greenspace and additional walking or biking connections through parts of the neighborhood, but contain few park amenities. The utility easements provide a corridor for a high-voltage electrical transmission line, so the view includes occasional steel electrical towers and overhead transmission lines and areas appear to be underutilized. In a HIA scoping meeting in the neighborhood, one person stated the overhead power lines make the greenspace feel unsafe (*Source: Westwood HIA Workshop, 3-26-15*).

The high-voltage electrical transmission lines continue west through the southwestern portion of the neighborhood, transecting the edge of Westwood Park. The utility easement parks do not offer a continuous connection across the southern edge of the neighborhood.

To the northwest is Weir Gulch Park, which includes an urban trail along with natural areas that wind along the waterway. In addition to providing a recreational amenity, the Gulch also serves as a neighborhood stormwater conveyance channel. The park and trail continue north out of the neighborhood, where the trail eventually connects to the South Platte River Trail.

Some of Weir Gulch Park is narrow, and adjacent to a three-sided concrete box culvert that is bordered by a chain link fence. The pedestrian trail is constrained between the chain link fence and adjoining residential yards. The fences and culvert are frequent targets of graffiti, and residents have expressed safety concerns due to gang activity and poor surveillance. Wayfinding can also be a challenge on some parts of the trail, as it meanders somewhat disconnectedly through the neighborhood. While the trail appears to be underutilized, it offers significant opportunity as a neighborhood greenspace, and provides an important connection to the regional trail system. Weir Gulch will undergo a study for possible improvements beginning in 2016 as part of the "Urban Waterways Restoration Project," a partnership with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Urban Drainage and the City and County of Denver.

PHOTO: Xcel easement through Westwood Park



Photo by Denver Environmental Health

PHOTO: Section of Weir Gulch Park Trail in Westwood



Photo by Denver Environmental Health

Although not in the neighborhood, Garfield Lake Park is immediately adjacent to Westwood's southern boundary across Mississippi Avenue in Mar Lee. Garfield Lake Park offers approximately 29 acres of parkland, and amenities include an outdoor pool, picnic tables, playground equipment, basketball courts, a futsal court, a ballfield, as well as walking paths and the lake, with the opportunity to fish. Residents have expressed their appreciation for its large amount of greenspace, scenic beauty and recreational opportunities. However, it is only conveniently accessible for residents in the southern part of the neighborhood.

Recreation Facilities

City Recreation Centers

Access to recreation centers is limited for Westwood residents, as there are no City recreation centers in the neighborhood. The nearest centers include Barnum Recreation (Rec) Center, which is located nearly a mile from the northern boundary, Athmar Rec Center, which is located more than a mile from the southeastern border, and Harvey Park Rec Center, which is about 1.5 miles from the southern boundary. Including distances within Westwood, most neighborhood residents need to travel at least two miles to the nearest City recreation facility. While transit options are available for some residents, this is not an option for all.

Of the three nearest recreation centers, all have gymnasiums, exercise equipment and programmed activities. Athmar Rec Center has a year-round indoor swimming pool, while the Barnum and Harvey Park Rec Centers offer an outdoor pool in the summer.

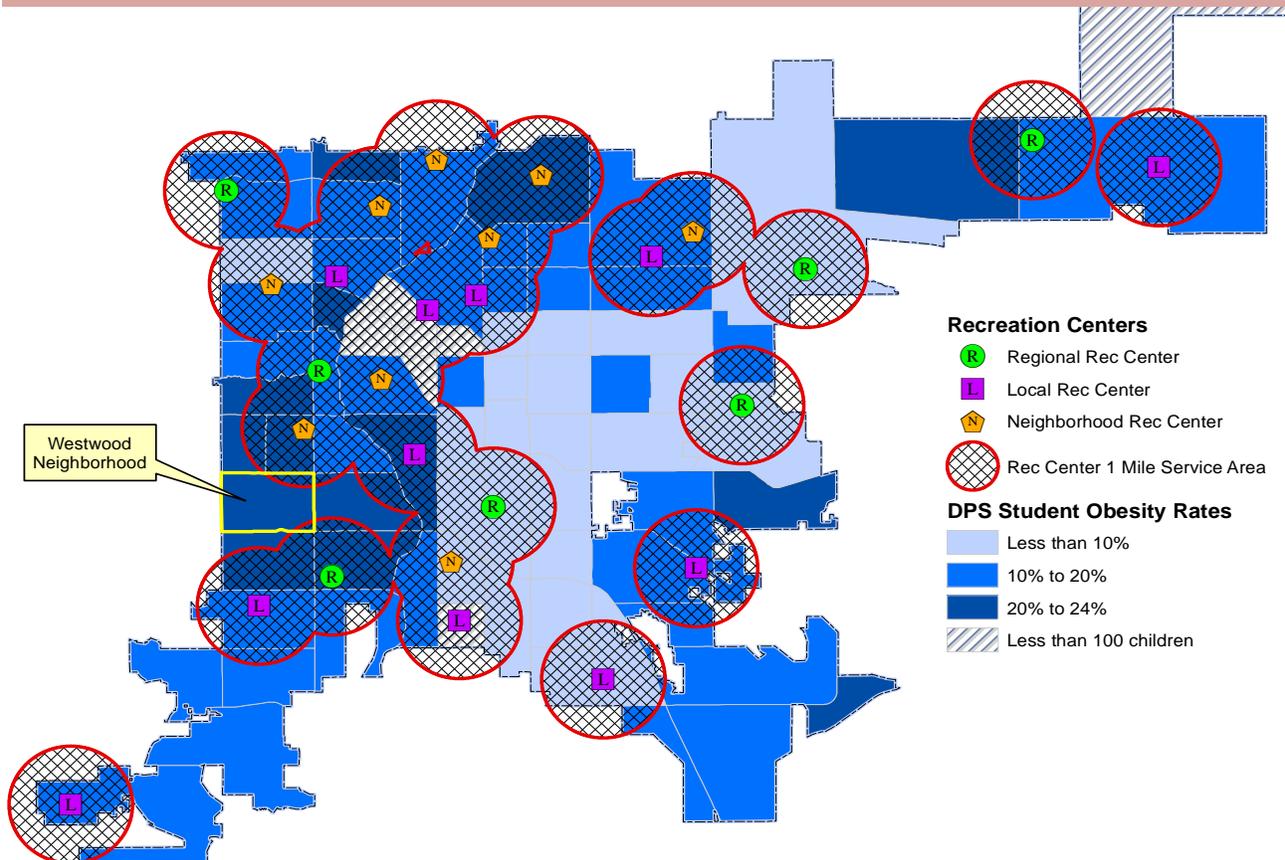
Residents have repeatedly expressed their desire for additional recreational facilities in

the neighborhood. The following are several comments received at community meetings for the neighborhood planning process (Source: *Westwood community workshop, 2/26/15*):

- “Not enough place(s) to work out”
- “Not enough parks and no recreation center”
- “No recreation center”
- “Not enough places for physical activity”
- “No places to exercise”
- “We want a pool to exercise in”

Similarly, parents have expressed the desire for active recreational programming for children, saying neighborhood youth require more supervised activities to keep them active, positively motivated, and away from drugs and gangs (Source: *Westwood HIA workshop, 3/26/15*). In September 2015, Westwood community leaders sent a formal letter to the Denver Mayor, the Mayor’s Cabinet and Denver City Council, requesting a recreation center be built in the neighborhood (Source: *Westwood Unidos, 2015*). While 22 percent of Westwood’s children and youth suffer from childhood obesity, one of the highest rates in the City, Westwood falls outside of the one-mile service area of City recreation centers.

FIGURE: Recreation Center Service Areas and Child Obesity by Neighborhood



Source: Denver Parks and Recreation 2016

While a recreation facility is clearly needed, the cost of facility user fees is an additional barrier for Westwood residents, as expressed in a community meeting (*Source: Westwood Unidos, 4/9/15*):

- "... [t]he pool at Athmar Recreation Center... is the closest, but it costs \$380/year and I can't afford that... My doctor told me to do water aerobics for my back pain but I can't afford it ... If we take our kids they can use the pool* but we can't afford to swim with them."

*Children and youth ages 5-18 can use pools and recreation centers for free with the "MyDenver" card

As noted, Westwood households earn only slightly more than half the median income of Denver households, and 25 to 53 percent of Westwood families with children under 18 live below the poverty line. Income is a very real barrier to accessing recreation for many Westwood families.

Non-City-owned Recreation Facilities

Within the neighborhood are several non-City operated recreation facilities. The SouthWest Improvement Council (SWIC), in the southern part of Westwood, operates a community center with a gymnasium that offers programmed activities, but has limited hours open to the public.

While the Denver Indian Center in the west central part of the neighborhood, has a gymnasium, most of their programming and outreach is focused on

Native Americans and does not draw widely from the immediate neighborhood.

The Owen Boys and Girls Club in the southeastern quadrant of the neighborhood has a multi-use sports field and offers a variety of youth activities associated with its Teen Center, which includes a technology lab, half-court gymnasium and recreation area. The programs appear to be highly valued and facilities are well-utilized but are limited to youth.

Denver Public School Sites

There are a number of playgrounds and ball fields associated with Denver Public Schools in the Westwood neighborhood. These include Knapp Elementary in the northwest, Munroe Elementary in the northeast, Castro Elementary in the southeast, as well as Pascual LeDoux Academy and the adjoining Kepner Middle School, also in the southeast.

These provide large areas of greenspace, outdoor basketball courts and ball fields, as well as play structures aimed at various ages of youth. Several residents stated they enjoy visiting the school facilities after school hours, but sometimes don't feel welcome and complained the school grounds close too early in the evening. Also, parents expressed safety concerns, saying older kids sometimes dominated the use of facilities after hours (e.g., the basketball courts) and were engaged in drug use in close proximity to the younger kids (*Westwood Unidos Safety Team meeting, 10/26/15*).

How Parks and Recreation Affect Health

The overall health benefits of utilizing nearby parks and recreation for physical activity are well known in research literature. Highlights include:

- Physical activity reduces obesity, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease, among other chronic health concerns (*Source: CDC 1996*).
- Physical activity in a park or recreation facility builds social cohesion, allows for the enjoyment of a natural landscape, and can benefit mental health as well (*Source: NRPA 2012*).
- Proximity to parks and more park area within a community is associated with higher levels of park use and physical activity among a variety of populations, particularly youth (*Source: ALR 2010*).
- Children who live near parks are more likely to walk to school or for leisure (*Source: AHA 2009*).
- Children with access to safe green spaces, park playgrounds, and recreational facilities are more likely to be physically active and have a healthy weight than those who lack these resources (*Source: APHA 2013*).



Photo by Denver Environmental Health

- When visiting parks, people tend to be more physically active on trails, at playgrounds and at sports facilities. Organized park programs and supervision may increase use of parks and playgrounds and may increase physical activity, particularly among youth (Source ALR, 2010).
- People of all ages and abilities enjoy higher levels of health and wellbeing when they have nature nearby in parks, gardens, greenways, naturalized schoolyards and playgrounds, and natural landscaping around homes and workplaces (Source: APHA 2013).

Shared use agreements (also called “joint use” or “community use” agreements) are a nationally recognized tool to increase opportunities for children and adults to be more physically active through access to safe, conveniently located and inviting places to exercise and play. These agreements involve two or more entities (usually a school and a city or private organization) making a formal agreement for shared use of indoor or outdoor space like gyms, athletic fields and playgrounds. Shared use agreements build upon

assets a community already has, since sharing existing space is cheaper and more efficient than duplicating the same facilities in a community. (Source: www.jointuse.org)

More than 150 school districts around the nation participate in shared use agreements. They can be formal or informal, but formal written agreements offer increased protections for both the facility and the community group using the facility. A formal agreement can also help prevent problems related to maintenance, operations, liability, or ownership.

How the Westwood Neighborhood Plan Can Improve Parks and Recreation

Recreational opportunities are particularly important for Westwood because of the large percentage of children in the population, and because its residents are at an increased risk of being overweight or obese.

By increasing access to existing parks and open spaces, improving safety and adding parks, open spaces and recreational facilities with more programming, Westwood residents can increase their physical activity and reduce obesity, heart disease, diabetes, and stress.

What’s Working in Westwood

- **Gulch Master Plan** – Completed in 2009 by the City and partners, as a visioning document for the City’s Gulch park system, including enhancements to drainage, connectivity, habitat and water quality, as well as recreational opportunities.
- **2016 Weir Gulch Study** – In conjunction with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the City is currently undertaking a study of Weir Gulch to consider ecosystem restoration, with likely improvements to the recreational experience for trail users in the Westwood neighborhood.
- **Westwood Park Conceptual Plan** – With community partners, the City has undertaken a planning effort for the replacement of the existing playground and walks, as well as the addition of new fitness equipment, expected in 2016.
- **New Pocket Park** – The City recently obtained a small parcel of land to develop into a pocket park at the corner of Kentucky Avenue and Irving Street in 2016.
- **La Casita Community Center** – In March 2016, Westwood Unidos and Healthy Places Westwood opened a new learning and fitness center along Morrison Road in the center of the neighborhood that will offer programmed activities.

Recommendations to Improve Parks and Recreation

Westwood Neighborhood Plan

Other City Plans/Policies/Projects

Lead Agencies

Lead Agencies

<p>B.1 Increase number and acreage of parks, pocket parks, plazas and open space corridors through available means such as property acquisition, public or private easements, shared use agreements, etc.</p>	<p>DPR/ City Council/ OED/ Xcel</p>	<p>B.1.a Pursue shared use agreements with interested partners including Denver Public Schools to expand community recreational access to open space and other facilities.</p>	<p>DEH/ DPR/ DPS/ NGOs</p>
<p>B.2 Increase and improve connectivity between parks and open space corridors and to key destinations through available means such as property acquisition, public or private easements, rights-of-way, etc.</p>	<p>DPR</p>	<p>B.2.a Explore revisions to the City's current policy of charging a fee for all outdoor recreational classes and clinics offered by groups or individuals in Denver parks. Consider fee waivers for those providers serving neighborhoods with high health disparities.</p>	<p>DPR/ DEH/ City Council</p>
<p>B.3 Improve access and visibility to parks and open space corridors through available means such as property acquisition, public or private easements, shared use agreements, wayfinding signage, etc. Work with DPR and Xcel to bury the Xcel power lines in the utility easement to create a true open space amenity</p>	<p>DPR/ CPD/ City Council/ NGOs/ Xcel</p>	<p>B.3.a Explore reduced-cost admission to recreation centers and pools for parents that accompany children who currently have free access to these facilities.</p>	<p>City Council/ DPR/ Mayor's Office</p>
<p>B.4 Improve amenities in parks and open space corridors – such as restrooms, water fountains, lighting, fitness equipment, shade, benches, and pedestrian and bike facilities – to create safe and attractive multigenerational gathering areas.</p>	<p>DPR/ NGOs</p>	<p>B.4.a Analyze the City's current mobile vending policies. Explore the creation of more opportunities for mobile food vending to promote neighborhood culture and authenticity.</p>	<p>City Council/ DPR/ Ex & Lic/ DEH</p>
<p>B.5 Identify opportunities to enhance or redevelop existing recreation or community space – through available means such as shared use agreements or other partnerships – and enhance recreation programming to meet needs for all ages.</p>	<p>DPR/ OED/ DEH/ City Council</p>	<p>B.5.a Increase recreational programming for all ages and interests, particularly children and youth, at schools, community centers and recreation centers.</p>	<p>DPW/ NGOs</p>
<p>B.6 Identify opportunities to build a new recreation center in Westwood</p>	<p>DPR/ OED/ City Council</p>		

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Community Safety

Summary of Key Findings

Community safety concerns in Westwood include speeding traffic that often results in pedestrian and cyclist injuries and fatalities; loose dogs; safety concerns due to lighting and other physical conditions; and many alcohol outlets contributing to drunk driving.

How the Westwood Neighborhood Plan Can Improve Community Safety

Improvements in the physical environment such as street design to increase pedestrian and cyclist safety, improved lighting, more visibility of public spaces, effective outreach regarding animal regulations, and appropriate location of alcohol and marijuana outlets can help improve community safety.

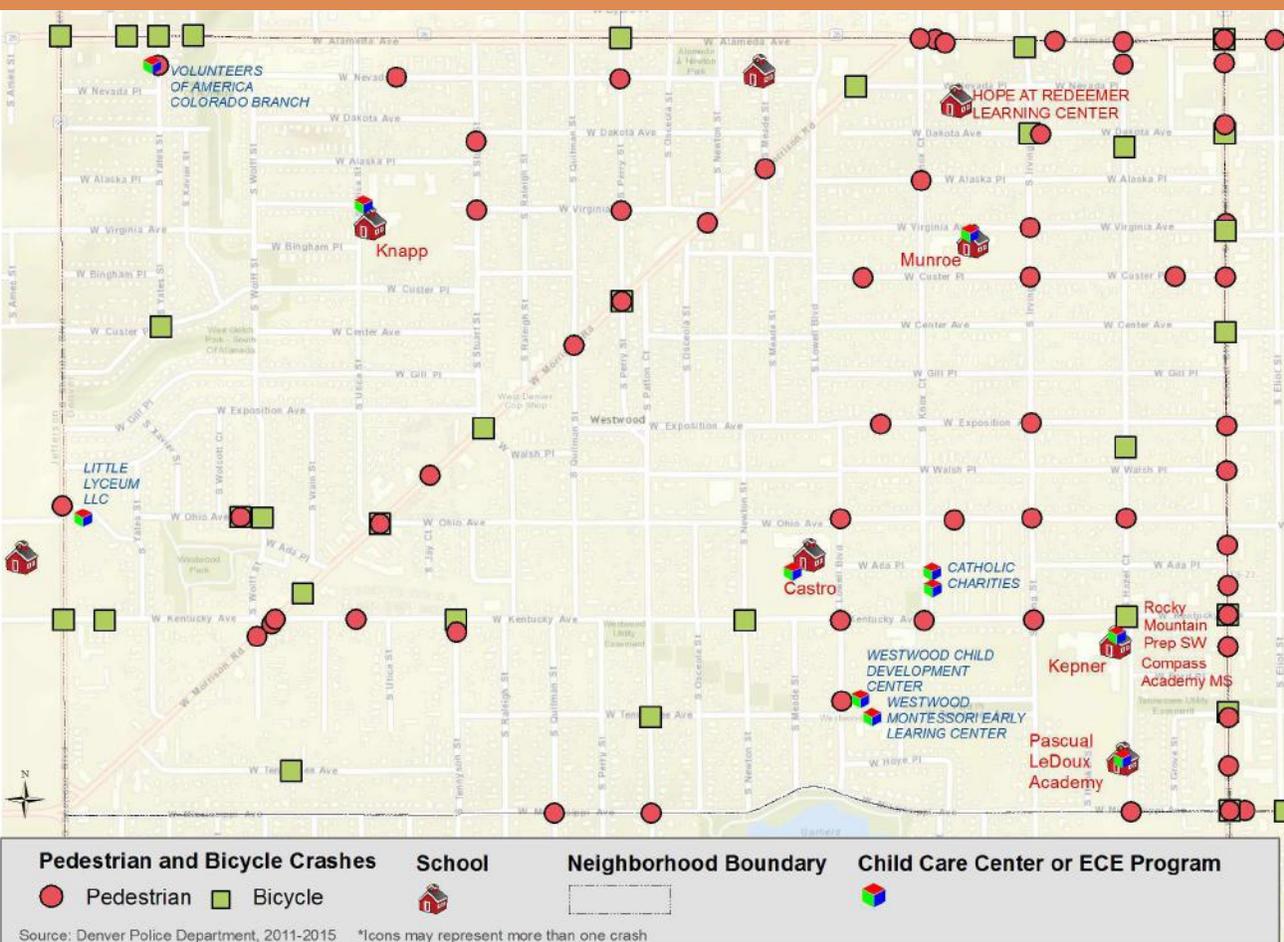
Community Safety in Westwood Today

Pedestrian Safety and Injury Crashes

As discussed in "Safe Multimodal Transportation," Westwood community members report traffic safety as a key concern, given the significant number of fatal or injury-causing accidents that have occurred as a result of collisions with pedestrians. In fact, Federal and Sheridan Boulevards are two of the deadliest streets in Denver (Source: *Streetsblog Denver* 11-13-15).

Residents also expressed concerns about high speeds and pedestrian safety on Morrison Road, and the fact that it runs adjacent to a number of residential properties and neighborhood retail stores. There have been a number of crashes in Westwood over the past five years; the vast majority resulting some type of injury to the pedestrian or bicyclist.(see map below).

FIGURE: Crashes Involving Pedestrians and/or Bicycles (2011-2015)



Loose Dogs

While it may not be immediately evident, dogs running at large can present a significant safety concern. Westwood has an unusually high incidence of dogs running loose, which creates a safety hazard for pedestrians, particularly children. Denver Animal Protection reports Westwood had the highest number of citations issued for all dog violations of any neighborhood in the City, in 2013.

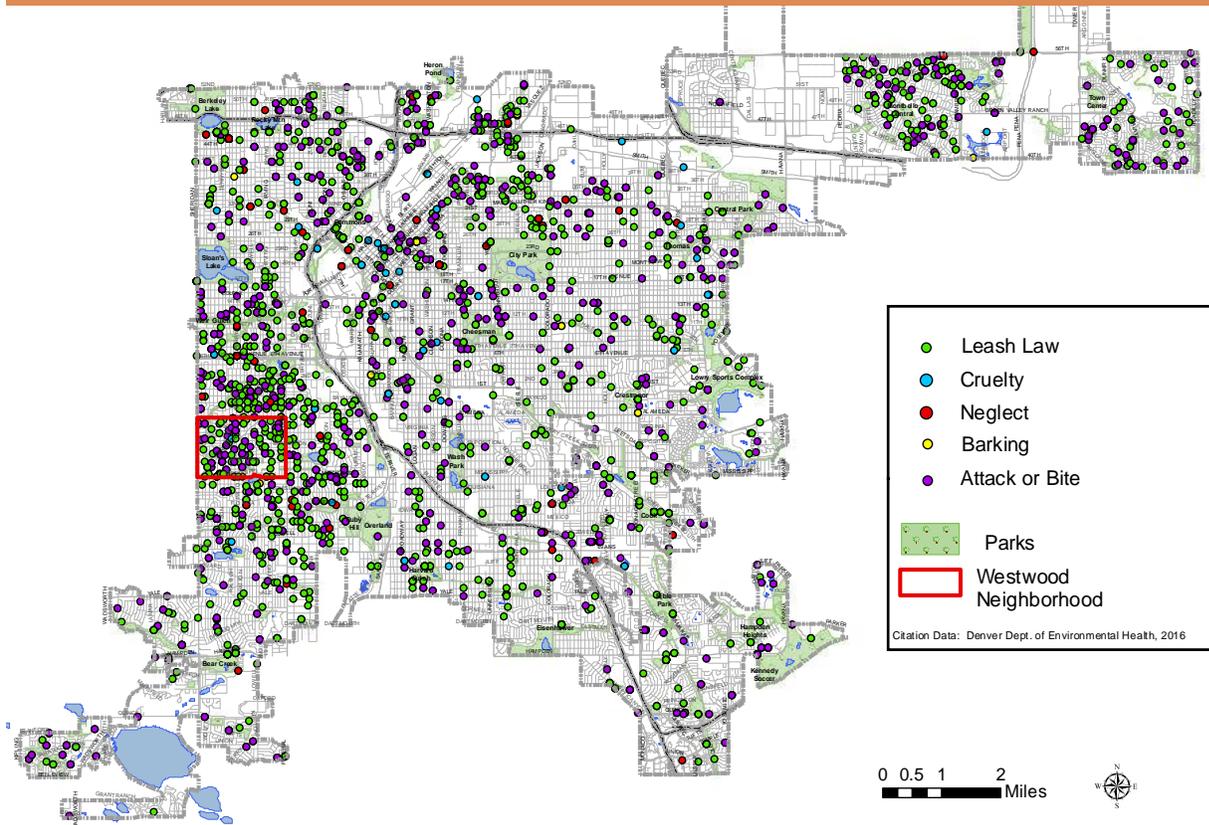
Animal citations range from violation of leash and vaccination laws, to barking, bites and attacks. In

community meetings, residents have expressed the following concerns:

- “People don’t want to walk on the sidewalks because there are so many scary barking dogs (in yards) right next to the sidewalks”
- “Loose dogs scare people away...you’re forced to take other walking routes because of loose dogs”
- “Animal control laws need to be enforced before people get bitten.”

(Source: Westwood HIA Workshop, 3-26-15).

FIGURE: Denver Animal Citations in 2014-2015



Denver Animal Protection officers cite a number of factors in Westwood that may explain the high citation rates, including:

- Many dog owners in a high-density neighborhood
- Low spay/neuter rates reinforced by cultural norms against spaying and neutering before dogs have at least one litter
- Few veterinary clinics, with no low cost vaccination or spay/neuter services
- Low incomes restrict spending on animal care
- Language barrier due to few Spanish-speaking officers in a primarily Spanish-speaking community.

PHOTOS: Dogs in Westwood



Neighborhood Safety

Westwood residents expressed concerns about neighborhood safety due to poor lighting and visibility, which creates opportunities for illicit activities. For example, Westwood Park is the largest park in the neighborhood, yet many parents do not take their children there because of safety concerns about gang activity and drug use in the park. Weir Gulch was also identified as a hangout for gangs, along with Kepner Middle School, which has been reported as an area where youth are recruited for membership.

Overall, residents cite a need for better outdoor lighting, both in streetlight poles and house lights. Older street lights may have old-technology bulbs that cast dim or uneven lighting, increasing the likelihood of criminal activity. Lack of adequate lighting also reduces the opportunity to walk outdoors at night; residents say:

- Feeling unsafe means you don't get out and walk, even when you want to."
- It's unsafe to walk at night because of poor street lighting.

(Source: HIA workshop, 3-26-15).

PHOTOS: Inadequate lighting causes Westwood residents to feel unsafe

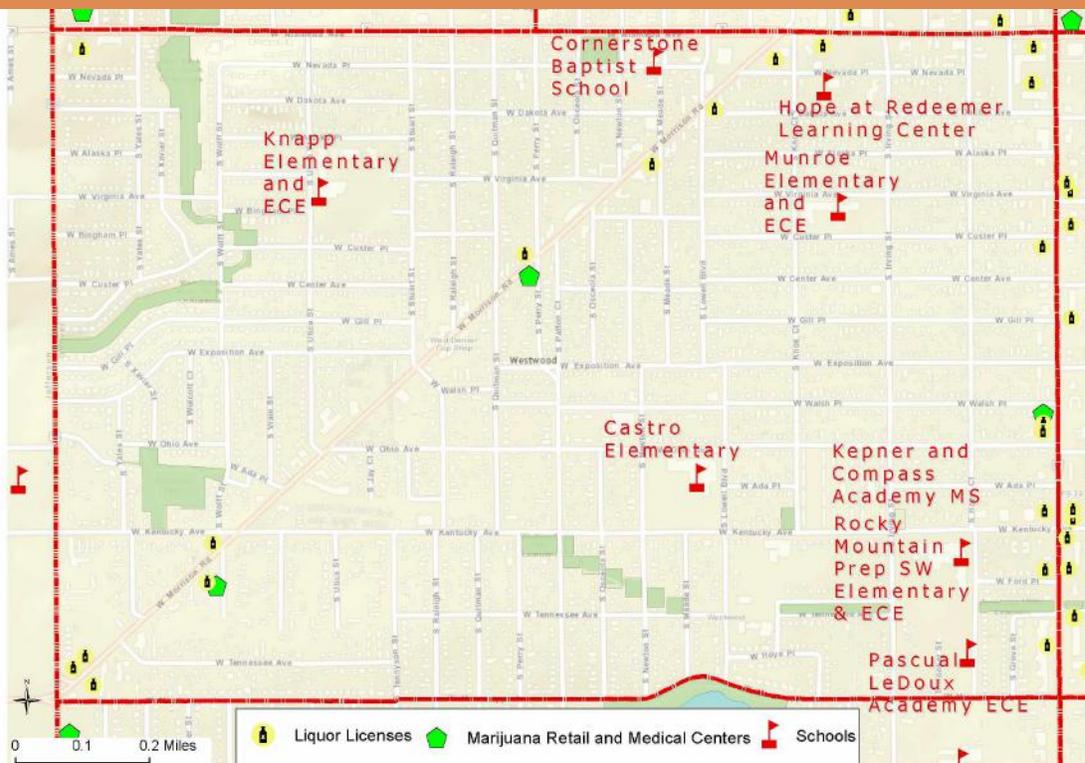


Photos by Denver Community Planning & Development

Alcohol and Marijuana Outlets

Westwood has a number of outlets to obtain alcohol, including liquor stores, bars, and dance clubs along Morrison Road and Federal Boulevard. There are also several retail marijuana dispensaries in the same general vicinity.

FIGURE: Liquor and marijuana licenses with schools and early childcare education (ECE) in Westwood



DPD reports that DUIs occur after the bars close, as well as fights. One resident said, "You know what happened over the weekend when you are on Morrison Road. On Monday morning you see all the busted planters and curbs that were hit by drunk drivers." (Source: Westwood HIA meeting, 3-26-15).

Many parents feel that there are too many marijuana outlets located in close proximity to schools, particularly near Kepner Middle School. Residents expressed the following concerns:

- "Kepner school kids are accessing marijuana."
- "Marijuana is near the schools and walking routes to school; kids get it from other kids."

Alcohol Licensing

New liquor license applications in Westwood continue to come in for liquor stores, bars and restaurants. The City's liquor licensing regulations requires each applicant to present evidence at a public hearing of a 'need and desire' for the license to be issued.

Interested parties such as neighborhood organizations and residents may testify at the hearing to oppose the license, but it is often difficult to match the legal and financial resources of the applicant. Also, hearings are often scheduled during working hours, making it difficult for community members to attend. Residents often feel that the current process puts them at a disadvantage.

How Community Safety Affects Health

Traffic Crashes Involving Pedestrians and Cyclists

There have been many research studies conducted on the relationship between traffic crashes and injuries to pedestrians and cyclists. Traffic speed, volume and road design are key factors that affect the frequency and severity of injuries. A review of 16 research studies found 11 percent fewer traffic injuries in areas that included traffic calming measures such as narrow travel lanes, medians, sidewalks and street trees (Source: Bunn 2003).

Slower vehicle speeds result in fewer pedestrian injuries. With vehicle speeds below 20 mph the probability of serious or fatal injury is less than 20% of that at higher speeds; with speeds above 35 mph, most injuries are fatal or incapacitating (Source: Leaf 1999).

Bike lanes keep bicyclists safer. More than 20 studies found the risk of injuries to cyclists was lowest on roads with clearly designated bike features. Street lighting and paved surfaces also improve cyclist safety (Source: Conor 2009).

PHOTO: A marijuana dispensary in Westwood



Photo by Denver Environmental Health

Marijuana Licensing

New license applications for medical or retail marijuana dispensaries require a public hearing as well, but prior to Jan. 1, 2016, did not require a demonstration of community 'need and desire'. This and other gaps in the regulatory framework during the early years of legalized marijuana in Denver resulted in dispensaries located near schools and child care centers, particularly near Kepner Middle School and Rocky Mountain Prep SW Elementary School.

Since 2012, a number of regulatory changes have been adopted by the Denver City Council to further protect communities from potential negative impacts of the marijuana industry. Some notable changes include a cap on the total number of licenses issued; a one thousand foot minimum distance from schools, child care centers and residential zones (measured in a straight line); a demonstration of community 'need and desire'; and requirement of a community engagement plan. However, many neighborhoods including Westwood still struggle with marijuana businesses in locations that conflict with community values for health and safety.

PHOTO: Bike/vehicle activity on Morrison Road



Photo by Denver Environmental Health

Loose Dogs

Loose dogs pose dangers to pedestrians and cyclists, particularly children, and are reported more often in lower-income or high minority neighborhoods. One study found that lower-income respondents were more likely to report loose dogs as a barrier to outdoor activity, than those with higher-incomes (39 percent as compared to 28 percent) (Source: ALR 2011).

PHOTO: Graffiti in Denver



Photo by Denver Community Planning & Development

Real and Perceived Safety Concerns

Real and perceived crime in a community all contribute to a concerns about a lack of safety. Other factors that can contribute to these fears include physical signs of disorder, such as abandoned buildings, poor lighting, graffiti, litter, and loitering. These can also signal a sense of social disorder, with fewer 'eyes on the street'. (Source: Lorenc 2012). Physical neighborhood design that encourages interaction, 'eyes on the street', and a sense of community has been shown not only to reduce crime, but also to create a sense of community safety and security (Source: Calhoun, 2002).

How people perceive their environment influences their decision to walk in the neighborhood, thereby impacting their level of physical activity. Feeling safe, seeing an appealing aesthetic environment, and having a connected street layout with close destinations, are all necessary to increase walking (Source: Van Dyck 2013).

Street lighting plays an important role in crime prevention. Improved street lighting is thought to affect crime by increasing surveillance, thus

detering potential offenders, and by signifying community investment and pride in an area. In street lighting studies done in 13 different communities in the United Kingdom and United States, there was a 21 percent drop in crime in communities that improved street lighting compared to similar areas that did not. (Source: Welsh 2008). DPD reports that crime decreased in the Highland and Sun Valley neighborhoods after old technology lightbulbs were replaced with new brighter LED lighting in street light poles under a 2014 pilot program (Source: HIA Workshop, 3-26-15).

Alcohol and Marijuana

A growing international body of public health research shows that even relatively small increases in the availability of alcohol generally leads to increases in alcohol consumption and an increase in alcohol-related problems. One large-scale study found a strong correlation between densities of restaurants, liquor stores, and mini-markets and areas with high numbers of injury-causing vehicle crashes. Other studies show that alcohol outlet density has a significant correlation to rates of violent crime.(Source: Ashe, 2003).

This association has led the World Health Organization to conclude that reducing the physical availability of alcohol through limitations on the number and placement of outlets will result in reductions in alcohol-related problems.

Land use regulations such as minimum distance requirements are a public health tool that has been successfully used to lessen the negative effects of alcohol retail outlets in neighborhoods (Source: Ashe, 2003).

Little research exists regarding the impacts of retail marijuana outlet locations on community health, as the retail recreational marijuana industry is newly legal in Colorado. Alcohol outlet research findings may be useful in considering marijuana outlet regulations. Additional research is needed as more states approve retail marijuana sales and communities must grapple with appropriate locations and densities of sales outlets that preserve property rights yet protect public health.

How the Neighborhood Plan Can Improve Community Safety

Neighborhood planning plays a key role in improving community safety.

For example, by implementing traffic safety measures, including reducing speeds, improving road design and engineering changes, and by conducting traffic education and enforcement in intersections where accidents often occur, traffic injuries can be reduced.

Increasing enforcement and education about animal regulations can increase residents' physical safety by reducing the conflicts resulting from loose dogs. Offering low cost spay/neuter services can also help to reduce the number of loose dogs. Fewer loose dogs will also allow and encourage more physical activity such as walking for exercise and students walking to school.

Increases in the number and quality of street lighting will likely lead to reduced crime and perception of crime, and increase feelings of community safety as well as physical activity.

The designation of appropriate locations for future alcohol and marijuana outlets in the Neighborhood Plan, through zoning with use restrictions, can limit the concentration of such businesses and may also help to reduce youth access to these substances.

The creation of safe, activated places such as plazas or downtown pedestrian areas can build community cohesion, civic pride and add more 'eyes on the street'. The Westwood Neighborhood Plan discusses this in detail and makes recommendations for such amenities.



Photo by Denver Parks & Recreation

Recommendations to Improve Community Safety

Westwood Neighborhood Plan

Other City Plans/Policies/Projects

	Agencies		Agencies
<p>C.1 Install or upgrade street and pedestrian lighting in key locations including streets, alleyways, and parks to improve safety. Explore options with the City and Xcel to upgrade existing street lighting throughout Westwood, similar to pilot programs in other Denver neighborhoods.</p>	<p>DPW/ DPD/ NGOs/ Xcel</p>		
<p>C.2 Designate appropriate land use areas for alcohol and marijuana outlets in the <i>Westwood Neighborhood Plan</i> that protect community health and safety, particularly near schools.</p>	<p>CPD</p>	<p>C.2.a Analyze the City’s zoning regulations and retail licensing policies regarding alcohol and marijuana outlets to protect community health and safety, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimum distance requirements from sensitive uses such as schools; • Define minimum distance measurement as radius vs. legal walking • Maximum density of alcohol and marijuana outlets; • Add ‘needs and desires’ criteria for new and renewed marijuana licenses similar to liquor licenses. 	<p>City Council/ Ex & Lic/ CPD</p>
		<p>C.3.a Increase enforcement of drunk driving and speeding laws along Westwood’s main corridors including Morrison Road, Federal Boulevard, Alameda Avenue, and Kentucky Avenue.</p>	<p>DPD</p>
		<p>C.4.a Increase cultural outreach resources for City staff, including Spanish and multi-lingual police and animal protection officers, to prevent crime, promote safety and restore community trust. Provide on-call language interpretation services for use by all City departments.</p>	<p>DEH/ DPD/ City Council/ Mayor’s Office/ HRCF</p>
		<p>C.5.a Adequately fund City programs that promote community and youth safety including anti-graffiti and mural arts programs.</p>	<p>City Council/ DPD</p>

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Access to Essential Resources

Summary of Key Findings

“Essential resources” are those goods and services that people need to sustain daily life, including adequate housing, healthy foods, health care, commercial and retail services, and municipal services such as trash collection, emergency response and flood control.

Westwood residents face physical, economic and language barriers to accessing many of these services.

How the Westwood Neighborhood Plan Can Improve Access to Essential Resources

Future land uses should accommodate a variety of housing types and sizes, commercial uses including healthy food outlets, and adequate multimodal connections to essential services such as health care facilities.

Culturally appropriate education and outreach can help to better connect Westwood residents with vital resources.

Access to Essential Resources in Westwood Today

Housing

Much of the housing stock in Westwood was constructed in the 1940s before the community was annexed into the City & County of Denver. Most were not designed to meet current building code standards, are not energy efficient and are in need of repair. Westwood has one remaining mobile home park; two other mobile home parks are being redeveloped into new affordable multifamily homes.

Westwood is more densely populated, with an average of 18 people per acre vs. about 10 people per acre in the surrounding areas, and 6 people

per acre in Denver overall. Lower than average incomes, larger family sizes, and sharp increases in average rents mean that many Westwood homes have more extended family or households living in them. This echoes a dramatic nationwide increase in multigenerational households since the Great Recession in 2008. In fact, approximately one in six Americans (51 million people) now resides in a multigenerational household, a 10 percent jump since the start of the recession (*Source: Generations United 2011*). Most of the new affordable units are one or two bedrooms and cannot accommodate larger families.

FIGURE: Key Economic and Housing Indicators

	<i>Westwood</i>	<i>Denver</i>
Median household income ¹	\$26,900 - 33,900	\$51,800
% families with children in poverty ²	25% - 53%	22%
% of population 18 and younger ³	39%	21%
Average household size ⁴	3.5 - 3.6	2.3
Housing overcrowding ⁵	18%	3%
Population Density per Acre ⁶	18 people/acre	6 people/acre

1 Form DP03

2 Form S1702

3 Form S0101

4 Form S1101

5 Table B25014. Of all occupied living units, % of living units with more than 1 occupant per room. Westwood: 804/4581 = 17.80%. Denver: 8,993/266,069 = 3.38%

6 Denver=154.9 sqmi * 640 ac/sqmi = 99,136 ac. Westwood=1.496 sqmi * 640ac/sqmi = 957.44 ac.

Source: US Census, 2010-2014 American Community Survey 5-year estimates.

A lack of affordable housing for seniors adds to this issue, as there is a need for homes that are physically designed for ‘aging in place’. Several new affordable housing apartment communities are planned or under construction in Westwood, but the demand may exceed the supply.

Over the next decade, Denver’s 75 and older population

will increase by 40 percent. Colorado’s 65 and older population is the third-fastest growing in the nation (*Source: DRCOG*). Nationally, most seniors indicate that they want to stay in their communities as they age.

These factors mean that residents of all ages, family sizes and income levels will be challenged to find future housing in Westwood that meets their needs.

Overcrowded housing can also lead to excess trash. A number of residents reported that the one trash bin and up to two recycling carts the city provides to each residence is not adequate to contain trash from two or more families. Excessive trash can attract rodents, blow through the neighborhood, and create a hazardous environment for pedestrians to navigate. Excessive trash also undercuts the 'alleyway beautification' initiative by Westwood Unidos and Healthy Places.

Healthy Food

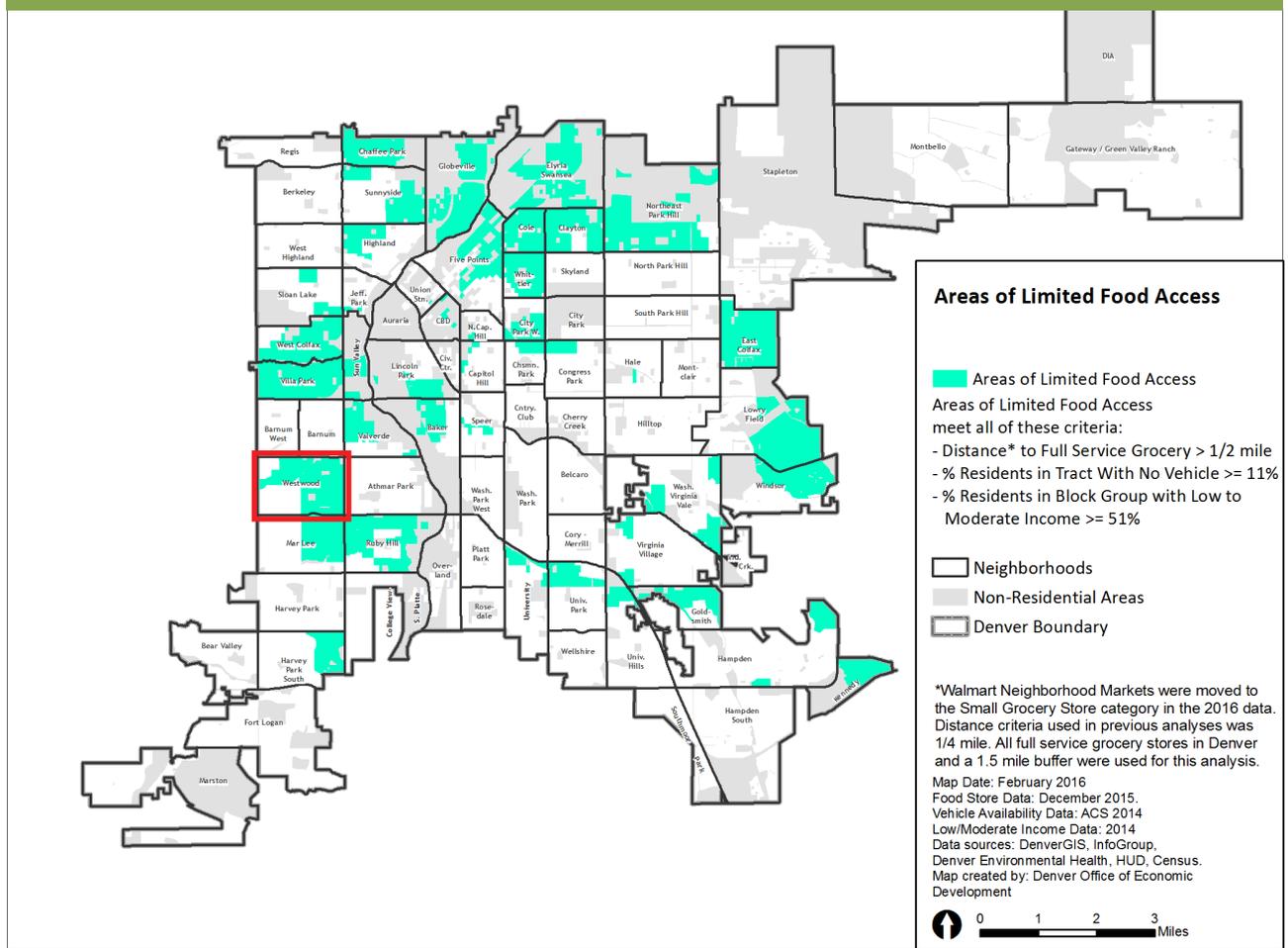
The lack of access to healthy food is a key challenge in Westwood. There is no full-service grocery store within the neighborhood to serve almost 17 thousand residents. Currently, residents need to travel more than a mile outside of the neighborhood to find affordable, nutritious and culturally-desired foods. While there is one Asian foods supermarket in the northeast corner of the neighborhood, the majority of Westwood is underserved for healthy

affordable food. With many residents having low incomes and limited access to a vehicle, Westwood becomes an area of high food insecurity (Figure 2 below).

While Westwood has a number of convenience stores, these are not typically sources of healthy food. Some of these are located near schools. To help increase the availability of healthy foods, Denver's *Healthy Corner Store Initiative* is working with four Westwood convenience stores to stock and market some produce and whole grain items.

One unique and promising source of healthy food in Westwood is Re:Vision, a nonprofit dedicated to bringing healthy food and nutrition awareness to low income communities. Re:Vision is network of resident leaders who are currently helping more than 300 families grow food in their backyards or on community farms. Re:Vision will open the Westwood Food Cooperative, a full service grocery store owned by members, on Morrison Road in the near future.

FIGURE: Denver Areas of High Food Insecurity, 2015



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PHOTO: Westwood Food Co-op



Photo by Denver Environmental Health

Access* to Health Care Services

Accessing health care services is a challenge for residents in Westwood, as the Denver Health Westwood Family Health Center is the only clinic in the neighborhood that offers a range of family medicine services and a pharmacy. The larger Westside Community Health Center is over a mile north of Westwood on Federal Boulevard, and offers comprehensive primary care for all ages, as well as dental services. However, residents say that both clinics are at capacity and there are often long wait times to see a doctor. Neither clinic offers behavioral health care, an urgent need according to residents.

A number of Westwood residents reported that they travel approximately six miles north to Clinica Tepeyac, a clinic that specializes in serving Spanish-only speakers, those without insurance, and non-U.S. citizens. Clients say they feel more culturally

comfortable at Clinica, due to the Spanish speaking staff and an 'integrated care' model where caregivers spend more time with each patient than typical providers. Clinica also offers mental and behavioral health care.

Pharmacies are in short supply in the neighborhood as well. Residents report that they often have to arrange transportation to pharmacies to get prescriptions filled.

Denver Health opened a new full-service Southwest Family Health Center & Urgent Care Center in Spring 2016, just south of Westwood on Federal and Louisiana. This center also offers behavioral health, dental health, and pharmacy services. It will be critical to ensure that residents have transportation – via transit, vehicle, walking and biking – to access this much needed health care clinic.

*refers to physical access, not health insurance coverage

PHOTO: Westwood Family Health Center



Photo by Denver Environmental Health

Other City Services

To help connect residents with city services more effectively, Denver has a 311 Contact Center to allow residents to get information, report problems, such as trash pickup, potholes, graffiti removal, street lights out, animal protection, and property information, among others. The 311 Contact Center can be accessed by phone, email or online. The 311 telephone service offers a series of automated prompts in English to reach a live operator. If a resident doesn't speak English, they can advise the operator (in their desired language) and an interpreter will be summoned to speak with the caller.

Westwood residents say they rarely use 311, yet at community meetings had a number of City service-related problems, indicating that there may be a barrier to using 311. Residents often do not know that language interpretation is available upon request, since the automated prompts are in English. Another barrier noted by residents in community meetings is concern about the privacy of their

contact information and how it may be used or shared, such as with the federal government.

311 reports that of the 420 thousand phone calls they received in 2014, less than 10 percent of residents requested a language other than English. However, calls from non-English speaking residents might be much higher if barriers were removed. The overwhelming majority of language requests are Spanish (98 percent).

According to 311, callers may remain anonymous; however contact information is useful when providing follow-up or keeping a resident informed of the progress of certain requests. There are a few instances where the contact information is required, such as when a state agency is involved in resolving issues like pollution control. 311 does not share the caller's information with any outside agency. Raising awareness about the availability of language interpretation and confidentiality could increase 311 by Westwood residents, improving their access to City services to improve safety and health.

Denver 311 Contact Center is available to request City services or report a problem:

- *By phone: 311 or 720-913-1311*
- *Online: www.denvergov.org/pocketgov*
- *Email: 311@denvergov.org*
- *Over 100 languages available (ask operator for interpretation in your language)*
- *Can report anonymously by phone or online*
- *Name, address, phone will remain confidential in most cases*

How Access to Essential Resources Affects Health

Housing

Older housing stock can present a number of challenges when it comes to maintenance and even public health. Older homes are more likely to have lead-based paint and asthma triggers such as mold, poor insulation or venting, bugs or water damage. Children in particular are susceptible to these hazards.

Overcrowded housing is a product of economic necessity. Overcrowding is a major health challenge because it impacts so many aspects of life, from getting enough sleep to food storage. Adequate housing can improve mental health, prevent spread of infectious disease, and improve student concentration and school performance (*Source: Healthy Housing 2013*).

Having affordable housing is also important, as it frees up family resources for other critical needs, such as healthy food and health care. Reducing energy costs also frees up resources. Affordable housing also reduces the need for frequent moves, improves school attendance, reduces stress, and improves overall neighborhood stability (*Source: Maqbool 2015*).

Healthy Food

'Healthy food access' is having sufficient resources, both economic and physical, to obtain appropriate foods for a nutritious diet (*Source: WHO*). Improving access to healthy food has been recognized as necessary to reduce obesity and improve health. Healthy eating is associated with lower risk for Type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease,

certain cancers, and obesity. Studies have found that the more grocery stores a community has per-capita is associated with lower chronic disease rates, whereas a higher number of convenience stores is related to higher obesity rates among students (Source: Bell, 2013).

Health Care Services

Distance and transportation factors have an influence on routine and chronic health care. Those who cannot drive must rely on public transportation or someone else in the household for a ride; therefore, those who live alone are less likely to obtain their needed health care. Distance and access to transportation also impacts the

likelihood of missed or delayed appointments, and the overall difficulty of making the trip (Source: Mattson, 2010).

Pharmacies

Like 'food deserts', there are also 'pharmacy deserts' in many neighborhoods with significant minority racial and ethnic populations. The number of pharmacies is disproportionately lower in predominantly minority communities than in predominantly white or mixed communities. Since communities of color also experience higher instances of chronic diseases, an inability to obtain prescriptions can limit efforts to manage chronic diseases (Source: Qato 2014).

PHOTO: Westwood backyard garden



Photo by Denver Environmental Health

How the Neighborhood Plans Can Improve Access to Essential Resources

The Westwood Neighborhood Plan can improve health by designating adequate land use areas for housing that allows a range of housing types and sizes, including single family homes with multiple bedrooms and yards for growing food, as well as options to add accessory dwelling units or tandem houses.

Land uses should also include areas or sites that can

accommodate a full service grocery store or smaller food outlets including markets, farmers markets, and urban farms and community gardens.

Multimodal transportation connections should be included in the Plan to safely and conveniently connect residents to essential resources such as grocery stores, health care centers and pharmacies.

Recommendations to Improve Access to Essential Resources

Westwood Neighborhood Plan

Other City Plans/Policies/Projects

	Lead Agencies		Lead Agencies
D.1 Recommend land use designations for a diversity of housing types to accommodate all ages, households and incomes, including single-family, multi-family, accessory dwelling units, or other.	CPD		
D.2 Ensure development and reinvestment in an adequate housing supply, including affordability, quality and energy efficiency, with City programs and other resources.	OED/ DEH		
D.3 Recommend land use designations to support a range of essential services including healthy food outlets, health care clinics and other critical services. Ensure multimodal connectivity to these destinations.	CPD/ DPW	D.3.a Support City and partner programs to increase access to healthy, affordable, culturally desired food, such as Re:Vision food co-op, Denver Healthy Corner Store Initiative and other economic initiatives.	OED/ DEH/ NGOs
D.4 Expand healthy food options to include culturally desired foods, food production and processing through grocery stores, farmers markets, corner stores, community gardens, mobile vending, food trucks and carts, etc.	OED/ NGOs/ DEH		
		D.5.a Explore ways to reduce overflowing trash, such as provision of additional waste carts upon request to a single address, offering composting, and culturally appropriate education and outreach about recycling.	DPW/ NGOs
		D.6.a Expand language interpretation and translation services for all City departments to increase citizen access.	311/ City Council

Access to Essential Resources

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Recommendations

A. Safe Multimodal Transportation: <u>Neighborhood Plan</u>	Agencies	Safe Multimodal Transportation: Other City Plans/Policies/Projects	Agencies
<p>A.1 Fund and build multimodal infrastructure as prioritized in the Westwood Neighborhood Plan including sidewalks, bike infrastructure, intersection improvements and bus stop amenities to improve safety and connectivity to key local and regional destinations. Coordinate with BuCu West's <i>Morrison Road 2016 Streetscape Improvement Plan</i> in upcoming City projects.</p>	DPW/ CPD	<p>A.1.a Complete installation of safety improvements per the <i>2015-16 Morrison Road Project</i> and other City plans including bump-outs, medians and crosswalks to reduce vehicle speeds and pedestrian injuries.</p> <p>A.1.b Take steps to reduce pedestrian and cyclist injuries and fatalities along Federal Boulevard, Alameda Avenue, Morrison Road and Kentucky Avenue by increasing enforcement, improving street design, and installing traffic calming devices. Monitor progress in reducing injuries and fatalities to achieve the goals of <i>Vision Zero Denver</i>.</p>	DPW DPD/ DPW/ CDOT
<p>A.2 Prioritize areas around schools for infrastructure improvements to create <i>Safe Routes to School</i>. DEH will work with Public Works to provide walk-audit data for priority locations for sidewalks, crosswalks, pedestrian signs, flashing beacons, etc.</p>	DPW/ DEH	<p>A.2.a Secure additional funding for <i>Safe Routes to School</i> education and outreach program to increase safety and physical activity among Westwood children and youth.</p>	DEH/ Mayor's Office/ City Council
<p>A.3 Facilitate the development of alternate transportation options in the neighborhood including car-share, bicycle-share, discounted transit passes.</p>	DPW/ DEH/ OoS		
<p>A.4 Work with transit partners to improve transit connections to key destinations including light rail stations as identified in the <i>Westwood Neighborhood Plan</i> "Transformative Projects".</p>	CPD/ RTD		
<p>A.5 Prioritize 'green alleyway' construction for pedestrian and bicycle connectivity, improved storm drainage, water quality, recreation and placemaking per the <i>Westwood Neighborhood Plan</i>.</p>	DPW/ DEH/ NGOS	<p>A.5.a Complete paving and lighting of City-owned alleys and private alleys (with owner permission) through the City alleyway improvement program.</p>	DPW/ CITY Council/ Xcel
		<p>A.6.a Engage Westwood community members and other interested stakeholders in the <i>2016 Federal Boulevard Corridor Study</i> to help identify issues of concern and opportunities to improve pedestrian safety and reduce injury crashes.</p>	DPW/ NGOs
		<p>A.7.a Integrate Westwood HIA recommendations in 2016 Citywide planning initiatives including <i>Blueprint Denver</i>, <i>Denver Moves Transit Master Plan</i>, <i>Denver Moves Pedestrian Master Plan</i>, <i>The Game Plan</i>, and the <i>2016 Federal Boulevard Corridor Study</i>.</p>	DPW/ CPD/ DPR/ DEH

B. Parks and Recreation: <u>Neighborhood Plan</u>	Agencies	Parks and Recreation: Other City Plans/Policies/Projects	Agencies
B.1 Increase number and acreage of parks, pocket parks, plazas and open space corridors through available means such as property acquisition, public or private easements, shared use agreements, etc.	DPR/ City Council/ OED/ Xcel	B.1.a Pursue shared use agreements with interested partners including Denver Public Schools to expand community recreational access to open space and other facilities.	DEH/ DPR/ DPS/ NGOs
B.2 Increase and improve connectivity between parks and open space corridors and to key destinations through available means such as property acquisition, public or private easements, rights-of-way, etc.	DPR	B.2.a Explore revisions to the City's current policy of charging a fee for all outdoor recreational classes and clinics offered by groups or individuals in Denver parks. Consider fee waivers for those providers serving neighborhoods with high health disparities.	DPR/ DEH/ City Council
B.3 Improve access and visibility to parks and open space corridors through available means such as property acquisition, public or private easements, shared use agreements, wayfinding signage, etc. Partner with DPR and Xcel to bury the Xcel power lines in the utility easement to create a true open space amenity.	DPR/ CPD/ City Council/ NGOs/ Xcel	B.3.a Explore reduced-cost admission to recreation centers and pools for parents that accompany children who currently have free access to these facilities.	City Council/ DPR/ Mayor's Office
B.4 Improve amenities in parks and open space corridors – such as rest-rooms, water fountains, lighting, fitness equipment, shade, benches, and pedestrian and bike facilities – to create safe and attractive multigenerational gathering areas.	DPR/ NGOs	B.4.a Analyze the City's current mobile food vending policies. Explore the creation of more opportunities for mobile food vending to promote neighborhood culture and authenticity.	City Council/ DPR/Ex & Lic/ DEH
B.5 Identify opportunities to enhance or redevelop existing recreation or community space -- through available means such as shared use agreements or other partnerships -- and enhance recreation programming to meet needs for all ages.	DPR/ OED/ DEH/ City Council	B.5.a Increase recreational programming for all ages and interests, particularly children and youth at schools, community centers and recreation centers.	DPR/ NGOs
B.6 Identify opportunities to build a new recreation center in Westwood.	DPR/ OED/City Council		

Recommendations

C. Community Safety: Neighborhood Plan

	Agencies	Community Safety: Other City Plans/Policies/Projects	Agencies
<p>C.1 Install or upgrade street and pedestrian lighting in key locations including streets, alleyways, and parks to improve safety. Explore options with the City and Xcel to upgrade existing street lighting throughout Westwood, similar to pilot programs in other Denver neighborhoods.</p>	<p>DPW/ DPD/ NGOs/ Xcel</p>		
<p>C.2 Designate appropriate land use areas for alcohol and marijuana outlets in the <i>Westwood Neighborhood Plan</i> that protect community health and safety, particularly near schools.</p>	<p>CPD</p>	<p>C.2.a Analyze the City's zoning regulations and retail licensing policies regarding alcohol and marijuana outlets to protect community health and safety, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimum distance requirements from sensitive uses such as schools; • Define minimum distance measurement as radius vs. legal walking • Maximum density of alcohol and marijuana outlets; • Add 'needs and desires' criteria for new and renewed marijuana licenses similar to liquor licenses 	<p>City Council/ Ex & Lic/ CPD</p>
		<p>C.3.a Develop a comprehensive City-wide dataset of aggregated pedestrian and cyclist injuries caused by vehicle crashes as part of <i>Vision Zero Denver</i>. Make the data open and available to the public as part of a continuing dialogue on improving safety and managing the public right of way.</p>	<p>DPD/ DPW/ DEH</p>
		<p>C.4.a Increase enforcement of drunk driving and speeding laws along Westwood's main corridors including Morrison Road, Federal Boulevard, Alameda Avenue, and Kentucky Avenue.</p>	<p>DPD</p>
		<p>C.5.a Increase cultural outreach resources for City staff, including Spanish and multi-lingual police and animal protection officers, to prevent crime, promote safety and restore community trust. Provide on-call language interpretation services for use by all City departments.</p>	<p>DEH/ DPD/ City Council/ Mayor's Office/ HRCP/ 311</p>
		<p>C.6.a Adequately fund City programs that promote community and youth safety including anti-graffiti and mural arts programs.</p>	<p>City Council/ DPD</p>

D. Access to Essential Resources: <u>Neighborhood Plan</u>	Agencies	Access to Essential Resources: Other City Plans/Policies/Projects	Agencies
D.1 Recommend land use designations for a diversity of housing types to accommodate all ages, households and incomes including single-family, multi-family, accessory dwelling units, or other.	CPD		
D.2 Ensure development and reinvestment in an adequate housing supply, including affordability, quality and energy efficiency, with City programs and other resources.	OED/ DEH		
D.3 Recommend land use designations to support a range of essential resources including healthy food outlets, health care clinics and other critical services. Ensure multimodal connectivity to these destinations.	CPD/ DPW	D.3.a Support City and partner programs to increase access to healthy, affordable, culturally desired food, such as Re:Vision food co-op, Denver Healthy Corner Store Initiative and other economic initiatives.	OED/ DEH/ NGOs
D.4. Expand healthy food options to include culturally desired foods, food production and processing through grocery stores, farmers markets, community gardens, mobile vending, food trucks and carts, etc.	OED/ DEH/ NGOs		
		D.5.a Explore ways to reduce overflowing trash, such as provision of additional waste carts upon request to a single address, offering composting, and culturally appropriate education and outreach about recycling.	DPW / NGOs
		D.6.a Expand language interpretation and translation services for all City departments, to increase resident access.	311/City Council

Agencies:

BuCu West	Business and Cultural Development Association for Westwood
City Council	Denver City Council
CDOT	Colorado Department of Transportation
CPD	Community Planning & Development
DEH	Denver Environmental Health
DPD	Denver Police Department
DPR	Denver Parks & Recreation
DPS	Denver Public Schools
Ex & Lic	Department of Excise & Licenses
HRCP	Human Rights & Community Partnerships
Mayor's Office	Office of the Mayor
NGOs	Non-governmental organizations such as Westwood Unidos, Re:Vision, Trust for Public Land, etc.
OED	Office of Economic Development
OoS	Office of Sustainability
DPW	Denver Public Works
RTD	Regional Transportation District
Xcel	Xcel Public Service Company

Next Steps

The recommendations in the *Westwood HIA*, when implemented, are designed to create lasting positive impacts to the health and wellness of Westwood residents and visitors for years to come. The *Westwood HIA* can also be used to inform future plans, policies or projects in Westwood to ensure healthy, equitable and sustainable growth and development.

Adoption of the Westwood Neighborhood Plan

The recommendations in the *Westwood HIA* are included in the *Westwood Neighborhood Plan*, anticipated to be adopted by Denver City Council in Summer 2016. Once adopted, neighborhood

plans can be implemented through a range of tools and resources including zoning, permitting, licensing, and public and private investment.

Communications and Reporting

The *Westwood HIA* is available online at Denver Environmental Health's website, www.denvergov.org/deh. The complete report is available in English, and executive summaries are available in Spanish and English. In addition, printed copies will be distributed

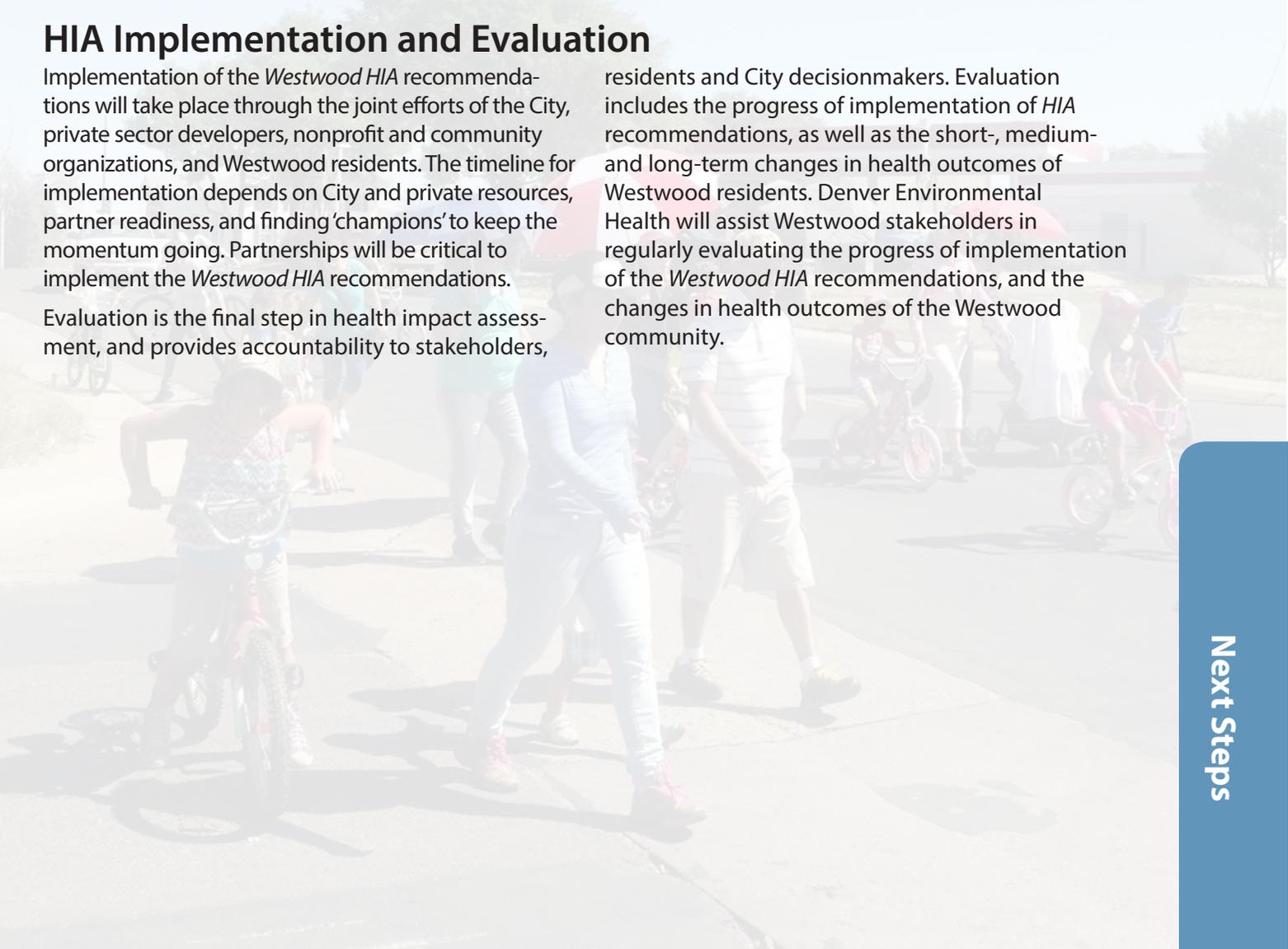
to all stakeholders, and made available at local community centers and organizations. Finally, Denver Environmental Health will engage with interested stakeholders to present and discuss the *Westwood HIA* findings at community meetings and other gatherings.

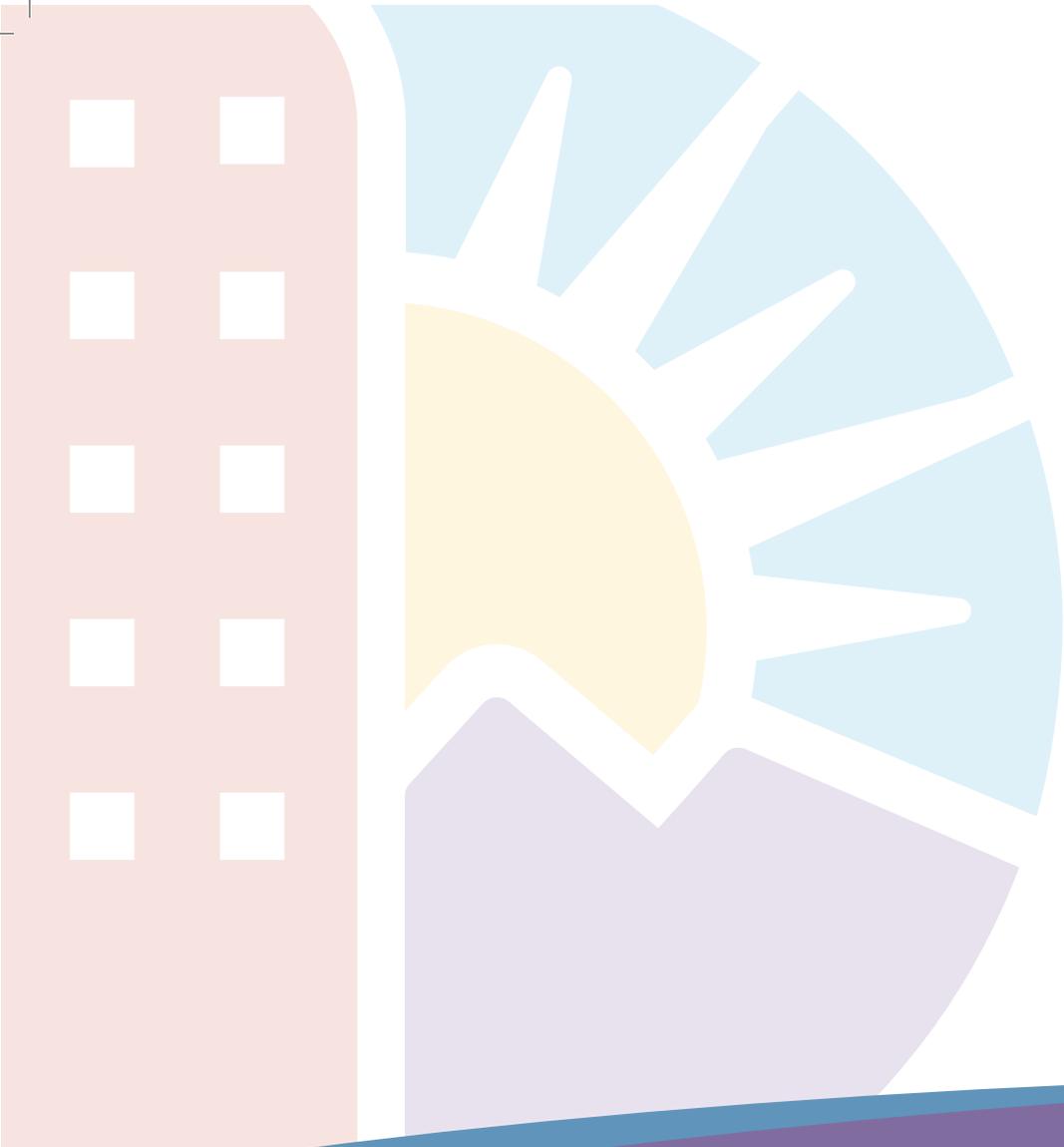
HIA Implementation and Evaluation

Implementation of the *Westwood HIA* recommendations will take place through the joint efforts of the City, private sector developers, nonprofit and community organizations, and Westwood residents. The timeline for implementation depends on City and private resources, partner readiness, and finding 'champions' to keep the momentum going. Partnerships will be critical to implement the *Westwood HIA* recommendations.

Evaluation is the final step in health impact assessment, and provides accountability to stakeholders,

residents and City decisionmakers. Evaluation includes the progress of implementation of *HIA* recommendations, as well as the short-, medium- and long-term changes in health outcomes of Westwood residents. Denver Environmental Health will assist Westwood stakeholders in regularly evaluating the progress of implementation of the *Westwood HIA* recommendations, and the changes in health outcomes of the Westwood community.





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