



Discussing Public Environments in the Community:  
A Focus Group Report about Nutrition and Physical Activity

**A FrameWorks Research Report**

April 2007

## **Introduction**

**This report recounts findings from focus groups conducted for the FrameWorks Institute as part of a multi-method investigation into how Americans think about community and societal determinants of health, especially those affecting the availability of healthy food and spaces for physical activity. This particular phase of inquiry uses findings from previous FrameWorks reports to test their ability to lift programs and policies identified in the W. K. Kellogg Foundation’s Food and Fitness Initiative Concept Paper. In collaborating with the FrameWorks Institute, the researchers incorporated a Strategic Frame Analysis™ perspective into the development and analysis of this qualitative research.**

Frames are “organizing principles that are socially shared and persistent over time, that work symbolically to meaningfully structure the social world”<sup>1</sup>. How citizens think about issues and policies related to public health, fitness and nutrition is invariably affected by such frames. The FrameWorks Institute, on behalf of the W. K. Kellogg Foundation, previously conducted a media analysis of the ways that health and fitness are conventionally framed in print media (news articles, editorials, and advertisements with images). That research found the “Little Picture” approach to be dominant, presenting fitness in consumer, individualistic and appearance frames. Further research by the FrameWorks Institute suggested four alternative frames that might serve to situate fitness and health in a “Big Picture” approach. The four frames are designated as the Food Systems Frame, the Public Environment Frame, the Fitness/Kids Frame, and the Public Health Frame. In keeping with the composition of frame elements identified by the FrameWorks Institute – values, simplifying models, messengers, etc.<sup>2</sup> – articles were developed that experimented with various ways to drive home the frames.

In general, the qualitative research reported here tests the efficacy of the four frames identified above, and generates findings that (1) help identify which aspects of the frames are working, (2) help identify which aspects of the frames are not working, and (3) provide guidelines to help better communicate the structural forces that shape Americans’ approach to food and physical activity. This research, which involved focus groups conducted in six U.S. cities, endeavors to enrich previous work completed by the FrameWorks Institute. The results from the focus groups ultimately build upon the communication platform set forth for each frame, and identify obstacles and opportunities related to the frames in public discourse.

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<sup>1</sup> Reese, SD, OH Gandy, Jr. and AE Grant. 2001. *Framing Public Life: Perspectives on Media and Our Understanding of the Social World*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum as cited from E-Zine No. 8 “A Five Minute Refresher Course in Framing,” © FrameWorks Institute 2007.

<sup>2</sup> For more on elements of the frame, see “A Five Minute Refresher Course in Framing, FrameWorks E-Zine #8 at [www.frameworksinstitute.org](http://www.frameworksinstitute.org).

The four frames tested in this research are described as follows<sup>3</sup>:

- **Food Systems Frame**

This frame was designed to communicate the idea that the food system, government policies, and health are interconnected; this view is consistent with The W. K. Kellogg Foundation's messaging on the Farm Bill. One question posed in the research is whether this frame may open up a broader conversation in public discourse. For example, is the Food System Frame a meta-frame capable of lifting an array of policies, or is it restricted to food? The model supporting this frame is termed the *Runaway Food System*. The Level One<sup>4</sup> value for this frame can be characterized as *Interconnection*, and the Level Two<sup>5</sup> issue as *Food and Health*.

For the purposes of this research, this frame is defined to suggest that a number of seemingly disparate issues are interconnected and related to food and health. For example, because governmental policies favor certain crops, this may lead to a food production system that ultimately dictates what food is available to us, what we most want to eat, and how healthy or unhealthy we are. According to this frame, the indirect result of these policies is that we tend to have unhealthier appetites, and less fruits and vegetables in our diet, both of which have negative consequences for public health.

The media format used to communicate this frame is an Op/Ed article written by a farmer/advocate (the messenger).

- **Public Environment Frame**

This frame attempts to address health and wellbeing problems by showcasing various solutions involving public spaces. An important question is whether this frame assists individuals in moving beyond health individualism, and makes them more engaged with public policy. The model supporting this frame is termed *Patchwork*. The Level One value for this frame can be characterized as *Ingenuity/Efficacy*, and the Level Two issue as *Community Quality of Life*.

For the purposes of this research, this frame is defined to suggest the notion that public structures and spaces can improve people's lives through better health and wellbeing, and therefore have a significant impact on how healthy or unhealthy we are. The media format used to communicate this frame is a New York Times article highlighting a press release from a nonprofit organization (the messenger)

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<sup>3</sup> See the Guide to Focus Group Sessions section for a description of the guide used in this research.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. Level One: Big ideas, like freedom, justice, community, success, prevention, responsibility.

<sup>5</sup> Level Two: Issue-types, like the environment or childcare.

- **The Fitness/Kids Frame**

This frame is the fitness equivalent of the food story in the Food System Frame. It also brings up the issue of diversity and differential effects on some communities. The model supporting this frame is termed *Common Good Stakeholders*. The Level One value for this frame can be characterized as *Public Good*, and the Level Two issue as *Fitness/Kids*.

For the purposes of this research, this frame is defined to suggest that there are systemic factors which lead children to get less physical activity, and this has a significant impact on how healthy or unhealthy children are. The media format used to communicate this frame is a letter to a newspaper editor written by a teacher/parent (the messenger).

- **The Public Health Frame**

This frame lodges the fitness and nutrition problem in community planning, and makes the connection between public health and the built environment. The questions inherent in this frame include: does the tobacco analogy (presented in the letter to the editor) work, and does this argument effectively define the issue as public? Are solutions available in public policies that would change conditions? The model underlying this frame is termed *the Tobacco Analogy*. The Level One value for this frame can be characterized as *the Responsible Manager*, and the Level Two issue as *Health/Community Conditions/Built Environment*.

For the purposes of this research, this frame is defined to suggest that inactivity is related to community planning; community planning should be focused on enabling Americans to walk and exercise more. The media format used to communicate this frame is a letter to a newspaper editor written by a physician (the messenger).

### **Guide to Focus Group Sessions**

All focus group sessions were conducted using the discussion guide located in the appendix of this report. Focus group sessions commenced with opening remarks to help establish rapport with the participants. The opening remarks included moderation information, session parameters, participant introductions, and an explanation of the purpose of the focus group. After the moderator's opening remarks, a warm-up exercise was introduced in which participants free-associated in response to the presentation of several different words related to food and health. Three separate articles were then provided to participants in a rotated order across groups. The participants were asked to read each article, and then were asked to provide open-ended responses regarding what information was new to them. After the moderator provided a brief recap of the articles, participants were posed specific questions about their reactions to the arguments contained in the articles. The participants were next exposed to the Healthy Communities Initiative exercise, in which they were asked to prepare talking points in support of a hypothetical policy that pulled in elements from the various articles. The Healthy Communities Initiative exercise was used as a mechanism to try to understand what

frame elements the participants internalized and subsequently presented to the researchers in making their case for the initiative.

### **Method**

In order to test the four frames, 16 focus group sessions were conducted in January and February of 2007. The focus group sessions occurred in six geographically dispersed U. S. cities chosen for their geographic and demographic diversity as well as being sites of interest to the W. K. Kellogg Foundation's Food and Fitness Initiative, and conducted with both adults and teenagers. The participant demographics and qualifications included the following:

#### **Demographics – Adults:**

Adult groups had a mix of:

- Males and Females
- Ages ranging from 26-70
- Ethnicities
- Education level
- Employment/occupation

#### **Adult Participant Qualifications:**

- Registered voters
- Extremely/very interested in current events/news
- Reads the newspaper 3 or more times per week
- Political Party Affiliation of Democrat or Republican (depending on group, limited to 3 strong in each group)
- Belong to 2 or more groups, such as such as the PTA, Rotary, neighborhood watch, or groups at place of worship
- Expressed their opinion by writing a letter to a newspaper, contacted an elected official, or spoke publicly about a cause they cared about
- No focus group participation in the past 12-months

#### **Demographics – Teens:**

Teen groups have a mix of:

- Males and Females
- Conservative/liberals/no affiliation expressed
- Ethnicities
- Ages 13-17; 2 groups of each below:
  - Freshman/Sophomores
  - Junior/Seniors

### Teen Participant Qualifications:

- Currently in high school
- Extremely/very/somewhat interested in current events/news
- Watch the news or reads news stories about current events at least once a week or more
- Must be involved in at least one organization such as: in their community or at their school, including involvement in a club, music, or sports group, Scouts, Big Brother, Big Sister, 4H, or groups at their place of worship.
- Must agree that the following statements describe themselves “very well” or “somewhat”
  - I feel comfortable talking and sharing ideas in a small group
  - I usually have an opinion on a given subject, and can express that opinion freely and clearly
  - I feel that talking about social and community issues can sometimes be interesting
- No focus group participation in the past 12 months

The focus group sessions were conducted with participants in the following locations:

Raleigh, NC, January 29, 2007

- Democrats
- Republicans

Framingham, MA, January 30, 2007

- Democrats
- Republicans

Seattle, WA, February 6, 2007

- Democrats
- Republicans

Des Moines, IA, February 8, 2007

- Democrats
- Republicans

Detroit, MI, February 12, 2007

- Teenagers (Junior/Senior)
- Republicans

Detroit, MI, February 13, 2007

- Teenagers (Freshman/Sophomore)
- Democrats

Albuquerque, NM, February 15, 2007

- Teenagers (Freshman/Sophomore)
- Democrats

Albuquerque, NM, February 16, 2007

- Teenagers (Junior/Senior)
- Republicans

All of the focus groups were moderated by David Schaich, Psy.D. Throughout this report, focus group participants are noted by their location, gender, and any other factor that distinguishes the group participants. Democrats and Republicans participated in alternating sessions, with the exception of the sessions involving teenage participants held in Detroit and Albuquerque which were organized by age. The focus group guide and the articles provided to the participants are listed in the Appendix. It should be noted that the focus group guide was changed after the Raleigh, NC, sessions to incorporate more focused questioning and all articles were edited to make them shorter overall. Both the original and revised guides are listed in the Appendix. The article for the Public Environment frame was changed after the Des Moines, IA sessions to provide a communication platform that would further resonate with the Republican participants. The prior Republican groups showed a pattern of resistance to alternative frames beyond health individualism and so the revised article was intended to gauge their sensitivity to adjustments in the frame communication. For the Detroit and Albuquerque sessions, the revised Public Environment article was used for both Republicans and Democrats. Similarly, a slightly different version of the Public Environment article which included more teen-relevant content was used for all of the teenage groups.

### **Analysis of the Food Systems Frame<sup>6</sup>**

The Food Systems Frame suggests that a number of issues are interconnected; governmental policies favor certain crops, and this leads to a food production system that ultimately dictates what food is available to us, what we most want to eat, and how healthy or unhealthy we are. According to this frame, the indirect result of these policies is that we tend to have unhealthier appetites and less fruits and vegetables in our diet, and this has negative consequences for public health. An important question is whether this frame assists individuals in moving beyond health individualism (i.e., a personal belief that it is an individual's personal responsibility to make healthy or unhealthy choices, and the impacts affect the individual), and subsequently makes them more engaged as citizens with public policy.

This research has identified three overall patterns of reactions to the Food Systems Frame:

(1) Focus group participants recognize the presence of a connection between politics (governmental policies) and the availability and breadth of food choices; (2) focus group participants understand that higher prices caused by public policy decisions affect individual choice; and (3) food system issues are more relevant in some communities than in others. These three findings are discussed in detail below. In general, participants are able to internalize the idea that the government has an impact on the availability of certain foods, and participants understand that the price of food affects the types of food that they purchase. Focus group participants, however, often do not make the connection between governmental subsidies and what they actually consume. These general conclusions are presented according to the patterns of reactions to the Food Systems Frame. Each finding is supported by relevant quotes from focus group participants.

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<sup>6</sup> See Article #1 in appendix.

**Focus group participants connect politics (governmental policies) to the availability and breadth of food choices.**

Participants expressed the opinion that the government has an impact on food availability and choice. In general, participants are unclear about what the Farm Bill represents, are curious about the Bill, and believe it to be relevant to what crops are grown in America. This finding was evident across locations and party affiliation:

*It amazes me how much Congress determines what is for dinner. We are the people that are paying their paychecks... We have let Congress decide how to raise our children and what to eat for dinner; it is up to us, not up to Congress. The sweet stuff is why children are obese. –Female Democrat, Des Moines*

*The politicians from the big farm states, they have fought and kept these subsidies in place for years. They have refused to look at the health impact on America. The politicians involved in all of this are also pretty dirty. –Male Republican, Raleigh*

When a focus group participant was asked, “Did you buy into the article?” she stated, *Oh yeah! I bought into it ages ago. –Female Democrat, Seattle*

*I think it has to do with what they [the government] subsidize. –Male Democrat, Des Moines*

*Get our local representatives on it! This is an economic driven market. –Female Democrat, Detroit*

*Most of the sugar comes from sugar beets, which are grown mostly in the Midwest and the South. That’s why the Farm Bill is very powerful and dominates the politics of a lot of states. –Male Democrat, Seattle*

*Unless you are a huge farmer, the subsidies aren’t that huge. Americans have cheap food because we are subsidized and we don’t see that part of our taxes are sent to pay for cheap food. Female Democrat, Des Moines*

*It doesn’t [Farm Bill] just impact farmers and agricultures. It impacts everyone. –Male Democrat, Seattle*

The research also revealed that it was easier for participants to get away from individual choice by focusing on the impact of government and public policy on school diets. *They took away a lot of the good stuff out of the schools. The government has cut back so much money that the schools can’t afford to bring in any of the decent foods any more. Plus they are putting things that kids like, but if you just put things that kids like, you know... When I was going to school, we had a menu, if you didn’t want to eat, too bad, you didn’t eat. –Male Republican, Framingham*



Many participants were concerned that fruits and vegetables are not on the government's diet; *we don't even know what they are controlling when we are eating. Decent produce is a lot more expensive to get. Why can't they somehow subsidize fruits and vegetables, and get people to eat that?* –Female Republican, Raleigh.

During the same discussion, another participant commented, *The Farm Bill is about subsidizing the farmers to grow fruits and vegetables. That would be a good approach, if they took it instead of corn, wheat, and soybeans. If you have an apple or you have fruit, we will give you more subsidies.* –Female Republican, Raleigh.

Another individual expressed, *The Farm Bill is the menu; Congress does not encourage fruits and vegetables to be grown.* –Female Democrat, Des Moines.

Some unhealthy foods were connected to current governmental policies; *we are eating that sugar because of government, government policy!*– Female Republican, Detroit

Although most teenagers were focused on food taste as the driver of their diets, a few participants were able to connect policies to the types of food they eat; *I think the government should start promoting fruits and veggies.* –Female Teenager, Albuquerque. Another teenager noted, *I don't know if the government should stay out of food regulation completely. If they have the power to change the society, how we eat. If they change burgers to broccoli, it would be a lot healthier for us. They can do it.* –Male Teenager Democrat, Detroit

A number of participants specifically brought up other (city) government initiatives on this topic, such as the trans fat issue in New York City:

*I think the idea that trans fat was banned in NY is a good thing because it doesn't dictate what people eat; it just gives them a healthier alternative.* –Female Teenager, Albuquerque

*I think the government stepping in and avoiding trans fat is a step towards the government trying to help.* –Male Democrat, Albuquerque

*Government intervention will kill you. The city in New York banning trans fats from restaurants and kitchens, you know... what exactly does the city government of New York really know about nutrition? The manipulation of foreign policies by the Congress forever really has been almost a patronage system, and denying rights to other people. Why do we all eat beet sugar? Because the US Congress put bans on cane sugar.* –Male Republican, Detroit

In summary, many participants had strong reactions to the article, and grasped the idea of the underlying model of a runaway food system:

*What got the strongest reaction out of me [quote from the article] “there are some serious side-effects of these policies. Today, the food system is like a runaway train – out*

*of control, with no one at the helm.” To some sense that may be true. There’s no one at the helm, but I really believe it’s hard to argue with the opinion that the control is profits. There is something at the controls; it’s the motor of profit making. It could be that the subsidies have a big influence. A sound minded person and, by extension, a sound minded community would make the decision based not on the one criteria profit alone but on a more comprehensive sort of criteria including health, what’s the land going to be like for the next generation, so forth and so on. –Male Republican, Seattle*

*We are on the wrong track in regards to food. We do need to take control of this runaway train that we have. –Republican, Des Moines*

**Focus group participants commonly expressed the notion that higher prices of healthier foods affect individual choice.** Participants say that their choice of buying food is directly affected by businesses and the price for certain foods. Participants feel that more nutritious foods (such as fruits, vegetables, and organically grown foods) are more expensive than unhealthy foods (fast foods). Some make the link that pricing by business is driven by government policies but for many the causal link stops with the businesses themselves. This finding was evident in many responses across group locations and participant political party affiliation.

*My girl at home loves fruit. She goes to the supermarket, and she wants peaches. One peach is \$2.59. My sister is on a low income budget, \$2.59, wow! She will buy it, but she will only be able to buy that one peach...People have the right idea: this is what is healthy for you, but sometimes it’s much easier to stuff yourself at McDonalds versus going to the supermarket...Going through a McDonald’s drive-thru is also much more fun for a child. –Female Democrat, Framingham*

*Who is going to buy an expensive salad when you get a double cheeseburger for a dollar? –Male Teenager, Albuquerque*

*There is definitely the issue of affordability. There is definitely a need to eat more healthy. People are living on budgets, and have children to feed. They realize that they need to be purchasing these healthier options but they are not affordable. I don’t understand what can make a cheeseburger, French fries and Coke option less expensive than a fresh sandwich, a bag of chips and a juice. –Female Democrat, Raleigh*

*This is a very poor state, and as parents, your budget doesn’t always allow you to buy the good stuff when you can buy the 2-for-1 bread, or the canned foods that is much cheaper. –Female Democrat, Albuquerque*

*Eating healthy is expensive. The more healthy you want to eat, the more expensive it is. That is why they are cutting all this stuff from the schools, because eating junk is cheaper. –Female Republican, Framingham*

*When I try and choose fresh fruits and vegetables, it is more expensive. It is more expensive to eat healthier. –Female Democrat, Albuquerque*

*Economically it is more expensive to buy fresh stuff. Families don't always have the budget to eat organic foods. When I want to eat healthier, it is much more expensive for me. –Female Republican, Albuquerque*

*They have all these crops they are not selling that are going bad and they lose money. The government gives you a couple of pennies for it, but they should be getting much more for it. And that money can go back into buying other things. –Female Democrat, Detroit*

As illustrated by this example, a few people noted that vegetarian diets are a healthy choice, but also complained about how expensive it is to maintain such a diet. *This is all true. To be a vegan is very, very expensive. If you grow your own, stuff it is free, but when you walk into the supermarket, everything is expensive. How do you feed your kids? Whatever is going to sell is what the government is going to put out there. If McDonald's is gonna sell, they are going to bring it out to fifty cents, and yes, people are going to go out there and buy two for a dollar. –Female Republican, Framingham*

Some participants were concerned about small farmers, as illustrated in this quote: *the farmers are going to do this and going to do that! The small farmers are losing all they have, and it's all going to these big consortiums. Money! The cost of running a small farm is incredibly expensive, and they are going against these mega places that can underbid them on anything they want. They just get lost in the shuffle. Basic economics! –Male Democrat, Framingham.*

Many of the participants found the Farm Bill of particular interest. Although many participants had never heard about it before and found the topic somewhat boring, some were very interested: *The Farm Bill, like many others, was been developed in the 1930s with the Great Depression to generate income, to give jobs, it's what the government had to do at that time for the nation's wealth and wellbeing. Now that we have become wealthy, we are looking back and seeing the errors of our ways, the mass production of these crops, corn, rice, soybean, and all the byproducts, meat, pork and all their byproducts has created a great monster; which we are now looking at to try to put on hold and get back into a balance. An example: the president we have today, what were his financial interests as far as before he was president, and how much are we paying for gas these days? Why would he do that? Why would he allow that? –Female Democrat, Raleigh*

*I'd like to know what opportunities policy makers have to play catch up this year with the Farm Bill. What does it mean? I don't know much about the bill, I'm not a farmer. But what it is telling me is that the government controls it. –Male Democrat, Framingham*

In another group, one individual stated, *the Farm Bill, how fair is it? Is it fair to everyone? –Republican, Des Moines.*

During the Healthy Communities Initiative Exercise<sup>7</sup>, one pair of participants stated, as a supporting point for their main message, *the reformation of the Farm Bill. The importance of diet.* –Female Democrat, Seattle

**Participants note that inter-community differences exist which affect the viability of the food system argument.** Participants view their communities differently from other communities; they suggest that the success of the food system’s argument may differ by location. For example, a participant asserted, *this idea may work in Detroit, but not here in Boston.* –Male Republican, Framingham.

Another person stated, *I think Seattle is very proactive with that. I think that we are more aware than a lot of cities.* –Female Democrat, Seattle

A number of **Obstacles** (Barriers to Frame) were identified within the Food Systems Frame, many of which were presented above. A review and consideration of these obstacles may be useful from a communications standpoint to assist in overcoming resistance from the frame and the tendency to revert to an individual choice standpoint.

- Government control is a huge concern on either side of the issue, both at the national and regional level. Participants may see how the government can lead to unhealthy eating but are at the same time hesitant to have the government dictate what we eat. For example, one participant from Iowa said, *I don’t want the government to stop me from supersizing my fries.* –Male Republican, Des Moines. Although this is one of the more dramatic responses gathered from the data, it captures the wariness among Americans to having the government controlling what they eat in negative *or* positive ways. This individual was discussing McDonald’s reaction to the documentary “Supersize Me.” This participant is under the perception that due to the movie, McDonald’s no longer can “supersize” (make larger portions) of their food. Another individual stated, *the last thing we need is government telling us what to eat. We should take away all the control.* –Male Republican, Detroit. Similarly, many other participants reacted negatively to the information presented in the article about New York City banning trans fats from restaurants.
- For many participants, marketing by businesses (rather than government) is seen as the culprit responsible for unhealthy eating habits and also the source of opportunity for addressing “what’s for dinner” in America. TV advertising spots were regarded by many as a contributing factor to people’s decisions about what to eat, and for some this focus represents a barrier to acceptance of the idea of public solutions (e.g., government-driven initiatives). When marketing/advertising is viewed as a key driver of eating habits, the connection between government and what food industry businesses do is sometimes lost. For example, when asked whether it’s purely an individual choice or if other factors influence decisions

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<sup>7</sup> Healthy Communities Initiative Exercise: An exercise given to focus group participants in which they developed talking points in support of a hypothetical policy initiative that was designed to incorporate the themes of each frame. See Appendix.

about what to eat, one respondent said “*advertisements.*” *Male Democrat, Raleigh.* Another participant said, *this is Super Bowl weekend. I’m going to be in front of that TV!* -*Male Democrat, Raleigh.* This participant seemed to indicate that his choices of what to buy were influenced by advertising and, like many other participants, he did not readily see the connection between government and business/marketing activities. Additional relevant quotes also demonstrate this point of view:

*I believe that it’s more driven by marketing, than by farm subsidies. I don’t think it’s because of how the government subsidizes the farming. –Male Republican, Seattle*

*I think the information is there but this a consumer-driven country. I think the consumers need to be educated more. As we get more education people will start making better choices instead of just looking at the costs. –Female Republican, Albuquerque*

Response to this execution of the frame indicates that citizens can make the connection between politics and the availability and breadth of food choices. Additionally, citizens relate to the idea that higher prices caused by public policy decisions affect individual choice. Overall, the Food System Frame elicits more of a focus in citizens’ minds on the systemic factors (e.g., governmental policy) rather than individual choice as the driver of unhealthy eating habits.

However, some aspects of this execution of the frame appeared difficult for participants to accept. Participants are wary of government involvement in solving the problem. They do not want to give the government more control (in either direction; the support of healthy foods, or the limiting of unhealthy foods) in restricting their individual choice. Although participants recognize the mega-issues presented in this frame that affect individual choice, at the same time they have a hard time relinquishing their personal choice to make unhealthy dietary decisions. Participants also view their communities differently than other communities, and get distracted from thinking that larger social policy changes could affect “their” community. Finally, marketing (rather than the government) is often seen as a major source of the problem. These participants are not making connections between marketing, government, and social policies. Each of these issues with the execution of the frame suggests opportunities for refining the way in which the frame is communicated.

### **Analysis of the Public Environment Frame<sup>8</sup>**

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<sup>8</sup> See Articles #2, 2A and 2T in Appendix.

The Public Environment Frame argues that public spaces can improve people's lives through better health and wellbeing, and that physical structures have a significant impact on how healthy or unhealthy we are.

Some general patterns emerged in response to this frame:

- (1) The frame is strongly linked to individual choice (health individualism) and tends to trigger the idea that people cannot change their lives through the public environment;
- (2) The participants do not see the solutions presented in the frame as realistic; and
- (3) The participants do not see the government as having an impact on the type of solutions presented in this frame.

These general conclusions are explained below. Each finding is supported by quotes from focus groups participants.

Of all of the frames examined, the Public Environment Frame appears to have the greatest difficulty overcoming the hurdle of individual choice. Participants view changes in their community as intimately tied to individual choice; the effect that the public environment and physical structures have on an individual's fitness is perceived as minimal. For example, participants indicated that parents are responsible for getting their children outside, into parks, and for turning off their children's video games. Participants indicated that individuals choose to go to parks, and that the addition of more parks, by itself, will not get more people to visit them. In addition, individuals make the choice whether to purchase fruits and vegetables (the number of farmers markets in the area makes little difference).

*Parks are overrated. You can go outside and walk anywhere in the world. – Male Republican, Des Moines*

*As far as children go, it is up to the parents. If the parents take them out and play baseball with them, they will begin to be more active. –Female Democrat, Albuquerque*

*I don't buy into the article. Sorry. I used to let my kids drink a lot of juice, because they get a lot of calories that way, but I had to make a choice that whenever they were thirsty they had to drink a bottle of water. So I made choices for them, and as a parent I make the choice for them. I agree with Andrew that if you involve the community, then they have more pride for it. But if you just build things for people, they just destroy it. They don't have any incentive to keep it going. And as far as parks and stuff like that, I sometimes feel more comfortable in a smaller space, like a track because people don't respect parks. There's graffiti, people break things, there's poop all over the place. People don't take pride into things. I don't buy into this, unless people are involved enough to make a difference for themselves. I think the eating healthy is a choice too. Unless you live 20 miles away and can't buy. You can walk even to the corner store and pick up fruit and vegetables. It's not like it used to be where it was only at big grocery stores you could get something. – Male Republican, Framingham*

*No. Not true. I do believe yes, it will have an impact, but it will be minimal and it will be a very small percentage of the people. If you have 1000 people working downtown [where a park or new gym facilities are built], it will have an impact on 50-60 people. – Female Republican, Detroit*

*The local municipality I work for, they have the new library, and when they left the old library, we converted one of the rooms for a gym for the employees. They put all kinds of equipment in there. Nobody went in there. Nobody! – Female Republican, Detroit*

Participants see individual motivation, morals, and internal self-control as key issues. They have trouble seeing how the public environment will make a difference if a person lacks motivation to change. For example, one participant stated, *there needs to be motivation in a person. –Republican, Des Moines*. Another person stated, *I think that if people want to do it, they will do it no matter what. When I was in college, there was a beautiful facility, and it was for free. Never once went! Now I want to exercise, and I work out 6 times a week, I drive there, and I pay for it. –Male Republican, Detroit*. A teenager noted, *I think there is always going to be something on TV or something else people will want to do other than jogging. –Male Teenager, Albuquerque*

Participants also view time as a factor; facing a variety of workload and technological changes, people have less time to take advantage of the public environment: *The world is moving so fast, and people don't have the time. It is like you are always trying to keep up with the Jones. You want to one up your neighbor. The lifestyle you project is so important now days. –Male Republican, Des Moines*

Parental supervision was also brought up across groups; participants suggested that parents need to do a better job in educating their children: *I'm kind of jaded on that point because I think its only one part of the equation. I'll give you a good example. I think that many of the major projects back east, back when they still had the housing projects, were centered around a couple of huge open spaces. Those open spaces did very little for the health and the wellbeing for the people who were inside those projects. In fact they have turned into drug dealing areas. I think it's an over simplistic approach. I think that it has to be a combination of open space, supervision, and community involvement. If you have an open space there is no guarantee it's going to be healthy. –Male Republican, Seattle*

*Again that has to go with parents' [desire] to get out and do the activities because some of these kids these days are inside playing videogames. There's no exercise and no nutrition in that. You know what I mean? Compared to when I was growing up we would be outside playing baseball. It's really hard to get kids outside these days. –Male Republican, Seattle*

*That kind of touches on the idea of leading by example. If you have an active parental group, then children have a tendency to be involved the same way. For example, my brother rides bikes and all his kids ride bikes and take part in that. I played sports and my kids play sports –Male Republican, Seattle*

In the Healthy Communities Initiative Exercise, one pair said: *learning starts at home with family. Learning starts at home with active lifestyles and good nutrition.* –Male and Female Republicans, Seattle. Another pair said “*Educate people and get them involved. You can’t force people to eat good food.*” –Male and Female Republicans, Seattle.

**The solutions presented in the frame are not seen as realistic changes that can be made in communities.** In general, participants indicated that having more farmers markets and creating more parks was unrealistic, especially in big cities and pre-established communities. Participants also commented on the fact that many of the changes presented in the article took too long (10 years).

When individuals do make the connection and agree that an enhanced public environment could have an impact, they do not see viable solutions:

*This takes too much time.* – Male Republican, Framingham

*Cities are already built.* –Male Republican, Raleigh

*It’s not going to matter. How long is it going to take? How can we do some changes immediately? If Dwayne [governmental official] doesn’t get together in the community at least once a month, how is a change going to happen? It’s not going to happen. Community action, not the government.* – Female Democrat, Framingham

Many participants seem to question the legitimacy of the article; *I would like to know how many people actually participated in each of these 3 programs. I mean did it really work?* –Republican, Albuquerque. Another similar response, *I would like to see leadership and costs. Where is the money coming from? Who would be sponsoring the movement?* –Female Democrat, Des Moines

Similarly, the phrase *parents are running recreation activities in every park; I’m curious to see how they got them involved and how they got them to take the initiative to do it. I take it this is all true?* –Female Republican, Seattle

**The participants do not see the government as having an impact on the type of solutions presented in this frame.** The participants had a difficult time identifying how the government could have an impact on local community environments, and were resistant to suggestions that the government should play a role in the physical or public environment of local communities. The participants said that it was important for local communities to come together and take action independent of the government.

Participants make the distinction between the community and the government, and do not make the connection on one influencing the other, *Community action, not the government.* –Female Democrat, Framingham. Another example is seen in the quote: *the bottom line is: the community got together and did it right. It benefits people, it helps kids.* –Female Democrat, Framingham



*I know a company that will pay for your membership, as long as you go 6 times a month, you don't have to pay the membership. If it is less than 6 times, then you have to pay. That is a really big motivator. That is a great idea that will lower their health costs and lower costs to employers. –Male Democrat, Albuquerque*

*I think that we need to be more aware of what is going on in our neighborhoods. I think that there are some people that pay close attention and others just don't know until it happens. Then, they are like, but wait a minute!! They don't see what is going on. A community should try to work together, to make it what they want it to be. –Female Democrat, Seattle*

During the wrap-up, one participant stated, *the need to do more in the community. We need to be a voice for our children. –Male Democrat, Framingham.* In the same wrap-up, another participant stated, *they are trying to promote health, which is nothing new. They have to find better ways to discuss this. –Female Republican, Framingham.* In yet another focus group wrap-up, a participant noted, *the impact of the community on the individual –Female Democrat, Seattle* as the most take-home point of the focus group.

In addition to the findings presented above, a number of additional **obstacles** (Barriers to Frame) were identified within this execution of the frame. A review and consideration of these obstacles may be useful from a communications standpoint to assist in overcoming resistance to the frame, and the tendency to revert to an individual choice standpoint.

- Perceptions related to safety and crime emerged among some participants as a possible barrier if not expressly addressed in the execution of the frame<sup>9</sup>. As one participant stated, *Safety has a big impact depending on how we design. If you make things people-friendly, or let's say more friendly to go outside, and if you create safe environments, you'll do it. Safety is an issue. –Male Republican, Seattle.* Another individual stated, *the problem there is when you sit on the board, all the parents would come in and say No! No! The kids are going to be selling drugs there. You can't do that, and you put up a center for kids to go and shoot pool or something, all the drug dealers are going to be there. –Male Democrat Detroit*
- Communities are different, so no one solution will work. This idea was emphasized in a number of different locations: *That won't work here in Boston. – Male Republican, Framingham.* Another participant stated, *this is like the urban villages once attempted in Seattle. It was a great idea, but it failed.” –Male Democrat, Seattle*

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<sup>9</sup> This parallels findings expressed related to safety, as explained in FrameWorks E-Zine #22, “A New Dominant Frame: The Imperiled Child,” Franklin D. Gilliam, Jr. for the FrameWorks Institute, 2007 at <http://www.frameworksinstitute.org/products/issue22framing.shtml>

In summary, within the context of the Public Environment Frame as tested here, participants had difficulty moving beyond health individualism and becoming more engaged in public policy. A new execution of the frame (article) could perhaps be more effective if the solutions presented in the article were more relevant to their communities. In addition, the article brought participants toward a dominant frame related to safety. Participants also appeared to misinterpret the argument as communicated in this particular article; they tended to become entrenched in the notion that the problem is multifaceted, and that no one solution will succeed by itself.

### **Analysis of The Fitness/Kids Frame<sup>10</sup>**

This frame attempts to communicate the concept that there are systemic factors that shape how much physical activity children get, and this has a significant impact on how healthy or unhealthy they (children) and ultimately we are.

This research identified a number of general reactions to the Fitness/Kids frame: (1) Children represent a high potential vehicle for getting past individual choice; (2) People see that public institutions (schools) have made mistakes that are reversible; and (3) This frame would be improved by focusing on schools rather than a series of institutions. These general conclusions are explained below. Each finding is supported by quotes from the focus groups participants.

**The children are a vehicle for getting past individual choice.** Individuals buy into the idea that children are the stakeholders of the future, and they are more readily accepting of the idea of public entities (schools, recreation centers) changing the health of the children, than of themselves (adults) being swayed by bigger systemic factors beyond their individual choice. In other terms, participants are saying “don’t tell *me* what to do, but get the children in better shape.”

The following responses demonstrate the salience of this point:

*... [I]do believe that kids do need some type of change. –Male Democrat, Framingham*

*I like how they are implementing making the streets walkable and bikeable. Because, now we can’t even get two cars on a street, God forbid if a child wants to bike in the street, because they only put a sidewalk on one side of the street. When I was growing up the street was wide enough. Now they build on top of each other. You hear people talk about it in the communities and with their neighbors, but nobody does anything about it. I think they don’t want to fight with getting a petition together; going down to city council, fighting and pushing issues that they know themselves need to be done. I think this is a big problem. ..with children; now you have a problem where they are going to go to schools. The schools are too crowded. If you leave green space, make the communities where children can walk to school, it will be more community involved; you won’t have to bus certain kids because this community is overdeveloped and there is too*

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<sup>10</sup> See Article #3 in the Appendix.

*many kids going here, and now we have to have year around schools, and get the developers involved and dedicate some of this land to build schools, so that this won't be such a problem...—Female Republican, Raleigh*

*I think it makes sense. Building less property, and giving the kids in the neighborhood an area. I believe it can improve health! —Male Democrat, Framingham*

*Kids aren't taught art, music, PE any more. We have overweight people because we do not want to move. Children aren't having recess any more. The restless kids in school get medicated because kids aren't getting out anymore. —Female Democrat, Des Moines*

*We are lacking in after school programs and parks. —Male Democrat, Albuquerque*

*We did do a good job in getting the soda and candy out of the schools. So far we are on the right track. —Male Democrat, Albuquerque*

*We were stationed back in Maryland starting in '84. We lived in an area, a new housing development we bought into, and developers there followed the same pattern established by the previous generation of developers. Which was: this is rural, we don't need sidewalks. It will look so rural. Isn't it cool to not have sidewalks? So the kids had to walk in the streets or more likely get driven every place. And when we were back to visit two years ago, I saw sidewalks along the roads we were on: to give to kids a place to ride their bikes without being on the streets. —Female Democrat, Seattle.*

*The first issue is with our children, and physical education is not a big thing nowadays. I think that what we have forgotten is balance. We forget about their physical wellbeing. We have eliminated physical education, and kind of put it under the rug, but if we keep putting things under the rug, we will have a mountain after a while. And that is what we have now, and we are trying to figure out what's going on. We need to bring balance back into our school system. That it's not all just education, but education is part of being healthy and having nutrition. —Female Democrat, Seattle*

*I would love to hear anybody say that they know 10 schools that have recess. My elementary school used to have it, but if I go back now, they don't have it. —Female Democrat, Seattle*

*I remember [when I was a child] we used to walk everywhere. I used to live in North Raleigh, and we walked. We could go to the lake, it was all over. There was something to go do, an outdoor activity. —Male Republican, Raleigh*

*During a wrap-up session, one participant commented, the survey (sic) was excellent because we do have to do something about our children. —Male Democrat, Framingham. Moreover, a participant stated, they need to do more in the community. We need to be a voice for our children. —Male Democrat, Framingham*

**Participants see that public institutions (schools) have made mistakes that are reversible.** In this frame, individuals are focusing on school system mistakes, such as limiting physical education. Participants recognize that these public programs can affect children. They also say that schools have made grave mistakes in helping (or not helping) children stay fit, and that these mistakes can be fixed. They recognize that there are viable solutions within public institutions that can affect the fitness and health of the children. The following quotes demonstrate the relevance of this issue:

*They are saying that the school system needs to design programs to put that back in. But that again is back to politicians, because the school boards are the ones to decide what you should do and how the classes are run. To me he is saying that, and also get a big movement going, a community movement. –Female Republican, Raleigh*

*If they are so worried about kids being obese, why are they taking away PE, art and music, the stuff that gets the kids going? The stuff that gets their blood circulating, and gets them being more active. Even a smile is better than these tests they are giving. Going to a basketball game, and cheering them on, is still better than taking away everything. –Female Democrat, Framingham*

*I think past freshman year you know whether you like sports or not. Either you like sports or you don't. I think it is good to have PE in junior high and elementary school so kids get in the habit of PE so they will want to continue to be physically active in high school. –Female Teenager, Albuquerque*

*Going back to when I was in high school, if you were a junior and you passed PE for your three years, you didn't have to take it again. So, you just sit there, and fool around with your friends. –Female Democrat, Framingham*

*They need to get walking programs at schools and definitely need to get PE back. –Male Teenager, Albuquerque*

*I would say that one of the things that was refreshing with both articles<sup>11</sup> is that they tied together a lot of pieces that often they talked about in isolation. Urban planning never gets tied with PE, they are isolated issues, and both these articles tied them both together very well; and really pointing out the root causes, the way the medical cost, education and urban planning are tied together. –Female Democrat, Seattle*

*I do think we need to bring physical education back. I think its good for the teachers and for the kids. –Female Republican, Raleigh*

*I had no idea they didn't have physical education. I don't have any kids, and I had no idea. They are trying to focus so much on the testing because the scores are so low for the state, and I don't know how to correct that but something needs to be done. –Male Republican, Raleigh*

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<sup>11</sup> The Fitness/Kids Frame and the Public Health Frame.

A number of participants across groups made their main supporting point for the Healthy Community Initiative as: *Bring physical education back into the schools –Male and female Democrats, Framingham; Male and Female Republicans, Framingham; Male and Female Republicans, Raleigh; Male and Female Republicans, Detroit; Male and Female Democrats, Detroit*

**This frame would have improved its impact by focusing on schools.** The research suggests that the letter to the editor may be too broad in communicating the frame. Specifically, the letter lost some of its effectiveness with the content about the lack of physical education that is taking place outside of schools (home, in the community). This broad focus (inside and outside of the schools) may undermine the frame by distracting individuals. The distraction leads participants to an individual choice mode of thinking, evidenced by a focus on parenting, getting the children to turn off the television, etc. These findings perhaps suggest that “less is more” when aiming to deliver the frame because the focus on a core concept could result in more impact. If the article solely focuses on physical education and nutrition only within schools, it may communicate the frame more directly without allowing individuals to revert to individual choice. One example that is representative of the reaction of many participants to the article is:

*I finished high school in Framingham, and I walked. I walked a lot. I rode a lot. I feel that this article is all over, they talk about PE, art and music. I’m going to quote Oprah Winfrey: “In this country everyone feels that they are entitled to everything.” I think that is why many problems have been created. –Female Democrat, Framingham*

In addition to the findings presented above, a number of **Obstacles** (barriers to the frame) were identified within the presentation of the frame. A review and consideration of these obstacles may be useful from a communications standpoint in assisting to overcome resistance to the frame, and the tendency to revert to an individual choice standpoint.

- Finances. Participants had a difficult time understanding where the money would come from for the community planning, and to fund school and after-school activities. Examples include:

*Who will pay the bill? – Male Republican, Detroit.*

*It all comes to money, the parks take money. The builders can build 3 homes on the park land, they would rather build a house for money than a park that will not return any money to the builder. –Male Democrat, Des Moines.*

*There are three factors that I see: ....One is definitely money... –Female Democrat, Raleigh*

- Perceptions related to safety and crime emerged among some participants as a possible barrier and perhaps could be addressed more explicitly in the execution of the frame to mitigate concerns. Participants noted that many individuals don’t want to walk. Participants are worried about violence, pedophiles, and traffic

endangering our children. Consistent with the FrameWorks observation that facts will be rejected if they do not fit dominant frames,<sup>12</sup> an interesting point was brought up by one respondent: *Even though statistics all say that America is safer than ever, people's perceptions are that it is not safe. –Female Democrat, Seattle.* People will not allow their kids to walk or bike to school. Participants also feel that they will be criticized if they allow their children to be outside unsupervised. Additional quotes below support the general concern about safety in this frame:

*How many children do you see walking to school? None because of safety! There are no crossing guards. There is no police. – Male Democrat, Framingham*

*Where my grandkids live there isn't a sidewalk. They couldn't walk to school, they would have to walk in the middle of the streets. It's too dangerous! – Male Republican, Framingham*

*Now kids aren't safe to be out. When we were kids, there was a community. If I was in the neighbor's yard the neighbor would pick me up and take me home. Times have changed you don't have that anymore. How do we get that community back? – Female Democrat, Des Moines*

*I would be fine with allowing my kids to walk to school in some areas, but in others, it just isn't safe any more. There use to be a better sense of community, people use to look out for one another kids. We are no longer community oriented. – Female Republican, Des Moines*

*You didn't use to have to worry about your kids like you do now. There were no abductions. – Female Republican, Des Moines*

*I just don't feel safe at parks. I guess that is why I carry around mace. – Female Teenager, Albuquerque*

*I think there is one essential point that is left out of this article, and that is crime. People are too scared to walk anyway. –Female Republican, Albuquerque*

*How can you make it safe? Then safety also relates to the government. What is the government doing to make our neighborhood safe? I should be safe in my neighborhood, and go out and walk. –Female Democrat, Raleigh*

*It's not very safe either. I also think that kids these days wouldn't go to school if they had to walk. They would do whatever on the streets...–Female Republican, Raleigh*

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<sup>12</sup> See “Framing Public Issues,” FrameWorks Institute © 2002 for more on rejection of fact-based claims at variance with frames.

*There is a great community center that the kids cannot walk to because of the busy street. If there was a bridge going over the highway, more people would use it. –Male Democrat Detroit*

In this particular case, we also saw an important **Opportunity** for improving the frame, based on participants' reactions. Public solutions that successfully instigate a “tipping point” phenomena may be helpful case studies to include in the article to help citizens move past individual choice to an interest in community-based initiatives. The following quotes demonstrate participants expressing this view:

*...My community center, where I live, we teach nutrition. I mean not everyone follows it, but we teach it to the teens and the smaller children, then other people follow it. –Female Republican, Framingham*

*If I turn off my kids' TV, and get them outside playing, the other kids in the neighborhood will join in. –Female Democrat, Seattle*

*I think that with the kids being lazy, a lot of it is on us. We buy the kids all these little toys to play at home, Nintendo and all these games. We give kids stuff that we never had. I think that it's on the parents. Get the kids out of the house. – Male Democrat, Detroit*

*That kind of touches on the idea of leading by example. If you have an active parental group, then children have a tendency to be involved the same way. For example, my brother rides bikes and all his kids ride bikes and take part in that. I played sports and my kids play sports. –Male Republican, Seattle*

Within this frame it was found that many individuals believe that fitness is most important for children. This belief may be growing due to emotional reactions to the numbers of obese and inactive children in society. A consistent finding was that participants want to bring back physical education in the schools, and encourage children to eat healthy. Participants also recognized the importance of moving children away from the more sedentary inside activities (e.g., video games, television) to be outdoors and more physically active. The focus on the children in the execution of the frame can also help bypass individual choice perspectives, and reinforce the idea that the school system can affect other large community bodies (i.e., bring more physical education to the children). One Democratic participant from Detroit summed up the general feeling across most of the focus groups when he stated *Children are America's future*—Male Democrat Detroit. Other examples of this frame include the following:

*They are taking away the structure. Maybe that is why they [children] are obese! –Male Democrat, Framingham*

*If they are so worried about kids being obese, why are they taking away the physical education, the arts and the music, the stuff that gets the kids going? Their blood circulating, more active. –Female Democrat, Framingham*

*I do believe that kids do need some type of change. –Male Democrat, Framingham*

*These kids nowadays, there is not a lot of activity in the schools. Most schools took away gym. They have no activities. That's why they have strong thumb muscles from playing videogames all day. As far as going out and playing; when I was a kid, we'd go out through the neighborhood and pick out 6/7 guys and girls and we would have a baseball team. These kids don't know how to do anything. We have to do everything for them. – Male Republican, Detroit*

*These kids that don't have gym at home or at school, not only are they sitting at the computer, they are playing with their Gameboys and Nintendos. They can even take it with them. At what point do parents or government officials say: you know what, that's it. Games are to stay at home, the parents can set their limits, but outside the house, no. There are some schools that ban them, they still bring them, they get stolen, and then they blame it on the schools. These are expensive pieces of equipment that kids don't really need. Even if they buy them, keep them at home. Keep the recess, because there are kids with ADD and ADHD that need to release every once in a while. Keeping these kids bundled up inside, and making their school days even longer, what good will you make them? Obesity will persist even worst. So they have no fruits, no vegetables, no exercise, then they go home, and have no room to run around. –Female Democrat, Framingham*

*The first issue is with our children, and physical education is not a big thing nowadays. I think that what we have forgotten is balance. We forget about their physical being. We have eliminated physical education, and kind of put it under the rug, but if we keep putting things under the rug, we will have a mountain after a while. And that is what we have now, and we are trying to figure out what's going on. We need to bring balance back into our school system. –Female Republican, Raleigh*

In summary, the Fitness/Kids frame was successful in moving people away from health individualism. Participants quickly recognized that children are common stakeholders in the future. Participants readily accepted the idea that public entities could change the health of the children. The aspects of the execution of this frame that were difficult for participants to grasp were that changes in public entities could improve the health of adults as well as children. Adult participants appeared to focus on helping children at the expense of examining their own responsibility. Participants were also concerned with finances; they wanted to know where the money would come from for community planning.

### **Analysis of The Public Health Frame**<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> See Article #4 in the Appendix.



This frame suggests that physical activity is directly related to community planning; community planning should be focused on enabling Americans to walk more.

The research identified a number of general reactions to the Public Health Frame. The findings include:

- (1) Participants do not easily connect the environment to inactivity; and
- (2) Participants are somewhat aware that inactivity may lead to obesity or other potential health concerns.

These general conclusions are explained below. Each finding is supported by quotes from the focus group participants.

**Participants do not connect the environment to inactivity.** The proposals to use community planning to combat inactivity are not working; individuals are not making a connection. The whole concept of community planning, urban planning, and their relationship to fitness and nutrition is a new concept to participants. It is difficult for participants to think in these terms. As one participant succinctly stated, *the idea is bizarre – Female Democrat, Des Moines*. Moreover, participants generally feel that community planners and contractors have more important things on their agenda. One participant estimated that contractors probably put health and “walkability” at around 300 (1 being the most important) in terms of priority.

*Now, walking, I think, walkability is not feasible. They can just encourage people to walk a different way. I just don't think that the way they're stating it here, the idea of increasing sidewalks. First they have to increase safety, increase more activities in school before getting into this. I don't see this being feasible. This may be feasible in one particular area. I think this is addressing suburban areas. I don't think this is addressing the more technological areas, like the cities. I don't see that here. I think this is just a particular demographic. –Male Republican, Framingham.*

*We don't live in small towns where you can walk. Are there communities really designed where people can't walk? I don't think designing the community is the problem, it is a personal problem. –Male Republican, Des Moines*

*You can plan the whole community but if you don't get the idea into the minds of the individual it just isn't going to happen. You have to break the habits. –Male Republican, Des Moines*

*It isn't the plan of the community, it is a mind set. –Female Republican, Des Moines*

*Inactivity is related to your own choice. If you choose to be active that's great. And if you are telling your kids to go out and go play that's great. But when you drive down to the minimart on the corner you are telling your kids [the wrong message]. If you want an activity and you want to be physically fit it doesn't matter if you live in a 20 story*

*apartment you can find activity. You can run up and down the apartment stairs because it's there. –Male Republican, Seattle*

*They are building golf courses all over this country, kids can do that! Out of season, of course! They are not going to ride a bike path because it's there. If they want to ride, they can do it now. It's great, but I don't believe that to improve our kids' health is to improve the parks. Let's utilize what we have. –Male Democrat, Framingham*

*Walking and exercise is helpful, but it's not a cure. –Female Republican, Framingham*

*This is kind of unrealistic. People move away from busy areas. People move into cul-de-sacs because they think it's safer. The reason people don't walk is because of safety. It would be nice if all these things could change but it just doesn't seem plausible. –Male Republican, Framingham.*

*It is also lifestyle; we just don't have the time to meander to the grocery store. Nowadays it is go... go... go... –Female Democrat, Des Moines*

*We live in the Midwest and I really haven't lived in a neighborhood where there isn't a park that you can walk to. –Male Republican, Des Moines*

*People won't even walk at the zoo, anymore they get on the tram that drives them around. I think it is a personal thing. If someone wants to drive they are going to drive. Our days are so crammed we don't want take that extra 5 minutes to walk and stay healthy. Americans just don't feel like they have the time. –Male Democrat, Albuquerque*

*I think the biggest issue here is does the person have the desire to want to be healthy and be in shape. –Female Republican, Albuquerque*

*Teenagers don't want to go to the local theater; they want to go to the big and popular theatre. –Female Republican, Albuquerque*

*These are all great ideas but people need to want to do it. –Female Republican, Albuquerque*

*People are going to need proof that this process is feasible and we would need to see the economics. –Male Republican, Albuquerque*

*What is the tradeoff? What would I have to give up for this urban planning? –Female Democrat, Seattle*

*Some teenagers equated driving with being “cool,” or fun, as opposed to walking. For example, *It just wouldn't be cool for me to ask a girl out to the movies and then say hey let's walk there...that just isn't going to happen. That isn't cool. –Male Teenager, Albuquerque.* Another teenager said, *it's a good thought, but I don't see myself walking to the movies. –Female Teenager, Albuquerque.* Another teenager said, *No one is going**

*to walk to get groceries, because no one is going to walk home all happy with a bunch of groceries. –Female Teenager, Albuquerque*. These finding suggests that teenagers may view walking as outdated and impractical; therefore, it may be problematic to emphasize walking in the execution of the frame.

**Participants are not fully aware of the dangers of physical inactivity.** Focus group participants respond to the data presented in the letter. They readily recognize and generally accept the assertion that inactivity is the second leading cause of death next to tobacco. Participants also recognized that walking helps improve fitness.

*The relationship between inactivity and heart disease. It was just shocking. It's like second to tobacco. –Male Teenager, Detroit*

*If more people knew that heart disease comes from inactivity I think people would start being more active. I don't think a lot of people really know the real numbers. –Female Teenager, Albuquerque*

*I was amazed about the 200,000 deaths per year, I think people need to start doing a little more physical activity each day. –Female Republican, Des Moines*

*I didn't know that the connections were so strong between inactivity and coronary heart disease. I mean they are connected but to such a degree? And the same with inactive lifestyle, is second only to tobacco. –Female, Democrat, Seattle*

In addition to the findings presented above, a number of **Obstacles** (barriers to the frame) were identified within the presentation of frame. A review and consideration of these obstacles may be useful from a communications standpoint in order to overcome resistance from the frame and the tendency to revert to an individual choice standpoint.

- The tobacco analogy, while powerful, may be diversionary. Many participants get distracted by the tobacco analogy. They end up discussing the dangers of second-hand smoke, but overlook the issue of inactivity.
- Perceptions related to safety and crime emerged among some participants as a possible barrier. People don't want to walk. Participants are worried about violence, pedophiles, and traffic endangering themselves and especially their children.

In summary, participants liked the idea of the Public Health Frame (making the community more walkable), and they were engaged by the tobacco analogy. Nonetheless, even though participants liked the idea of “walkability,” some failed to make the general connection of community planning to inactivity. Moreover, participants were often distracted by the tobacco analogy; they tended to become focused on the issue of second-hand smoke. Thus, the analogy was so powerful that participants began to skim over the issue of inactivity.

## Conclusion

### The Food Systems Frame

Overall, the Food Systems Frame elicits a stronger focus in citizens' minds on the systemic factors (e.g., governmental policy) rather than individual choice as the driver of unhealthy eating habits. Participants connect politics to the availability and breadth of food choices. Moreover, they understand that higher prices caused by public policy decisions affect individual choice.

Some participants are skeptical of government involvement in solving the problem. It needs to be shown in the execution of the frame how governmental policies can prove beneficial. In addition, to be more effective, the article needs to be sensitive to the issue of the appearance of government control and couch the language to convey a more supervisory or guiding role as opposed to control. At the very least, the argument needs to address concerns about government control, and assure people that their interests are at hand.

Participants recognized the mega-issues (governmental policies) that affect individual choice presented in this frame. One issue that seems to prevent some participants from responding to the alternative frame is the position that "this won't work in my community." Thus, local community examples may help convince participants of the viability of governmental involvement. In addition, participants seem to view marketing (rather than the government) as a major source of the problem. Thus, the argument may be better received if it spells out the connections (how policy affects marketing) directly in the article.

The farmer (the messenger) from the Op/Ed article received mixed reviews; some participants thought he was biased and trying to save his farm, while others thought he presented an educated and informed viewpoint. It appears that his association with the coalition of farmers carried a slightly negative connotation, as he was perceived as having a political agenda. A more objective figure may achieve better results.

The potential plight or impact of governmental policies on farmers themselves emerged as a concern in focus group sessions. Some participants opined about the "poor small farmers," or were worried about large farms monopolizing food production. This issue was combined with the topic of subsidies in general. Therefore, an obstacle that appeared across the executions of all of the frames is that if you want to change governmental or other policies to increase health, you must be prepared for public reactions, which include concerns over small farmers and the farming industry. Individuals may be sidetracked about poor or small farmers and their survival, as opposed to the bigger picture of public health. Thus, the sympathy for the small farmer may overwhelm the other communications in the argument. In the argument, it may be helpful to convey a sense of protection for the small farmer, or "the little guy."

### Public Environment Frame

Participants had difficulty moving beyond health individualism to embrace public policy options when exposed to the article representing the Public Environment Frame. Participants did not find the solutions presented in this article as viable in their communities. In addition, the argument as expressed in the article brought participants toward a dominant frame related to safety which undermines the perceived feasibility of the solution. In order to prevent the emergence of the dominant safety frame, the perception of safety could be addressed explicitly in the article. Participants also became entrenched in the notion that the problem is multifaceted and that no one solution will work by itself. Moreover, to make the argument more effective the communication of the frame should present solutions that are community specific, have demonstrated efficacy, and are supported with more data.

Interestingly, many participants were skeptical of the non-profit organization communicating the message for the Public Environment Frame article; it appears that participants have a fear that non-profit organizations may have an agenda, and may be influenced by the government. The message could potentially be communicated more effectively if it was delivered by an independent research group associated with academia or by a university.

### **The Fitness/Kids Frame**

The communication of the Fitness/Kids Frame tested here was relatively successful in moving people away from health individualism. Participants quickly identified their children as common stakeholders in the future. Participants readily accepted the idea that public entities could improve the health of children. The aspects of this frame that were difficult for some participants to grasp were that changes in public entities could enhance health for adults, not just children. Participants appeared to get stuck with the idea of only focusing on the children and thought less about themselves. It may be helpful for the execution of the frame to include a critical mass or contagious component. The proposition put forth by many participants in the group was that parents need to get children away from the television, encourage them to go outside, and then others (other parents and children) will follow suit.

Participants were concerned with finances and where the money would come from for community planning. To make the execution of the frame more effective, the argument needs to address the issue of finances and provide the participants with reasonable financial solutions.

Public solutions that successfully instigate such “tipping point” phenomena may be helpful case studies to include in the article to help citizens move past individual choice to an interest in community-based initiatives.

### **The Public Health Frame**

Participants liked the idea of walkability (making the community more walkable) and they were engaged by the tobacco analogy. Nonetheless, even though participants liked the idea of “walkability,” many failed to make the general connection of community

planning to inactivity (the frame). More data about the importance of walking could be helpful to strengthen the execution of the frame. Additionally it may be helpful to downplay the walkability issue to some degree, introducing other aspects where the public health frame might apply. Participants also noted that that the cul-de-sacs referenced in the article are beneficial rather than detrimental because they often appeared safe and invited physical activity (opposite to the argument). It may be useful to drop this reference from the article insofar as it may undermine the argument overall.

Some participants were distracted by the tobacco analogy and became focused on second hand smoke rather than physical fitness. The analogy was so powerful that participants began to skim over the issue of inactivity. It may be useful in the execution of the frame to bring the reader back more directly to the issue of inactivity. Also more specific examples or statistical evidence of the dangers of inactivity may help with this.

### **Cross-Frame Comparisons**

In addition to the frame-specific findings discussed above, this research also uncovered some important findings that generalize across all of the frames. Perhaps of greatest significance were:

#### **1. Political party affiliation differences observed across all of the frames:**

- Republicans, in general, had a more difficult time accepting the frames than did Democrats. Republican participants were more likely to fixate on concerns about governmental control, finances, and idealistic thinking, or as a few participants put it, the “utopian thinking” of those whose views differed from their own. In addition, Republicans were less willing to accept the tax increase for the Healthy Communities Initiative.
- Democrats, on the other hand, were somewhat more accepting of the frames. They were less likely to get sidetracked by issues such as governmental control and finances. However, they were more easily distracted by the tobacco analogy. For example, in the Democrat group from Detroit, participants opined at length about the dangers of second-hand smoke, despite repeated attempts at redirection by the moderator. Democrats were also, in general, more accepting of the messengers presented in each of the articles.

#### **2. Teenagers’ responses to the frames differ from those of adults.**

This research discovered that, with teenagers, the executions of the frames need to be grounded more in the teen experience. Teenagers generally expressed a desire for the articles to include more content that is relevant to what they go through in that stage of life. For example, issues such as farmers markets, the Farm Bill, and governmental control were found to be remote or abstract. There were also some other obstacles to teen acceptance of the frames, namely feasibility, finances, and food taste. Teenagers appeared to simplify the topic to what they specifically consume daily, and connect this to their common experience; for example, junk food, soda, and cafeteria food were

frequently discussed. Teenagers did not typically discuss macro-level and policy insights from the articles. This is not surprising, given the limited world experience and education of teenagers, but important nonetheless. Teenagers focused on their immediate environment and experience in understanding the concept of food choice. They did not appear to connect food availability, choice, and price to governmental policies (to the extent that adults do). It was important for teenagers to have quick access to cheap food that suited their preferences.

However, some of the teenage participants were aware that fitness and nutrition could be improved, but felt that it was fairly unrealistic as presented. Many of the teenage participants suggested that there were many McDonald's or other fast food restaurants in close proximity to school, and they had limited time for lunch. They also said, in general, that they do not have the financial resources to spend money on a healthy lunch (when they could get a double cheeseburger for one dollar). Teenagers had a hard time getting past the preconceived notion that unhealthy food tastes much better than healthy foods. However, teenagers do see themselves as representing the future and therefore appear to be open to taking on some responsibility for better health and fitness. Capitalizing on this sense of responsibility may be an opportunity to improve the execution of this frame.

### **3. Perceptions of “Physically Active” versus “Fitness”**

People define being physically active as one component of fitness. For example, the phrase “physically active” was often associated with being *active, running, walking, and swimming*, whereas fitness was associated with *health, exercise, mental and emotional health*. The Des Moines Democrats described the difference as: *One contributes to the other...fitness is a perfect purpose...fitness is a lot of things mental, physical, and emotional*. Moreover, participants across groups viewed physically active as being *fun*, and fitness as being *work*. For example, Seattle Republicans said that the word fitness was associated with *discipline, health club, diet, and exercise*, and physically active was associated with *exercise, health, and athletics*. Other examples of relevant quotes include:

*I think that being physically active is one component of fitness. I think fitness is comprehensive, ... fitness encompasses a lot of things: physical being, physically active is just one of those things. I think fitness includes having your mind fit, having your family life healthy, having your finances in order, being physically active is just a portion of it. – Male Democrat Seattle*

*I am a carpenter and a very active person. I physically work every day of my life and do a lot of outside activities, but I wouldn't say that I am all that fit because I have had a weight problem my entire life. Fitness is a whole physical picture. Physical activity is just a component of fitness. –Male Republican Detroit*

*Fitness is a conscious effort. Fitness is more of a lifestyle and going to the gym. Physically active is just being active. –Male Republican, Albuquerque*

*Fitness is the end result of being physically active. But it doesn't necessarily come about just because you're physically active. It comes about because you focus on it and hopefully is the end result. –Male Democrat Seattle*

### **Recommendations**

The next step in the research process is to utilize the insights from the focus groups to adjust how these alternative frames are communicated in the articles. By making these adjustments in light of the qualitative findings, we will have the proper stimulus materials for inclusion in a *quantitative* experimental survey designed to provide empirical estimates of the impact of the alternative frames on public opinion dynamics.

Before detailing our suggestions for potential refinements to each of the articles, it is important to highlight our belief—based on the qualitative research—that the Public Environment Frame may have the least potential for moving citizens beyond the dominant frame of health individualism. For a variety of reasons as detailed throughout this report, the Public Environment Frame triggers a strong focus on individual choice. Moreover, the solutions presented are viewed by many as unrealistic and we saw that receptivity to the argument did not improve materially when we attempted to revise the execution of the frame by introducing new examples of model cities in the article. While the Public Environment Frame itself could of course be more viable if properly executed in terms of how the argument is communicated, our recommendation is to focus on the more “low hanging fruit” opportunities to strengthen how the remaining frames are executed since they are already much more effective at eliciting the desired effects.

Our recommendations for key adjustments to the execution of each of the remaining frames are as follows:

- Food Systems Frame
  - Make the connection to the local level in terms of public solution opportunities to increase relevance. Focusing at the national scale of the Farm Bill makes the problem less tangible and therefore may undermine support because the issue is perceived as too far beyond local community efforts. The article should include more local community-focused content.
  - Don't just make the case of the runaway food system without including clear insights for what public policy solutions are available to address the problem. Citizens respond to the argument that the problem exists, but they need to see what the policy opportunities are; asking for people to simply “pay attention” to the Farm Bill isn't enough of a call to action. The article should articulate what specific new/changed policy opportunities exist and merit support.
  - Alleviate concerns that the small farmer would lose out in the course of public solutions to the runaway food system problem. Sympathy for the “little guy” can sidetrack citizens from thinking about the bigger picture of public health implications. The article should highlight how society



at all levels will benefit with public solutions to the problem, and not at the (unreasonable) expense of the farming community.

- Fitness/Kids Frame
  - To further strengthen what is already a relatively compelling argument, explicitly incorporate the idea that public solutions can instigate a “tipping point” phenomenon in terms of spreading healthy, active living habits communitywide. Perhaps including an example from a successful community where such an occurrence has taken place would help reinforce the idea that implementing public solutions (e.g., after school programs, PE reinstated in schools) can have an effect on public health beyond just the children who are directly involved. This would indicate how such policies can yield a very strong overall return on investment due to the potential breadth of positive impact.
- Public Health Frame
  - Between the third and fourth paragraphs, there is no explicit bridge from the tobacco analogy back to the inactivity problem. Otherwise the tobacco analogy is almost too powerful and can take the reader off point from considering the dangers of inactivity.
  - Walkability may be perceived as too narrow of a solution to the health problem. Therefore, the article may be more effective if it incorporates other objectives beyond facilitating walking as the strategy to overcome the public health problem associated with inactivity.

Additionally, there are some cross-frame considerations that should be evaluated in re-visiting all of the articles:

- Across **\*All\*** Frames
  - Be clear about how these public solutions can be paid for (e.g., highlight how some specific example of current “wasteful” government spending can be re-directed to fund this entire effort and would still leave money left over). Otherwise, questions about who will foot the bill are likely to undermine the argument.
  - When introducing fitness opportunities that call for outdoor living and public spaces, show how safety can be ensured through practical means. Otherwise, concerns about crime and safety can leave citizens feeling that proposed solutions are not viable in American communities today.

As we work toward the quantitative experimental survey, it may be valuable to develop two distinct executions for each of the frames (Food Systems, Fitness/Kids, Public Health). By having two versions per frame, we will have the opportunity to analyze the extent to which the effectiveness of the frame is sensitive to specific approaches of executing its communication. This approach would yield a total of six monadic cells for the experiment (three frames x two articles each). Through this quantitative method we will be able to provide a rank ordering of the different frames in terms of their

effectiveness in helping citizens move beyond health individualism to beliefs and preferences in support of public solutions.

***About FrameWorks Institute:*** The FrameWorks Institute is an independent nonprofit organization founded in 1999 to advance science-based communications research and practice. The Institute conducts original, multi-method research to identify the communications strategies that will advance public understanding of social problems and improve public support for remedial policies. The Institute's work also includes teaching the nonprofit sector how to apply these science-based communications strategies in their work for social change. The Institute publishes its research and recommendations, as well as toolkits and other products for the nonprofit sector at [www.frameworksinstitute.org](http://www.frameworksinstitute.org).

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*Guide*Appendix

- I. Opening remarks (20 minutes)
  - a. Moderator information
  - b. Session parameters
    - i. Confidentiality
    - ii. No right or wrong answers
    - iii. Videotaping of groups
  - c. Participant introductions
    - i. First name
    - ii. Family status
    - iii. Occupation
    - iv. How do you stay involved in your local community? What types of organizations are you involved with?
  - d. Purpose of session: Today, we're going to talk about your opinions regarding issues in the news. Remember, there are no right or wrong answers so please be as open and honest as you can.
  - e. I'm going to toss out some words and I want you to tell me the first associations that come to mind, and as many as you can think of. Don't think too hard about this, just blurt out the first thing that comes to mind (rotate order in groups).

Health  
 Healthy community  
 Fresh food  
 Fitness  
 Quality of life  
 Physically active  
 Obesity  
 Local produce  
 Lifestyle

Probe: what's the difference between fitness and physically active?

- II. Frame Evaluation (60 minutes)
  - a. We have lots of interesting things to talk with you about tonight. We're going to read a number of different articles and talk about the issues they raise and how we feel about them, as citizens and neighbors and moms and dads. After each one, we'll try to wipe our minds clean and approach each one with fresh eyes. Please take a minute to read the article and we will then discuss your reactions to it.
    - i. [SEE ATTACHMENT FOR REVISED SECTION II GUIDE CONTENT]

- III. Policy Evaluation exercise (30 minutes)
- a. **Exercise: Break participants into pairs (one triad if necessary). Give each group a copy of the “Healthy Communities Initiative” handout. Read instructions aloud and answer any questions they may have.**

**INSTRUCTIONS:**

“For this exercise, you and your partner will help draft talking points for a speech that is to be made to your local city council. The speech is designed to support the **Healthy Communities Initiative**. The primary goal of the speech is to get people to vote for the **Healthy Communities Initiative**. To help organize the speech, you and your partner will decide who you would like to deliver the speech and what the main points of the speech will be. When deciding who is to give the speech, please choose a member of your community--anyone you think would be credible with voters in your community and your city council.. Also, you can use anything you learned from the articles we’ve read together that you found especially helpful.

Remember these are talking points, not the text of the whole speech. The speech should have one primary talking point. This is called the main message, and it should be the primary thing that you would like your speech to communicate.

In addition to the main message, you should have 3 to 6 supporting points that are also communicated in your speech.

Please take a moment to read the handout describing the **Healthy Communities Initiative**. You and your partner will have 10 minutes to organize your speech.

**(Give participants 10-15 minutes to complete exercise.)**

Have each set of participants answer all questions before moving to next set of participants:

- i. Who would you like to deliver your speech?
- ii. What is your speech’s “main message”?
- iii. What are your supporting points?
- iv. Why did you decide on this main message?
- v. Did any of the articles influence your speech? Which one(s)? How?
- vi. Would you personally vote for the Healthy Communities Initiative?

Final exercise related question for the whole group after all sets have answered the above questions:

-Which of the three components of the initiative (as shown in the 3 boxes) do you see as having the potential to have the most significant impact in keeping communities healthy over the long term?

- IV. Final thoughts / wrap-up (10 minutes)
- a. We’ve had a good time tonight discussing a range of articles and topics together. When you go home, and you talk to your spouse, mother, next-door neighbor and they say, what were you discussing in that focus group, what

would you say? What's the one thing that sticks with you from all that we've discussed?

## **SECTION II: FRAME EVALUATION**

### **ARTICLE 1:**

Was there anything written in this article that was new information for you and could change the way you think about these issues?

-What specifically within the article made you feel this way? Why?

### **SUMMARIZE ARGUMENT:**

**Now let me provide a short recap on the article for you...**

The article talks about the idea that all these things are connected...governmental policies favor certain crops, and this leads to a food production system that ultimately dictates what food is available to us, what we most want to eat, and how healthy or unhealthy we are. According to the article, the indirect result of these policies then is that we tend to have more unhealthy appetites and less fruits and vegetables in our diet, and this has negative consequences for public health.

Had you thought about our current national health and nutrition situation in this way before?

Do you buy into this argument or not? Why?

(If not because reverting to individualism, then ask: "Is *any* part of the situation that we're in due to these bigger issues beyond individual choices?")

What else would you need to know about this line of argument to really be convinced about this being the source of the problem?

How is your reaction to the article shaped by the fact that it was written by...?

**ARTICLE 2:**

Was there anything written in this article that was new information for you and could change the way you think about these issues?

-What specifically within the article made you feel this way? Why?

**SUMMARIZE ARGUMENT:**

**Now let me provide a short recap on the article for you...**

The article talks about the idea that public spaces can improve people's lives through better health and well-being...physical structures have a significant impact on how healthy or unhealthy we are.

Had you thought about our current national health and nutrition situation in this way before?

Do you buy into this argument or not? Why?

(If not because reverting to individualism, then ask: "Is any part of the situation that we're in due to these bigger issues beyond individual choices?")

What else would you need to know about this line of argument to really be convinced about this being the source of the problem?

How is your reaction to the article shaped by the fact that the message is coming from this non-profit foundation?

**ARTICLE 3/4:**ARTICLE 3

Was there anything written in this article that was new information for you and could change the way you think about these issues?

-What specifically within the article made you feel this way? Why?

ARTICLE 4

Was there anything written in this article that was new information for you and could change the way you think about these issues?

-What specifically within the article made you feel this way? Why?

SUMMARIZE ARGUMENT FOR 3 AND 4 COMBINED:

**Now let me provide a short recap on these letters to the editor for you...**

These letters to the editor talk about the idea that there are systemic factors leading to kids getting less physical activity, and this has a significant impact on how healthy or unhealthy we are. Therefore, the letters suggest that urban planning should be focused on enabling Americans to walk more.

Had you thought about our current national health and nutrition situation in this way before?

Do you buy into this argument or not? Why?

(If not because reverting to individualism, then ask: “Is any part of the situation that we’re in due to these bigger issues beyond individual choices?”)

What else would you need to know about this line of argument to really be convinced about this being the source of the problem?

How is your reaction to these letters shaped by the fact that they were written by a father and teacher and a medical doctor and public health director?

*Articles*

Article #1 (FOOD SYSTEMS FRAME)

Reprinted from the Boise Beacon Journal (ID), January 26, 2007

You've Got to Eat: How the Food System Affects Us All

Food production -- from farm to fork -- is the mother of all social issues. This year we have a chance to correct many of the documented problems in our food system that have gotten out of hand, from subsidies for the very things that make us fat to unfair policies that shut new farmers out, and contaminate the land for future generations.

Many are already responding:

- Business has rushed to meet consumer demand for more nutritious foods. The organic foods category is growing five times faster than conventionally packaged foods.
- Local governments have also responded. New York City became the first jurisdiction to ban trans fats from restaurant kitchens. Recognizing that kids who aren't healthy have a harder time learning, California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger has put school nutrition and obesity on the state's agenda.
- Consumers--in search of fresher, locally-grown foods and a deeper connection with their sources--spent over \$1billion at farmers markets last year.
- Officials at more than 200 universities and 400 school districts are supporting a "farm-to-cafeteria" movement, seeking ways to bring locally produced fruit and vegetables into cafeterias.

But much more remains to be done to take our food system in the right direction. This massive infrastructure that affects so many aspects of American life must be overhauled.

This year, policy makers have an opportunity to play catch up with this broad-based food movement as the Farm Bill comes up for renewal. Since the 1930's, Congress, through the Farm Bill, has largely determined what's for dinner across America. And the menu has been limited to a handful of crops--corn, cotton, rice, soybeans, wheat, and sugar. Their by-products and how they are used in food production have driven our desire for meat and beef, and given us a major sweet tooth, among other appetites. Fruits and vegetables, remarkably, aren't even on the menu. They are considered "specialty crops".

There are some serious side-effects of these policies. Today, the food system is like a runaway train -- out of control, with no one at the helm. The way we produce food today has radically changed, and now has the power to alter the foundations of life as we know it, almost by accident. Farming chemicals like pesticides and weed-killer are permanently altering our soil and water. Genetic engineering is changing the nature of the plants and animals we eat. And mile-long fishing nets are dragging the ocean floor and altering



ecosystems. America needs to retake control of this runaway food system before it does more damage to the foundations we depend on.

In mostly hidden and subtle ways the Farm Bill shapes how we feed ourselves and our children, how we fight hunger and obesity, and how we sustain our land and keep our air and water clean, rewarding the few and compromising the legacy of our food system. So, we must all pay attention because the Farm Bill does not simply impact farmers.

*Michael Litzker is president of the Farm to Food Alliance, a national coalition of nonprofit groups, and a farmer in Idaho Falls, ID.*

### Article #2 (PUBLIC ENVIRONMENT FRAME)

**New York Times, April 16, 2006**

#### **Three Cities Receive National Attention for Innovation**

The Community Quality of Life Foundation has announced the winners of its Excellence in Civic Wellbeing award. This year, three cities earned the Foundation's top honor for leadership in creating public environments that demonstrably improve residents' health and wellbeing: Springfield, MA, Roanoke, VA and Richmond, IN.

"Public officials make decisions every day in zoning and in the design of public spaces that directly affect the health and wellbeing of communities. Drive through any metropolitan area and the neighborhoods will change dramatically. Some have public environments that encourage health while others don't - this creates a Patchwork Effect in the nation's health picture. We've seen the impact physical structures can have in improving people's lives, and we're using these awards to highlight the best examples of change," explained Alan Robson, CEO of the Foundation.

"We felt we could make progress on our quality of life in Springfield if we created more spaces for public activities," suggested Myron Wear, Mayor of this Massachusetts town. "Research strongly suggests that places with the most serious problems like poor health, domestic violence, and failing education have few community structures, such as community centers, health clinics or parks. We worked with citizens to put together a master plan to renovate abandoned buildings and parks. Two of the centers have early education programs, and parents are running recreation activities in every park. People are healthier and happier in these minority communities which had been Springfield's highest at-risk areas for many health problems."

“Our biggest concern was addressing the increasing rate of mental health problems in Roanoke as well as nationwide. Scientific evidence indicates that green spaces can help address a range of mental health issues from depression to behavioral problems, so we started with a pilot study 10 years ago that was so successful we’ve spread the program to 10 neighborhoods across the city,” explained Mayor Alexander Hintz of Roanoke, VA. By building safe parks with after-school recreation next to schools, the city noted improvement in children’s ability to focus and learn in school and a reduction of school expulsions due to behavior. Doctors also credit the parks with relieving depression among adults even in Roanoke's poorest areas.

“A town like Richmond has few resources,” noted Mayor Jane Berry. “We’re surrounded by farmland, but the only place to buy groceries is the Wal-Mart 20 miles outside town. Consequently, many of our residents rely on unhealthy, processed foods or so-called ‘fresh’ fruits and vegetables trucked in from 1500 miles away. We set aside public spaces for farmers markets at 10 locations around the city. Nutrition has improved and our local farmers have more income. A win for everyone!”

“We hope that these three stellar examples will encourage citizens and mayors in other cities to take actionable steps to create public spaces that improve lives,” stated Robson, the Foundation CEO.

Article 2A- Article changed from Detroit on to be more Republican friendly.  
Used for both Republicans and Democrats.

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The first award went to Tempe, AZ for a partnership between the Chamber of Commerce and city government. In an effort to reduce health care costs and improve employee performance and morale, Chamber businesses agreed to

offer extended lunch hours to employees interested in exercising during the work day. The city invested in the effort by providing a subsidized low-cost multi-year lease on a dilapidated building near downtown for employee use. The chamber businesses rehabbed the facility to accommodate a walking track, indoor ball courts, and sports equipment. A rock climbing wall was added using city funds to accommodate children, who sometimes accompany employees on weekends. A team of volunteer accountants have been monitoring the impact on a sample of small, medium and large-sized businesses; to date, their analysis indicates that employee participation significantly lowers health costs. "Employee health is a win-win for business and for local government," says Sam McDonald, CEO of Manny's Restaurants, one of the early sponsors. "As people have gotten healthier, they have looked around their communities and begun to involve their businesses in creating more public spaces for people to use. The project is having a snowball effect on the entire area, with business and local government partnerships as the cornerstone."

The second award went to the town of Belmont, MA which hosted its third annual "Belmont Unplugged," a month-long slate of activities that encourages residents to "unplug their electronics" and "plug into" active outdoor living. Throughout the month, the town sponsored a variety of programs that did not require electricity and that emphasized health, physical activity, and team sports. There were gardening classes, low impact nature hikes, free family swims at the high school pool, a kickball tournament, and even a town square dance.

The Neighborhood Council, made up of parents, kids and even local business owners, turned the momentum from "Belmont Unplugged" into a project with lasting effects. "We realized the town simply needed more public places for unplugged activities," said Neighborhood Council member, Joe Drinan. The Neighborhood Council successfully convinced the Town Planning Board to pave over a much used in-town parking lot and fill it with sod, trees and benches. The new park has become a hub of year-round activity for kids and families alike. In addition to hosting exercise classes and sports leagues for all ages, it is the spot for the town's newly established Farmer's Market that features an enticing assortment of fresh foods for healthier lifestyles. "The amount of space this took was so little compared to what it delivers for the community," said town planner, Marcus Bean.

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Article 2T-Used with all teens to be more teenager friendly

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The first award went to the town of Belmont, MA which hosted its third annual “Belmont Unplugged,” a month-long slate of activities that encourages residents to “unplug their electronics” and “plug into” active outdoor living. Throughout the month, the town sponsored a variety of programs that did not require electricity and that emphasized health, physical activity, and team sports. There were gardening classes, low impact nature hikes, free family swims at the high school pool, a kickball tournament, and even a town square dance.

The Neighborhood Council, made up of parents, kids and even local business owners, turned the momentum from “Belmont Unplugged” into a project with lasting effects. “We realized the town simply needed more public places for unplugged activities,” said Neighborhood Council member, Joe Drinan. The Neighborhood Council successfully convinced the Town Planning Board to pave over a much used in-town parking lot and fill it with sod, trees and benches. The new park has become a hub of year-round activity for kids and families alike. In addition to hosting exercise classes and sports leagues for all ages, it is the spot for the town’s newly established Farmer’s Market that features an enticing assortment of fresh foods for healthier lifestyles. “The amount of space this took was so little compared to what it delivers for the community,” said town planner, Marcus Bean.

The second award went to Waterville, VA. A group of Waterville teens, frustrated that their high school only offered varsity sports and no regular P.E. classes, enlisted the help of the Mount Auburn Club, one of the most popular health clubs in town. The result: an after-school program called “Jump In,” which runs Monday through Thursday, from 2 – 6 pm. During that time, young people can choose from a menu of physical activities, including high ropes and indoor rock-climbing, power yoga, salsa dancing, and swimming. The Mount Auburn Club provides the facilities free of charge. Students secured additional funding—for the staff and supplies—from the Whole Foods Foundation and Josh Hoben, a local philanthropist and member of the health club. “I was impressed that these young people identified what they wanted and looked for a real solution,” said Hoben. “Our community is truly strengthened by their resourcefulness and their desire to live healthier lives.” Now the city council is considering getting in on the act, having recently explored public funding requirements to sponsor an outdoor component to the program to be hosted at the park down the block from the health club. “I love coming here every day,” said Stephanie Hamden, a sophomore at Waterville High. “I used to think that sports were just for jocks, but now I see that there are so many different ways to be active. And I’m making friends with kids I never really knew before.”

The third award went to Richmond, IN. “A town like Richmond has few resources,” noted Mayor Jane Berry. “We’re surrounded by farmland, but the only place to buy groceries is the Wal-Mart 20 miles outside town. Consequently, many of our residents rely on unhealthy, processed foods or so-called ‘fresh’ fruits and vegetables trucked in from 1500 miles away. We set aside public spaces for farmers markets at 10 locations around the city. Nutrition has improved and our local farmers have more income. A win for everyone!”

“We hope that these three stellar examples will encourage citizens and mayors in other cities to take actionable steps to create public spaces that improve lives,” stated Robson, the Foundation CEO.

### Article #3 (THE FITNESS/KIDS FRAME)

## WE GET MAIL SECTION OF THE ST. LOUIS POST DISPATCH, SEPTEMBER 2006

*READERS DISCUSS THE NEED FOR HEALTHIER COMMUNITIES*

### **Fitness is a Public Good**

Children are America’s future, and our children’s future is all dependent upon their health. Increased attention to testing in schools has eliminated not only art and music from our children’s lives, but also physical education. And little has been done to make up for that loss, with predictable results for our society. Our kids are increasingly

sedentary and overweight – and that problem will have long-term effects on our workforce and our health care costs.

As a father of two, an admitted health advocate and a high school teacher, I believe that neighborhoods are friendlier to cars than to pedestrians and are built to be unsafe for kids. It's not an accident, it's the way we have allowed our communities to be organized, from our schools to our bike paths.

I am part of a movement to improve public health -- and ease other problems, such as traffic congestion -- by making it easier and more desirable to walk in our communities. The movement has created suburban neighborhoods where homes, schools and businesses are connected by walking and bike trails, and new urban centers where large numbers of people live next to shopping, entertainment and mass transit facilities.

If we want all of our communities to become stakeholders in our future, we need to get them a piece of the action. That means safe places to bike and play, and community gardens need to happen not only in my backyard, but in theirs as well. We can start by bringing back physical education in schools. But PE can't provide children all the physical activity they need. Because young people get about 70% of their physical activity after school, it is essential that we design good programs after school, in parks or other places. We can test our streets for the degree to which they promote walking and biking, including their safety from both traffic and violence. And we can develop routes that bring more children to school by foot or bike. Shouldn't our public dollars be buying everyone a healthy stake in the future?

If health is a common good, as economists are beginning to believe, then having a walking-friendly environment is an important indicator on an admittedly broader list that communities need to measure regularly. Public officials need to make sure that our society is organized in a way that actually promotes the common good. And kids' health – all our kids' health -- should be the place we start. Walk, don't run, to your next meeting with an elected official and let them know that you want to see policies that promote community health – in all our communities.

Sam Malone, St. Charles

Article #4 (THE PUBLIC HEALTH FRAME)

### **Inactivity is Making Us Sick**

Increasingly, it is apparent that physical activity has been engineered out of our every day lives. Over the past few decades, public policies and economics have changed patterns of land use and shaped the design of our communities in ways that make us less active.

Inactivity has severe consequences, both for us as individuals and as a nation. The relationship between inactivity and coronary heart disease is so strong that a recent report from the Surgeon General estimated inactive lifestyles to be responsible for 200,000 deaths per year, second only to tobacco (400,000 deaths per year). The economic consequences are equally dramatic, with direct medical costs of inactivity estimated to be similar to the medical costs of smoking.

Before we understood the dangers of second-hand smoke, we viewed smoking as an individual choice and rarely regulated restaurants and other public places. Today, that has changed, and we recognize that smoking is a public issue. It is a relatively new idea that the design of communities is contributing greatly to the most serious health problems of our time, but there is a lot of evidence to suggest this is so.

People in neighborhoods that facilitate and promote walking have been estimated to have 1 – 2 more walk trips per week than people residing in other areas. This translates to 15 – 30 minutes of additional walking per week, which would expend enough energy to keep roughly 2 pounds of weight gain off annually – about what the average adult gains each year.

Research from the fields of transportation and planning tells us that the following changes have the greatest potential: (1) more mixed land use (like putting supermarkets, movie theatres and restaurants in residential areas, not in shopping malls many miles away), (2) building higher residential density (taller buildings, but more parklands as well), and (3) streets with more traditional grid patterns and intersections, not winding streets with cul de sacs. Suburban sprawl and urban disinvestment are major contributors to our deteriorating physical health. To make Americans more physically active, we need to do things like: put in sidewalks that lead from homes to shops, enhance those sidewalks trees, install pedestrian signals at intersections, and work with churches, schools and worksites to get people using those sidewalks.

Bill Norton, M. D., Public Health Director, City of Lewiston, MO