

Changing the Built Environment through Grass-Roots, Media Advocacy

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Thank you, Ed. Thank you everybody for the opportunity to participate in this session. I'm going to give kind of a case study of an example of a campaign that did change the place and is still changing the place, the place being Columbia, Missouri, the town where I live and work. And in order to do that, I'm going to have to give a little background to our organization and our goals of our organization and to a subject that may not be mentioned anywhere else in this conference, which is engineering standards for streets. I know, I think there's a lot of intersection between that area and health marketing, but in fact as I hope I can show you, there is a real intersection in this case. Then describe the campaign.

When I moved to Columbia, Missouri, which was about eight or nine years ago, one of the first things that struck me, I come from Manchester in the United Kingdom and I had always been a cyclist for my transportation, was that it was very difficult to get around the town walking and bicycling and I ran into a number of other people who had the same thoughts and we decided to form an organization to try and build public support for a more multi model approach transportation design in the town. The town's about a hundred thousand population. There's a major, statewide university, the University of Missouri, in the town, so a lot of very broad-minded people and a very international population as well, and our goal to create a network of paths and trails throughout the city in order to improve people's health, as well as many other benefits to the community, was very well received. And this was our sort of conceptual plan for the city, which included various different types of multi-model paths all across the city, which the scale of that map is about six or seven miles across and we proposed putting bicycle lanes or separated paths on all of the major streets. The vision of the organization then was in two parts. Firstly, a healthy and active community, especially children because we see children as the next generation of voters and participants in public social dialogue that can really carry a message and create a cultural change, and secondly, an infrastructure that supports the physical activity in terms of trails and sidewalks and bicycle lanes. Unfortunately, the reality that we live within Columbia and in really many towns in the United States and in the developed world is a sedentary population and an infrastructure that really fails to support active living like this typical business loop photograph here. Imagine being a pedestrian or cyclist there trying to do your shopping. Our organizational model is in two parts and both of them, I think, satisfy Bill's criteria and have been more than simply a message.

Firstly, we developed programs that people can participate in, in order to get out and be more active. Walking to school, an annual event where we lay on breakfast stations for anybody's whose biking to work, that kind of thing. We use those programs to build a support base that gives us political leverage to push for new policies that will change the physical infrastructure. So, that's the second part of it and in this presentation I'll be talking mostly about the, that one policy change in particular that we achieved.

Here are examples of the programs. We have a walking school bus program where adult volunteers lead groups of children from the neighborhood to the school, every day. Have hundreds of children participating in this program and we have pictures from some of our other walking and biking promotional events and programs there.

Our policy successes include passage of sales tax issues in order to fund more infrastructure. The adoption of that master plan that I showed you the map earlier is now official. City of Columbia policy for the long range transportation plan. Funding for our organization to further our programming and policy goals. The fourth one is what I'm going to concentrate on here, a new street design standard policy and most recently in our town we were very proud to be one of just four communities to receive a twenty five million dollar federal grant to build out and to promote you solve a bicycle pedestrian multi model transportation network, which is now in full swing. Just a quick review here of the organizational model as to see how these two approaches support each other.

I need to talk a little bit about street design standards. These are policies that most communities have on the book that decide and define how roads should be built and they'll say how wide lanes should be, whether they should be sidewalks, where the parking is allowed. There is a whole lot of different categories of road. Here are two examples where the street design standards didn't really take into account the need to cyclists and pedestrians. You can see in the upper picture there is what we refer to as a goat path, where people walk along a very busy and uninviting road for a pedestrian. But, nevertheless people need to do that and maybe some people want to do that, so there's a pathway there. And here's a very brave cyclist trying to survive on a high volume road with narrow driving lanes. This was the street design standards in Columbia, Missouri in 2001 when the campaign started. A thirty-two feet residential street, that's a very wide street, much wider than is necessary for a residential area and the result is that cars drive very fast. I'm even guilty of this, everybody is, when you have a wide street with lots of visibility, you tend to get sucked into driving faster. Narrow streets are very effective at reducing the speed of traffic, especially in residential areas. Sidewalks were only required on the residential streets, not on any of the streets that connected the residential areas to the commercial and employment areas. No bike lanes or other kind of bicycle accommodation was required.

I'm just going to quickly run through some pictures to illustrate. Here, you can see how, as a motorist, you're not going to be doing thirty-five miles an hour through that neighborhood. The street winds. It's narrow. You might be meeting oncoming cars. A very natural way to control the speed of traffic and make it safer for pedestrians. Wide sidewalks, especially if they're designed in such a way that they're safe for cyclists to use are very effective on wide, high volume streets, major collect and arterial streets to allow bike traffic to get around. You have to be a little careful about cross streets because there's the tendency for cyclists to ride out into a cross street unless there's a stop sign for the cyclist and clear indication that they're reaching a point where they're entering the roadway. Safe crossings is another example of good street design that benefits pedestrians, bicycle lanes. This is a little pair of pictures here of a retro fit on a street. I'm afraid I've forgotten which city this is in, but anyway, you can see this is not a friendly street for cyclists and pedestrians. There is a shoulder on both sides, which cyclists can use with reasonable safety, but it's not very attractive. This is what they turn it into. There are now sidewalks on both sides of the street. There are bicycle lanes on both sides of the street. In

fact, on the right side of the sidewalk is a multi-use path that can be used by cyclists, as well. A cross walk here and just improving the aesthetic of the street. When you're in a car, people are in a car, they're generally just focused on getting where they're going. When people are walking or bicycling, having street trees, having some shade, having nice architecture to look at rather than great open concrete spaces is very important and they did all of this in this. I'll just flip back to show what it was like before and after.

So I think at this point, I'm going to pass out, Ed, could you do me a favor? If you could go down the line and just however many people in each row, there's five separate newspaper articles there that kind of chart the events of the end of the campaign. This was a three-year campaign. We really set our sites. We looked at the existing street standards. We were having a hard time every time a new street was proposed in making sure that at least a sidewalk was put in. We had to go to tremendous number of meetings and go to see the city staff and make the case that a lot of people in this part of town will want to walk. There's a school here. We've got ensure that these kids can walk to school and it was a nightmare for an entirely unfunded non-profit organization as we were at that time to do that. We realized that, in order to get ahead of the game, we needed to change the policy and we looked at the policy and the policy as I've showed you required almost, in terms of bike path accommodations. So, we started with public outreach, building our membership and basically getting people to sign a petition that they wanted to see multi-modal systems in the town. We called our supporters 'members', but we didn't ever charge a dime in membership. Once in awhile somebody actually donated some money to us, which was wonderful, but this was actually very effective because we could go out to community festivals and public events with our photographs from some of the cities that are already well appointed with bike path accommodations like Boulder; Madison, Wisconsin; Davis, California; Portland, Oregon. We visited those towns, took photographs, created that street display system and convinced people, almost a hundred percent of people we spoke to, that this was a good thing for our town and they signed the petition and became a member and within a few years we had over five thousand members. We now have about six and a half thousand members in a town of a hundred thousand who have signed their name to our goal. This created some political force because our website listed all the names of the people that had signed and we were able to quote this in media interviews and so on. We recruited advocates in a number of different fields to speak for the change that we were looking for and I listed those there. Having physicians and health researchers with academic research to quote about the benefits of a community that supports physical activity was very helpful. School principals and teachers could talk about the more effective education they were able to communicate when the kids have been active and the benefits of walking to school. We recruited business leaders who said you know, this is not, one of the big criticisms we had to counter was that this was going to cost too much money and it was going to ruin the economy of the town and many business leaders were able to refute that by looking at places like Denver and Boulder where the economy is doing just great and they have very walkable, bikeable business districts, thank you. Government leaders as well; we had allies inside the city government and on the City Council, including the mayor of Columbia who is actually a national name in supporting this kind of thing. His name is Darwin Kleinman and he campaigns nationally for more walkable, bikeable communities and we were able to provide the political support that he needed to really push this at the political level on the Council and with the city staff.

We conducted a media campaign and I just kind of quickly talked through some of the articles here. This was all towards the end of the whole campaign in 2004. There are two editorials about three weeks apart and if you read these later you'll see how the position of the editor of the newspaper, editor and publisher, changed over the course of that period. Initially, we wrote to him and telephoned him and put our case and he wrote the first editorial. Then we actually managed to get a meeting with him. Brought in a Power Point presentation of all these great facilities in Boulder and Madison and Davis and Portland and other places and the vision for the future of Columbia and he was won over. The second editorial entitled *Let's Go for a New Approach* really indicates his conversion, and of course that's very important in a small town to get the editor and publisher of the main newspaper on your side. This was the up ad that we wrote just before the final vote on the Council and, if you look at the end, it is signed by a lot of the people that represent the different professions in health and education and environmentalism and business and this was written by really two or three of us, but then approved by everybody on that list and a lot of these in a small town people are well known names and to see that they were supporting this really helps the campaign and helps the community give political support to the Council members and for them to vote for this. And then the final two show - report on the passage of the new bill.

So, we've mobilized our membership, as well as our professional supporters, to write letters and call their policy makers, attend public meetings, and petition for these changes. This was a public meeting where we had almost two hundred of our supporters, all in our organization's t-shirt, sort of an intermediate stage when the planning and zoning commission had to support the recommendations. This thing was the timeline for the, set a stage is really for the campaign. An initial meeting in 2001 of interested parties, which included members on the City Council and members of the city staff in the Public Works and Planning Departments who believed this was a good idea. There were opponents on the City Council and in those departments, as well. We formed an unofficial working group to discuss the topic. Brought in experts from the University and from out of town to talk about street standards, how they affect behavior, and how they affect the economics of the town. Then started lobbying and, within another year, the City Council decided to appoint an official working group to make official recommendations to them about this. And firmly enough, it was almost all the same people who were on the official committee, which was appointed by the mayor, and then it became an official process, which made the recommendations that we hoped for. Developers were one of our biggest opponents. They were included and they were accommodated and to some extent brought into the fold and this eventually went through for adoption in June of 2004.

This was the final street standards that were approved. They weren't everything that we wanted, but they were probably I'd say eighty percent of what we wanted with narrower residential streets, wider sidewalks, and sidewalks on all streets. Bicycle lanes on all of the connecting streets between the neighborhoods and the retail centers and the downtown and the University and the employment centers. And then ped ways, which are wide paths for bicycle and pedestrian use. And these standards were to apply to all new streets that were built as of 2004 and also to be retrofitted, which is a much more difficult proposition to existing streets after some major repair or reconstruction took place.

This is my final slide. I think that the whole mark of a successful outreach campaign to the public is - one of the whole marks - is when the editorial cartoonist features your issue and that is what happened to us on the ninth of June, 2004. So, thank you very much for your time.

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