



## Working For A Walkable Island County

**Over half of Island County residents are overweight and most are physically inactive.** In the 2000 BRFSS survey of Island County residents, 53.9% were considered overweight and 15.5% were determined to be obese. Being overweight or obese increases the risk of chronic diseases such as coronary heart disease, diabetes, hypertension, and stroke. The increasing trends in overweight and obesity in Island County have reached epidemic proportions, caused in large part by the adoption of sedentary lifestyles. Physical activity, including walking, is important for maintaining a healthy body weight. However, the most recent data for Island County shows only 35% of residents engage in moderate physical activity for thirty or more minutes per session, five or more times per week. If all adults in Washington State met recommendations for moderate physical activity, it is estimated that there would be 12% and 25% fewer people with heart disease and diabetes, respectively, at a cost savings of \$81.6 million in hospital charges.

**Island County residents enjoy walking, but feel that some features of their physical environment prevent them from walking more often.** Based on a community survey of 668 respondents and 17 key informant interviews, the *Island County Plan for Healthy Living* found that out of many forms of exercise, Island County residents would most like to be able to walk, either in their neighborhood, on a trail, or on the beach. However, a lack of sidewalks and difficulty in accessing trails preclude some residents from walking. According to 2005 BRFSS data, only 23 out of 94 respondents walk at all, with 19.8% walking to 'get around' and 4.3% walking to work. Island County residents see great benefit in being able to walk safely to stores and services and more lighted and paved trails.

**Research supports the notion that the physical environment influences how much a person walks and how much they weigh.** A study of two neighborhoods in San Diego, CA, showed that residents in the low-walkability neighborhood walked less and had a higher overweight prevalence than the high-walkability neighborhood (Saelens et al. 2003). Additionally, Frank et al. (2004) found that walk distance as a component of land use mix was associated with obesity. Specifically, walking an extra kilometer daily reduced the likelihood of obesity by 4.8%.

**Bringing Island County residents together for a walkability forum will help us address how to make Island County more walkable.** We are interested in learning: What are the perceived gaps and barriers to a walkable Island County? To what extent is walking readily available as a safe, connected, accessible and pleasant mode of transport? What is the role of local government, schools, and communities in fostering the walkability of Island County?



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