

MEMO FROM THE MAYOR

SUBJECT: IT'S TIME FOR A COMPLETE STREETS POLICY, Part I

Bottom Line Up Front: In order to engage and defeat the kind of viral diseases thrust upon our world in recent decades, we need to get healthier. Walk down the over-the-counter medicine aisle of any supermarket or visit any drug store. What do these drugs cure? They treat symptoms, to be sure. At best, they buy some time, making us a little more comfortable, as our miraculous on-board systems go to work to cure us—if they can. Now, consider all of the advertisements for new “wonder” drugs at dinner time that we’re supposed to ask our doctors about—you know, the ones to see if they’re “right” for us. Then consider all the advertisements for class-action lawsuits against the same or similar drugs during primetime due to the onset of worse side effects, including death, than previously warned about. The bottom line is this: as one of the—if not THE—most “medicated” countries in the world, the US is far from being the healthiest. What we eat and drink, how we consume it, and our lack of exercise constitute the primary root causes of significant health problems, e.g., type 2 diabetes and heart disease in particular, in the general population.

Active People are Healthier People

One of the first things Team Emmett accomplished after I became mayor in 2015 encompassed developing five fundamental pillars (goals) designed to always guide and reorient us should we lose sight of what comprises solid city governance. Indeed, we have known what the fundamental purposes of cities have been since Plato told us in his Republic. Accordingly, based upon our constitutional and statutory mandates, we desired to be a city that is (1) economically vibrant; (2) health-conscious; (3) performing its constitutional mission (protecting the health and safety of its residents); (4) in legal compliance with all state and federal laws; and (5) maintaining adequate infrastructure for growth.

As it turns out, each one of those goals support to one degree or another, the importance of having a Complete Streets Policy. Put another way, a Complete Streets Policy supports each one of those goals. The benefit of having a policy encouraging a thriving, vibrant and healthier community for residents of all ages, and equally important, residents of all abilities, should be self-evident. Think how valuable it is to have our city providing access to safe and convenient places to be physically active regardless of anyone’s socio-economic status. While we have a decent

start, more must be done before we can truly say we accomplished our goal.

As you think about the value of such policy, consider these numbers. About one in five children and two in five adults in the US suffer from obesity, meaning their Body Mass Index (BMI), i.e., a calculation that compares a person's height and weight, exceeds 30. Overweight means one has a BMI over 25 but under 30. Far too many US residents, Idaho included, pack too many pounds to be truly healthy. I happen to be one of them. Believe me, I know the struggle.

While Idaho does a little better on the average overall than the US, it's still nothing to brag about. Looking at the latest data available under American Health Rankings provided by United Health Foundation for 2020, one finds the most disturbing numbers within the socio-economic index. Idaho households making less than \$25,000 show 36.2 % of adults hit the obesity mark, while households making from \$25,000 to \$49,999, drop the obesity percentage to 32.1%. Households making from \$50,000 to \$74,999 produce 29.9% hitting obesity and those making from \$75,000 and beyond, drop the obesity range to 28.8%.

These data tell us households with the least assets available for health care, therefore requiring government assistance to obtain it, are set up to suffer the most from chronic diseases where obesity comprises a root cause or initiator: heart disease, type 2 diabetes, the comorbidity of obesity and even some cancers. It is only fit and proper, then, that as a city, we provide easily accessible safe places from sidewalks to walking paths to parks that allow people of all ages and abilities to be active. Frankly, to do so means a payoff for the city and for the state and nation, as well.

For example, we know that creating active and walkable communities can help increase levels of retail economic activity, thus increasing employment in retail sectors. Further, the more we get proper exercise, the healthier we become. When we find ourselves in a healthier condition, we soon realize we pay less for health care, whether we pay for it out of pocket or have a private or public health insurer pay it for us. Physical activity also benefits the workforce. Physically active people tend to take fewer sick days. Finally, walkable communities also tend to improve traffic safety. When residents are provided safe spaces within which to walk or ride bikes, drivers need not worry as much about "meeting engagements" with them.

In the next memo, we will see how Emmett is in the forefront of an initiative to help 27 million Americans become more active by 2027. Until then, keep moving, stay hydrated, and please do what your Mom always asked you to do. Eat your vegetables!