



HEALTH IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Promoting healthy, cost-effective, sustainable and equitable decision making in Delaware



HIA is an objective analysis of how public health may be positively or negatively impacted by a significant decision; it provides additional information to the public and decision makers that can lead to better decisions and better health.



“Every time we step outside, our health is impacted by the decisions that have been made about the design of our communities. I commend Delaware Greenways, the Delaware Coalition for Healthy Eating and Active Living, and Delaware City officials for implementing the first Delaware HIA and viewing health as much bigger than just a visit to the doctor. Government and its many community partners can improve health outcomes simply by making health considerations part of land use and environmental planning.”

—Dr. Karyl Rattay, Division of Public Health Director

Background: HIA and its role in Delaware

In Delaware, as in other places throughout the country, public health and healthcare comprise a major component of spending. The Delaware Department of Health and Social Services is the largest agency in the state, both in terms of number of employees and budget. As concerns about healthcare spending garner much national attention, and managing one of the greatest public health issues of our time—obesity and related disease—grows more costly, preventive strategies are critical for addressing these public health problems. This shift in focus from treating disease and infirmity to a renewed emphasis on preventing disease is closely connected to understanding how health in communities is impacted by policy, project, and program decisions. These decisions have the potential to enhance the health of an entire community and are the focus of Health Impact Assessment (HIA).

HIA has been used with increasing frequency in the United States over the last decade. It is conducted prior to decision making and implementation, and is helping to reveal that even decisions with less obvious connections to health often have substantial effects—both positive and negative—on health outcomes. Using HIA can ultimately lead to more cost-effective, health-enhancing decisions.

It is also consistent with the comprehensive approach of the Governor’s Council on Health Promotion and Disease Prevention to achieve better public health outcomes, articulated in their January 2012 report. Health Impact Assessment was recommended as a strategy to build awareness, inform decision makers, and improve Delaware’s environments, policies, and systems to help people live healthier. During the summer of 2012, the Environment and Policy Committee of Delaware’s Coalition for Healthy Eating and Active Living (DE HEAL) chose HIA as one of the action items for their 2012-2013 work agenda. Conducting the first HIA in the state addresses goals in the 2011 DE HEAL Physical Activity, Nutrition, and Obesity Prevention Comprehensive Plan and goals of the Governor’s Council. The Environment and Policy Committee considered numerous subject projects for an HIA, and selected the Fort DuPont Master Plan and Feasibility Study to be submitted by Delaware Greenways for funding consideration to the Association for State and Territorial Health Officials (ASTHO).

In early October 2012, the HIA proposal was awarded as one of three nationwide ASTHO grants for Building Capacity for Health Impact Assessments. The HIA of the Fort DuPont Master Plan and Feasibility Study, featured on pages 3 and 4, commenced in October 2012 and was completed in May 2013.

The HIA Process

1. Screening

Determine whether the HIA is needed, feasible, and likely to add value



2. Scoping

Determine which health impacts to evaluate, the methods for analysis, and the work plan for completing the assessment



3. Assessment

Analyze baseline conditions and predict potential / likely health impacts



4. Recommendations

Develop recommended actions and mitigation measures to manage identified health impacts



5. Reporting

Disseminate findings to stakeholders and the public and solicit feedback



6. Evaluating

Monitor impacts, determine the effectiveness of the HIA process, and gauge the extent to which HIA influenced / produced desired outcomes

Delaware's First HIA: Fort DuPont Master Planning and Feasibility Analysis

The Fort DuPont Master Planning and Feasibility Analysis (Fort DuPont Project) began in October 2012 with the aim of determining the best future use of the underutilized 450-acre site. The planning project was initiated to address current challenges and opportunities for the site, including: maintaining historic buildings in varying stages of decline; financing and managing a state park with low visitation; and addressing the needs and desires of other interested stakeholders, including community members of Fort DuPont and adjacent Delaware City. The adoption of a final master plan for the Fort DuPont complex will set the direction for future development of the site; however, the plan leaves many important and potentially health-impacting details to future decisions. Both the plan and subsequent decisions were targets of the HIA.

Screening

The HIA Advisory Committee selected the Fort DuPont Project as the subject of the HIA from among approximately 10 candidate projects. Reasons for selecting the project included:

- its timing fit within the time allotted for the grant that funded the HIA;
- it had a relatively certain schedule for decision making and clear decisions/decision makers;
- health was not explicitly being considered; and
- there seemed to be the potential for significant health impacts.

Scoping

The longest phase of the process, scoping lasted nearly four months. Committee members initially produced an extensive list of likely health impacts and research questions. During this phase, Delaware City—a critical stakeholder—joined the HIA Advisory Committee. Additional stakeholder input and progress on the Fort DuPont Master Plan Project prompted the committee to assess: access to physical activity opportunities, food choices, and health care. HIA goals were also established during this phase.

Assessment

Assessment began in mid-February with the HIA training workshop, attended by members of the HIA Advisory Committee and other stakeholders. The group discussed the two development scenarios for the Fort DuPont Complex and developed health impact pathway diagrams, which solidified the HIA scope and guided the rest of the assessment phase. This phase lasted approximately 10 weeks and involved: 1) assessment of existing conditions; and 2) indicator assessment of alternative master plan scenarios, concerning selected health impacts.

The assessment focused on accessibility and examined how proposed changes under the two Fort DuPont master plan phases are likely to impact the health of the local community. Accessibility refers to one's ability to get to goods, services, amenities, and employment opportunities at a reasonable cost, in reasonable time, and with reasonable ease¹, and is a significant issue in the Fort DuPont and Delaware City area. Part of the area's draw and character is its relative isolation from the bustling roads and places of suburban New Castle County. However, this feature can make access to many important goods and services more difficult for the local community. For low-mobility populations, including older adults, people with disabilities, and children, accessing goods and services is particularly challenging.

Recommendations

The HIA relied primarily on literature review and existing data, as well as qualitative methods like site visits and interviews. The assessment and recommendations phases of the HIA were led by the project manager, Delaware Greenways, with support from various professionals on the HIA Advisory Committee. (Selected recommendations developed for the HIA are presented on page 4.) Findings from this HIA can and should be used by all parties that have a role in meeting community needs in the HIA study area. Future decisions that could impact the study area are likely to be made by the governor, state legislature, and officials in local, county, and state government, and may include: setting annual State budgets; major land use and transportation project decisions; review of development proposals and selection of a developer; and review of the plan under the land development process.

Reporting

The HIA was managed separately from the Fort DuPont Project; however, the HIA was timed so its key milestones aligned with key milestones of the Fort DuPont Project to the extent possible. This helped to maintain a completion date for the HIA that allowed for findings and recommendations to be considered prior to important decision making about the Fort DuPont Project.

Evaluating

The HIA Advisory Committee developed some components of an evaluation strategy during the HIA process. A comprehensive evaluation strategy has not been finalized; however, evaluation forms have been developed and are available for use with HIA stakeholders. Evaluations were completed by participants in the February 2013 HIA training sessions. A summary of the results of that preliminary evaluation is available.

Goals

- 1 Demonstrate public health impacts of policies, projects & programs to decision makers and the public
- 2 Build capacity of DE HEAL Environment & Policy Committee, Division of Public Health, and other organizations to conduct HIA
- 3 Make progress toward including health at the forefront of decision making
- 4 Inform/engage Fort DuPont Master Plan stakeholders and decision makers, so most desirable plan is selected
- 5 Promote consensus-driven, sustainable, cost-effective, health-enhancing development
- 6 Develop methods of assessment that can be used in future HIAs

Scope of Assessment

The scope of this HIA was limited to Master Plan Concepts regarding:

- proposed land use
- transportation network
- connections and interface with Delaware City

...that can influence the following factors of health:

- access to food choices
- access to health care
- access to physical activity opportunities

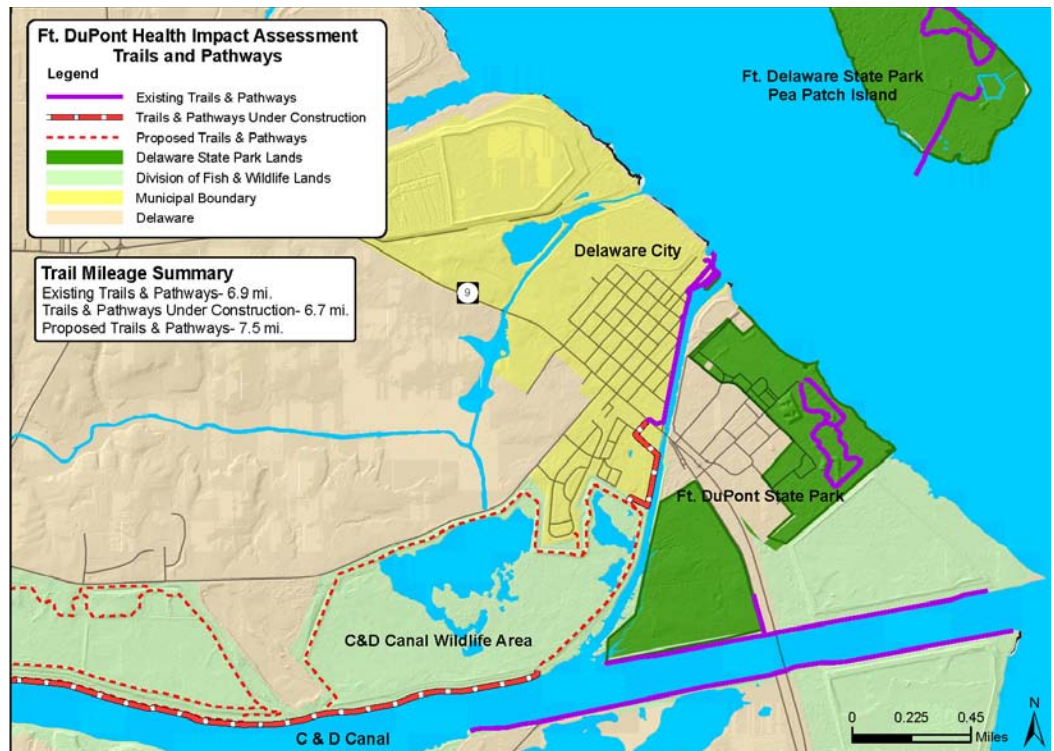
...which can impact the following health outcomes of the community:

- obesity & related disease
- injury
- quality of life
- mortality
- mental health
- asthma & respiratory conditions

1. Definition adapted from: Social Exclusion Unit. 2003. Making the Connections: Final Report on Transportation and Social Exclusion. United Kingdom, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

Access to recreation and transportation based physical activity opportunities correlates with healthier communities.

The addition of a bridge connecting Delaware City and the Fort DuPont complex at 2nd Street would provide nearly all community members in the HIA study area with walking access to the Fort Dupont site's recreational resources.



SELECTED RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVING ACCESS

Physical Activity Opportunities

- Ensure mixed-use development is promoted by local policies and plans, including the required update to Delaware City's Comprehensive Plan, expected to begin in late 2013
- Ensure infrastructure supports non-motorized travel connecting Delaware City and Fort DuPont, particularly for the recommended bridge over the Branch Canal at 2nd Street
- Use streetscape design standards that promote a safe, comfortable walking and bicycling environment designed for all users, regardless of age and ability (e.g. lighting, ramps, and human scale building set-backs)
- Factor in safety measures to meet the needs of a variety of users and minimize the potential for conflict between pedestrians and bicyclists
- Advocate for planned and recommended recreational facilities, and ensure interconnectivity of the growing local trail network
- Identify opportunities to provide indoor recreational facilities
- Examine user preferences and local needs not currently being met by existing recreational resources and plan for modifications based on population demographics

Food Choices

- Include better access to healthy foods as a goal in future development plans
- Coordinate with an existing coalition organized around food access issues to complete an in-depth assessment of food access opportunities and develop related policies for the area
- As the population grows and the consumer demand for healthier food in this area grows, consider approaching a grocery store to locate in the study area
- Explore additional options for improving access to locally grown produce, including a local Community Supported Agriculture pick-up point
- Explore opportunities to open to the public a Governor Bacon Health Center cafeteria
- Increase variety of food options locally, which would improve convenience and lower transportation costs
- Ensure ease of access to any food options added in the future to all residents, regardless of age or ability level
- Extend bus service to the Fort DuPont site and ensure routes are properly marked and advertised to facilitate access to goods and services among those who to use public transit

Health Care

- Attract a variety of practitioners to serve part- or full-time at an expanded Governor Bacon Center and cater to the existing Delaware City population
- Establish a telemedicine site and provide shared office/treatment space for doctors who have part-time hours
- Establish a walk-in clinic, primary care center, and pharmacy
- Expand existing senior living & facilitated care
- Offer better transit to an expanded Governor Bacon Health Center and more direct options to other outside health facilities
- Offer and promote wellness opportunities (e.g. yoga, tai-chi, massage) and preventive services
- Arrange a joint-use agreement for hospital space to accommodate preventive health services, such as exercise or nutrition classes
- To the extent possible, identify priority medical services needed by the local population and target those for inclusion in Governor Bacon Center expansion
- Include consideration of EMS ingress and egress from study area in long-term planning for the area, particularly with regard to land use and transportation

Building Capacity for Health Impact Assessment in Delaware

Completion of the HIA of the Fort DuPont Project has boosted experience and familiarity with HIA among partners and stakeholders involved in the process and those individuals and organizations that participated in the February 2013 training sessions. Results from a survey of participants in the HIA training sessions suggest that among those who attended, which included various participants in the HIA of the Fort DuPont Project as well as others unfamiliar with HIA, HIA is perceived as a tool that has potential for improving decision making and promoting healthy communities in Delaware. Ongoing evaluation of progress on the HIA for the Fort DuPont Project, as well as the use of and capacity for HIA in general should be carried out to promote learning and capacity building.

Prior to 2013, Delaware was one of only 13 states in which a HIA had not been conducted.

LESSONS LEARNED

An important aspect of Delaware's first HIA—the HIA of the Fort DuPont Project—was to present a candid review of what did and did not work well so that future HIAs can be implemented with these lessons in mind.

- Select a project/policy/program which has been identified by a local stakeholder group, community leader, or elected official for assessment to help ensure effective stakeholder participation, local commitment, and open communication
- Initiate stakeholder engagement before the HIA officially begins and maintain an effective stakeholder engagement strategy throughout
- To the extent possible, select a subject project/policy/program that has been well defined and about which there are sufficient data available
- Select for assessment a project or health issues/impacts that have greatest potential for impacting population health
- Work with subject project representatives to clearly define and agree upon how the subject project efforts and HIA efforts will interact, including reporting and communications strategies
- Allocate sufficient resources (time, funding, and personnel) since subject projects often have fluctuating timelines; building in a cushion will help ensure a successful HIA. Effective HIAs also require commitment from a broad coalition of professionals
- Be thorough in scoping phase brainstorming; plan for the scoping phase to be one of the longest phases of the HIA process and expect to adjust
- Think beyond the strict definition of the HIA and the process for opportunities to bring health into the decision-making process; if the process is not going as planned, identify the opportunities that have arisen unexpectedly that offer possibilities for bringing health into the discussion
- Select a project for which health, demographic, and other data are generally available, especially if new data collection is not possible. Also, use the most local data available so that the HIA can focus on the subject project population

Taking Action

The DE HEAL Environment and Policy Committee and many of the organizations that participated in the HIA of the Fort DuPont Project will continue to seek opportunities to work with communities and decision makers to conduct HIAs. The group will also continue to explore how HIA can best be adapted and applied in Delaware. For more information about HIA or if you have questions please refer to the people, organizations, and resources listed on page 6.

Partners and Contacts:

The Environment and Policy Committee of DE HEAL has been integral in supporting HIA and offering a unique venue in which public health and other professionals can share ideas, collaborate, and focus on the importance of achieving better public health. The HIA Advisory Committee, which was an outgrowth of the E&P Committee, guided and supported the HIA of the Fort DuPont Project. Many state agencies and other organizations also contributed to the data collection and assessment process, for which the HIA Advisory Committee is thankful.

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Advisory Committee:

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University of Delaware
Nemours Health and Prevention
Services
Office of State Planning Coordination
Department of Transportation, Division
of Planning
Wilmington Area Planning Council

Trainers:

Climate and Health Program, Minnesota
Department of Health



General Resources:

Health Impact Project | healthimpactproject.org
Human Impact Partners | humanimpact.org
Society of Practitioners of HIA | hiasociety.org
Toolkit for a Healthy Delaware | ipa.udel.edu/healthydetoolkit
Delaware Greenways | delawaregreenways.org/hia.html
Centers for Disease Control & Prevention | cdc.gov/healthyplaces

Data Resources:

Delaware Survey of Children's Health—conducted by Nemours Health and Prevention Services, focuses on child weight status and health behaviors.
Delaware Health Tracker—county and state level data for variety of health indicators, including: cancer incidence; access; diabetes; disabilities; exercise, nutrition, and weight; and many other social/environmental determinants of health. Resource managed by Healthy Communities Network | delawarehealthtracker.com/index.php
Delaware Trip Monitoring Survey System—transportation survey collected on ongoing basis since 1995; reports on trends in travel modes and habits; produced by the Center for Applied Demography and Survey Research | CADSR.udel.edu
Tax Parcel-based Travel Demand Model—the model is managed by DelDOT and produces travel mode split and related data, such as emissions information, for different land use/transportation scenarios. Contact the DelDOT Division of Planning for further information.
Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP)—a planning and policy document that identifies needs in outdoor recreation throughout the state of Delaware; document includes findings from survey of needs, preferences, and habits of Delaware residents. The 2009-2011 report is available at: <http://www.dnrec.delaware.gov/parks/Information/Pages/outdoor-rec.aspx>

Food Access Research Atlas—Geographic based tool for measuring food access managed by the USDA's Economic Research Service | ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-access-research-atlas/

SNAP Retail Locator—Map tool produced by the USDA's Food and Nutrition Service showing retailers that accept SNAP/EBT benefits | snapretailerlocator.com

Delaware Office of State Planning Coordination—staff maintain familiarity with and access to up-to-date geographic data on a variety of subjects and can help with accessing data layers not on file | stateplanning.delaware.gov

Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment Report—produced by Delaware's Emergency Management Agency on a regular basis; identifies susceptibility to flooding risk and other environmental hazards.

Sea Level Rise Inundation Maps—produced by Delaware Coastal Programs (DNREC) | www.dnrec.delaware.gov/Pages/SLRMaps.aspx

Community Commons—mapping tool designed for community health assessment. Most data is not available at sub-county level. Many health issue areas are available along with census demographic data overlays—a useful tool for early phases of the HIA screening, scoping, and assessment process | www.communitycommons.org