

Turning the Wheels to Build Biking Infrastructure and Access

Putting parking in a residential development is easy. Making new spaces practical, appealing and accessible for active modes of transportation — especially biking — is not so simple.

A discussion between Northwest Arkansas developer Specialized Real Estate Group and biking infrastructure consultant LaneShift, spurred by a connection through the Urban Land Institute, has opened up new possibilities for biking in Bentonville, Arkansas.

Resident health has been a chief concern for Specialized since its founding in 2002, and it has incorporated amenities like parks, community gardens, fitness centers and pools into all of its projects. These features have created market demand for healthier living options across Northwest Arkansas. So it's no surprise that for its LEED-certified Brick Avenue Lofts apartment complex near downtown Bentonville, the company has designed ways to integrate biking into its buildings — and into the infrastructure of the city.

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- Ryan Hale, LaneShift

“Bentonville is a biking mecca,” says Specialized project manager Maggie Owens, “so thoughtfully including bike-friendly elements into our neighborhood has been a major selling point. Brick Avenue Lofts is an easy choice for those

who seek alternatives to cars, trucks and SUVs with things like bike racks in every breezeway, bike-washing stations, and repair facilities.” Owens adds, “Working with LaneShift, we’ve better designed our neighborhood infrastructure and connected directly to the numerous bike lanes, paved paths and mountain biking trails in and around the city.”

These connections ultimately help promote healthy behaviors across Bentonville, says city Senior Planner Danielle Semsrott. “The more people are biking, the more it encourages others to try it,” she says. “That creates demand for enhancing and expanding the biking infrastructure, which enhances health and wellness across all neighborhoods.” Bike paths encourage exercise and reduce pollution while also providing new ways to access a library, grocery stores, a downtown activity center and other community services.

There are numerous bottom-line benefits to expansive thinking around biking, says LaneShift founder Ryan Hale. “A site can maximize income-producing square footage when we shift from a vehicle focus to embracing multiple forms of active mobility,” he says. On the health front, one study showed that the region generated \$86 million in health savings through cycling in 2017 alone. “Once you make it easy to bike,” says Hale, “the benefits for the entire community really start adding up.”





Conversation guide

Projects and initiatives related to health and health equity in the built environment often start with a conversation between individuals or among small groups. It may be a formal convening led by a foundation or city agency, a workshop at a convention or even coffee between colleagues.

The Joint Call to Action to Promote Healthy Communities is engaged in a year-long effort to spur these conversations among our members and beyond. We've compiled stories about discussions that have led to healthy solutions at the community, regional and state levels.

Here are the questions they asked in Northwest Arkansas →



WHO'S COME TO THE TABLE SO FAR

- City of Bentonville Comprehensive Planning
- City of Bentonville Parks and Recreation
- LaneShift
- Modus Studio (architects)
- Specialized Real Estate Group

1. STARTING THE CONVERSATION

A real estate team was experienced in incorporating innovative health amenities into their sites but wanted to seize an opportunity to expand an active lifestyle both within and beyond its new apartment complex. So team members began to ask:

- Who will our new apartment community be serving?
- How do we, as a development team, both respond to and encourage people's growing desire to live an active lifestyle?
- How can we help our residents connect with the broader community around them?

2. BUILDING OUT THE CONVERSATION

Specialized Real Estate Group knew that biking was important throughout the region. So the company chose to work with LaneShift, an education and planning agency that generates safe and efficient biking solutions. Questions at this stage included:

- What should the site plan and layout look like to make biking not just convenient, but a go-to choice for community transportation?
- What are the major constraints that might limit biking activity and access?
- What elements need to be on-site, and what needs to happen around the site to successfully meet the existing demand for

3. CLOSING THE LOOP

The developers finished the project with an expanded model of inclusive fitness and an ongoing series of questions to consider as they moved forward:

- In what ways do people on a bike engage with the broader community that they don't when they're in a car?
- How can new developments play a role in sharing resources in underserved communities?
- What other health opportunities can we create as we expand our work in Northwest Arkansas and beyond?