

## **Activate Martinsville/Henry County**

Activate Martinsville/Henry County will improve the health, quality of life, and economic vitality of the Martinsville/Henry County region by encouraging and enabling residents and visitors alike to enjoy a more active lifestyle. The program will stimulate changes to the physical environment and regional cultural norms so that more people of all ages will walk and bicycle as part of their daily routines. These changes will enhance Henry County's attractiveness as a business location and as a destination for environmentally sustainable tourism and development. The first three years of the program have been funded by the Harvest Foundation ([www.theharvestfoundation.org](http://www.theharvestfoundation.org)).

Activate Martinsville/Henry County (AMHC) will be led by BikeWalk Virginia in cooperation with a local partner. Working with community stakeholders – such as the city, county, state DOT, area non-profits including the local trails, health, economic development, and historic preservation groups – and national experts from the Safe Routes to School National Partnership ([www.saferoutespartnership.org](http://www.saferoutespartnership.org)), Complete Streets Coalition ([www.completestreets.org](http://www.completestreets.org)) and League of American Bicyclists ([www.bikeleague.org](http://www.bikeleague.org)), the AMHC team will build the capacity of the community to effect real change in the physical environment. Walking and bicycling will become a more integral and celebrated feature of life in the region.

AMHC will provide funding for a full-time program manager, hired by BikeWalk Virginia, to coordinate implementation of community assessments, technical training workshops, Safe Routes to Schools programs, planning and project review, promotional activities, public information campaigns, and completion of the Bicycle Friendly Community program application. Primary tasks of the program manager will include

- Coordinating all local activities and events
- Serving as the public face for the program
- Serving on the Steering Committee of diverse participants to help achieve the program goals, and staffing the coordination of the Steering Committee
- Developing a five year strategic plan to fulfill the goals, objectives and benchmarks of the program.
- Enhancing the level and quality of public involvement in the development of the community

A local consultant will be chosen to facilitate the launch of the Activate Martinsville/Henry County program. This local partner will be temporary and will help:

- Build local connections
- Identify partners and potential steering committee members and
- Work with BikeWalk Virginia to identify a location in which to house AHMC.

A robust evaluation component will maximize lessons learned from the program.

The AMHC initiative is a unique opportunity to build an active community infrastructure as an integral part of ongoing growth and dynamic change in the community. An exciting combination of national expertise and participatory local leadership will establish Martinsville and Henry County as nationally-recognized leaders in rural development strategies.

## Program Description and Goals

Over the course of the proposed three-year project, Activate Martinsville/Henry County will be the catalyst for creating a measurably healthier, safer and more active populace and community.

**The overarching goal of the program is to improve the quality of life in the county by increasing active living and active tourism.**

The measurable goals we have set for the program are to:

- 1) Increase walking and bicycling in Martinsville and Henry County
- 2) Secure funding and policy changes that result in construction of complete streets and improved bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure within the existing right of way.
- 3) Secure a Bicycle Friendly Community designation for Martinsville or Henry County.
- 4) Make Martinsville and Henry County a model for developing an Active Community Environment in a rural Southeast, US community.

Activate Martinsville/Henry County will undertake the following steps to achieve these goals.

**Preparation:** develop the technical capacity and community support for creating a more bikeable and walkable community; establish performance measures to judge progress. Objectives include:

- Initiating AMHC team as a broad-based, multi-disciplinary collaborative
- Assessing current community status and goals
- Developing a strategic plan for ongoing action
- Completing an evaluation program

**Promotion:** effectively use events such as Walk to School Day, and National Bike Month to promote walking and bicycling; build on existing events – such as NASCAR races – to reach a broad audience with campaign messages; create local bicycling and walking events; bring in state and national events to highlight opportunities to walk and bicycle. Objectives include:

- Creating annual promotion program
- Engaging existing community partners, e.g. Chamber of Commerce, Speedway
- Increase awareness of benefits of bicycling and walking

**Programs:** implement a community-wide Safe Routes to School program including teaching elementary school children to walk and bicycle more safely; implement education, encouragement and enforcement programs recommended as part of the Bicycle Friendly Community program. Objectives include:

- Bringing statewide events (e.g. Bike Virginia) to Martinsville/Henry County
- Providing educational opportunities related to bicycling and walking
- Developing a game plan for achieving BFC status

**Policy:** adopt a complete streets policy at the city and county and better implement the existing statewide complete streets measure by VDOT District 2; integrate bicycle and pedestrian friendly policies in development and comprehensive planning initiatives. Objectives include:

- Increasing awareness of all local VDOT, city and county transportation staff
- Affecting the outcome of projects to make them more pedestrian and bicyclist friendly

- Institutionalizing complete streets procedures throughout the region

***Physical projects:*** implementation of the regional bike plan, and county trails plan; redesign of streets and highways to provide improved access for bicyclists and pedestrians under the complete streets policy; installation of bike parking, street trees, benches, sidewalks, curb cuts; improved traffic safety around schools. Additional objectives include:

- Securing additional grant funding from VDOT for Safe Routes to School projects and programs, and bicycle and pedestrian improvements.
- Securing mainstream transportation funds for non-motorized improvements
- Establishing a storefront presence in downtown Martinsville

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