



# Building a Healthy, Vibrant Downtown Richmond

Richmond, CA, De Anza High School  
11<sup>th</sup> Grade Health Academy

## ISSUE

Downtown Richmond has a rich history, serving as the center of Richmond’s cultural and business life through WWII and the 1960s. The post-WWII economic climate and the development of Hilltop Mall led to decades of disinvestment. As a result, many businesses closed and the area became rundown. Additionally, high crime rates in the city during the 1980s and 1990s created a negative perception of the area, which contributed to the lack of investment in the city. As a result, many aspects of community life suffered. Currently, the district is undergoing a revitalization effort led by Richmond Main Street Initiative (RMSI), a non-profit organization that is building on existing assets to make Downtown a safe, vibrant, thriving destination for arts, entertainment, businesses, and residents with an easily accessible transit center. In 2012, RMSI successfully rallied city government, property and business owners, residents and other community partners to form the Downtown Richmond Property Business Improvement District (DRPBID)—the first and only in the city of Richmond.

While Downtown Richmond is making great strides supporting current merchants and community life, a major struggle remains: the lack of healthy, fresh, affordable food options in the area. Richmond Main Street Initiative is looking to engage young people in imagining business and community strategies for bringing healthy food options to Downtown in a way that is attractive, accessible, and beneficial for residents.

## QUESTION

*How healthy is downtown Richmond? What can the City of Richmond and/or Richmond Main Street Initiative do to address the need for access to healthy food and encourage healthy living in Downtown? How could young people and schools be involved?*

## COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

- Instructors: Mrs. Fatham Ng and Mr. David Pintado
- Students: 11<sup>th</sup> Grade Health Academy (4 classes of ~30 students each)
- Clients: Richmond Main Street Initiative and City of Richmond
- Community Partners: CalFresh, Kaiser, FoodsCo, Richmond Police Department, local schools, Freshest Cargo, Orchard Supply, Costco, Kaiser Permanente
- Other Resources: bake sales and fundraisers

## YOUTH DRIVEN DATA AND INSIGHTS

- According to a 2011 report from Contra Costa Health Services, 32% of children in Richmond are obese and 24% of adults. At this rate, they predict that when children living in Richmond today grow up to be adults, they will have a 42% obesity rate. We need to decrease these numbers.
- Only 50% of eligible families are enrolled in CalFresh in Contra Costa County
- There is limited availability of healthy, fresh, affordable food options in the Downtown Richmond area
  - Healthy food items tend to be more expensive
  - Some foods that are marketed as healthy are not actually that healthy (salads have lots of calories due to dressing, etc.)
- Need to create fun, safe attractions and make people feel welcome to the area
  - Provide more options for exercise and being outside and interacting with the community
  - There are very few playgrounds in the downtown area – the Downtown community park should be open to accommodate more families
- There are lots of empty buildings (new and old) that offer opportunities for local businesses including new restaurants, gyms, youth centers, etc.
- 2013 Crime Data - the chances of becoming a victim of a violent crime in Richmond is 1 in 128 while in California it's 1 in 252 (<http://www.neighborhoodscout.com/ca/richmond/crime/>)
- The area needs more trash cans to decrease garbage
- The area also needs more streetlights and lighted crosswalks to improve safety

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Our recommendations focused on educating the public about healthy eating options and how to make healthier lifestyle choices. We also propose adding more facilities and amenities to the downtown area to allow residents the opportunity to choose healthier food and forms of recreation.

## SHORT-TERM (1-6 Months)

### Healthy Food

- Create an educational campaign about the benefits of CalFresh and access to farmers' markets
  - Informational booths around the city
  - High school students can gain community service credits by going into elementary and middle schools to talk about the benefits of healthy eating
- Make healthy eating guides and tips for consumers about how to shop for healthy foods and plan healthy meals
  - include resources for existing cooking classes and exercise classes
- Expand the service of the local mobile farmers' market, Freshest Cargo, to create easier access to healthy food in the Downtown area
- Advocate for more healthy restaurant options in the Downtown area

### Safety

- Handout pamphlets and informational material about Neighborhood Watch
- Install more streetlights and lighted crosswalks to increase pedestrian safety and increase walkability

### Healthy Living and Activities

- Green Thumbs: create more community clean up days - start with a small area and then expand
- Add kid-friendly amenities/playgrounds to the downtown community garden and open on weekends to attract more families
  - Could include solar charging stations and a solar-powered healthy vending machine
- Expand the existing half-marathons to the downtown area to spread awareness of the area
- Advocate for and create more health-related classes in schools (spinning, diet, activity, etc.)
- Increase the amount of plants and trash cans and fix dilapidated streets
- Partner with Bay Area Rescue Mission to get more homeless off of the streets - add classes for job placement and health care services

## LONG-TERM (1-3 Years)

- Implement a bike share program to reduce carbon emissions and provide healthier commuting/transportation options
- Hire a “Health Manager” for Richmond to coordinate healthy living proposals and recruit healthy restaurants to the downtown area
- Make people more active and healthy by putting in a gym in the old Bank of America building (or another vacant space in downtown)
- Create a marathon that goes through the Downtown area of Richmond
- Install more public playgrounds/recreation areas in vacant areas
  - Install a fruit-themed park with slides and swings that look like food to promote healthy eating and activity
- The Richmond Main Street Farmers’ Market could create their own mobile farmers’ market to serve the city
- Use empty space for housing and services for the city’s homeless population
- Add to and/or renovate Richmond Downtown shopping center to make it more pedestrian-friendly
- Install more public playgrounds/recreation areas in vacant areas
- Create a community center with youth groups and activities
- Make a roller rink to increase physical activity and provide a safe place where teens can have fun

## NEXT STEPS AND SHARED ACCOUNTABILITY:

- We will reflect on the project and the project process as a class shortly after our presentation
- Richmond Main Street will be in touch with students/teachers regarding specific proposals that the organization is interested in implementing
- Students are interested in exploring internship options with any parties involved with Downtown Richmond
- We are open to any level of collaboration that the city is interested in moving forward