



Posted on Fri, Mar. 27, 2009

Survey explores Wichita's perception of healthy living

BY KAREN SHIDELER
The Wichita Eagle

Wichitans think it's easy, though not especially cheap, to eat healthy.

Except at work.

They say the community has lots of opportunities to get physical activity, but neighborhoods and public parks are lacking well-lighted, safe places to walk.

Those are among the results in a Health and Wellness Coalition survey, released Thursday and designed to help public and private groups think about how to move forward in making Wichita a healthy place to live.

The coalition, in partnership with the Wichita Community Foundation and with funding from the Kansas Health Foundation, this past fall asked residents what they thought about Wichita's "built environment" -- things such as availability of grocery stores and restaurants, parks, sidewalks and lighting.

Mim Wilkey, chairwoman of the coalition, told a group of community leaders that the survey is designed as a baseline measure. It drew more than 2,000 responses that were representative of the community, she said.

The survey purposefully didn't define "healthy eating" but nearly half of respondents said Wichita is a community that values it. Most people can find healthy food at home, in restaurants and in schools, they said -- but not at work.

"This is something we've got to work on," Wilkey said.

The majority of respondents also said most people have a difficult time paying for healthy food - especially meats, fruits and vegetables -- because of their prices.

Wichitans said they have lots of options for physical activity but only 43.3 percent said neighborhoods were designed to encourage walking and biking. And "few people are aware of indoor options," Wilkey said.

City Council member Jeff Longwell and County Commissioner Tim Norton were among those at Wilkey's presentation.

Both said the information gave them something to think about, especially in infrastructure planning, but warned that changes don't happen overnight.

"It does help us validate the argument that we need to change our thinking a little bit," Longwell said.

Norton said the public has to decide whether more bike paths, sidewalks and similar features

are of value -- and how they rank with other public needs.

Full results from the Healthy Wichita Perception Survey are available online at www.hwcwichita.org.

Reach Karen Shideler at 316-268-6674 or kshideler@wichitaeagle.com.

© 2007 Wichita Eagle and wire service sources. All Rights Reserved. <http://www.kansas.com>