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Walkable Washington

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WALKABLE WASHINGTON

Transformation towards walkability is taking place all over the state of Washington. From urban, suburban and small town initiatives, the program showcases the effects of a renewed focus on creating great places for people to walk. The case studies are exceptional projects and programs showcasing how cities, counties, school districts, and community organizations throughout the state are making it safer, easier, and more inviting for people to walk.

WHO WE ARE & WHAT WE DO

We promote walkable communities and empower people throughout Washington to connect to the world by foot.

CASE STUDY

SOAP LAKE DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION SOAP LAKE, WA

DESCRIPTION AND PURPOSE: Soap Lake is a rural town in Grant County along Highway 17 in central Washington. This revitalization project resulted in the redesign and complete replacement of the existing infrastructure and streetscape along 2 miles of Highway 17 and Soap Lake's Main Street.

The Soap Lake downtown revitalization project was an outgrowth of a 2005 Master Plan. In 2012, the city of Soap Lake worked with WSU's Rural Communities Design Initiative to hold a community charrette to develop a vision for the redesign of the downtown core. The community envisioned a redesign for the downtown core that included wider sidewalks, bike lanes, and enhanced streetscape including planters and new lighting fixtures. To realize this vision, the City Council adopted a Complete Streets ordinance in 2013, contracted with a local engineer, and established an all-volunteer steering committee to oversee the project and pursue funding from a variety of sources.

The resulting \$2.4 million project included converting a 4 lane highway to 1 lane in each direction along 2 miles of Highway 17 in order to slow traffic through the Soap Lake commercial district. The new street design includes bike lanes for the 2 mile stretch as well as curb bump outs to shorten crossing distances for walkers. The city and community continues to build out the design with street plantings and way-finding signage for walkers and bikers.

CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS: As construction was about to start in 2013, results came back from the sewer

For more information

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line video showing that sewer lines needed to be replaced. The Steering Committee went into high gear to secure an additional \$600,000 in funding from the USDA to replace the old sewer lines. This work delayed the rest of the project for a year, though the project area was then better prepared for the subsequent infrastructure update.

COSTS AND FUNDING: The \$2.4 million Soap Lake downtown project was funded through grants from the Transportation Improvement Board, the Grant County Economic Development Council and WSDOT as well as through donations from the Friends of the Lower Grand Coulee and the Columbia Basin Foundation.

IMPLEMENTATION TIME-FRAME: In 2012, the city's 2005 master plan was updated, and plans for this project were initiated. The major infrastructure improvements were completed in 2015. Ongoing projects have been completed by community volunteers including streetscape plantings and a recently completed flag pole installation funded through \$6,000 in community donations.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT: The City Council approved a Steering Committee of volunteers that spent 2.5 years planning, holding public meetings, writing grants, and working with city engineers to

maximize every dollar in order to improve Soap Lakes' downtown thoroughfare.

BENEFITS AND RESULTS:

Soap Lake has become a model for how a rural community with a declining economy and population can rally to become economically viable and an attractive place to live and work. Because of the Complete Streets aspect, more people are seen walking the super wide sidewalks, more bicyclists are present, more businesses are moving in, and the town has a greater sense of community pride. In addition, the completed project has provided inspiration for the community-driven effort to update a 15 year old park plan. The parks plan includes an extensive trail system in and around Soap Lake and other improvements to promote physical activity and healthy lifestyles.

CONTACTS:

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RESOURCES:

Grant County Journal, SL upgrades honored in *GCHD health flyer*
City of Soap Lake Downtown Master Plan (2005)

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before



after

Photography by ~Tamara Blalock
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