

# Incorporating Health in Public Policy in Richmond, CA

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The BlueGreen Alliance's Foundation (BGAF) Building Clean program is an initiative to strengthen domestic manufacturing by accelerating energy-efficient retrofits for affordable multi-family housing. As part of this initiative, BGAF has completed a product database with information on American manufacturing sites that produce healthy energy and water-efficient products.

The **Buy Local, Buy Healthy** database, accessible through [www.buildingclean.org](http://www.buildingclean.org), provides material supply chain information for manufacturers, residents, building owners, and contractors wanting to learn about energy efficient housing products and hazardous materials. As part of BGAF's efforts to accelerate retrofits, we are highlighting successful programs across the country that incentivize buying local or buying healthy.

In the city of Richmond, CA, health is integrated into every city policy. As California's first jurisdiction to incorporate a Health and Wellness element into their general plan, Richmond is leading the way in tackling health inequities and disparities while creating a sustainable city policy. **Richmond recognizes the inextricable link between health and housing in**

**their 2030 General Plan, and their environmental purchasing policy is a model example of buy healthy and buy local concepts.**

BGAF spoke with the City of Richmond's Interim City Manager, Mrs. Shasa Curl, to complete this case study.

## BACKGROUND

The City of Richmond, CA, was one of the first U.S. cities to adopt a Health in all Policies (HiAP) ordinance, passed in order to operationalize the health vision in the Richmond General Plan 2030.<sup>1</sup> A HiAP is "the integrated and comprehensive approach to bring health, well-being, and equity considerations into the development and implementation of policies, programs, and services of traditionally non-health related government systems or agencies.

Health equity within this policy is defined as **"efforts to ensure that all people have full and equal access to opportunities that enable them to lead healthy lives while respecting differences that include but are not limited to culture, language, race, gender, sexuality, economic status, citizenship, ability, age, and religion."**

1 City of Richmond HiAP, <http://www.ci.richmond.ca.us/ArchiveCenter/ViewFile/Item/6999>.

## HEALTHY INDOOR ENVIRONMENTS MATTER!

### Richmond Health in All Policies Ordinance

“Social determinants of health include but are not limited to:

(4) Accessible built environments that promote health and safety, including pedestrian, bicycle, and automobile safety, parks and green space, and healthy school siting.”

The HiAP envisions an environment where health is initially targeted in workplaces and communities, where residents have the opportunity to make decisions to live a healthy life regardless of outside externalities, and where preventative health measures are considered. Ultimately, HiAP relies on data collection and policy developments to inform decision-making that promotes health equity. It aims to reduce and eliminate community “toxic stressors” by providing secure and affordable housing, clean air and water, and integrating multi-service communities. The City of Richmond’s HiAP focuses on six intervention areas:

- Governance and leadership
- Economic development and education
- Full service and safe communities
- Residential/built environments
- Environmental health and justice
- Quality and accessible health homes and social services.<sup>2</sup>

The fourth intervention area, Residential and Built Environment, notes health inequities within the City of Richmond from poor indoor air quality and inadequate heating or ventilation exacerbating asthma and respiratory allergies. The HiAP outlined a number of actionable plans from these noted concerns, such as expanding their lead abatement program and addressing substandard housing conditions.

## RICHMOND 2030 GENERAL PLAN

Creating a new and innovative plan to deal with health, equity, and sustainability was not a quick process. The Richmond 2030 General Plan<sup>3</sup>—a comprehensive framework for developing a healthy city and healthy neighborhoods—was the culmination of a 5-year community visioning and planning process that involved the participation of 2,000 community members, representatives, local non-profits, advocacy groups, public agencies, industry and business representatives, educational institutions and other local governments. While California mandates sections such as economic development, conservation, land use, education, and human services to be included in a city’s general plan, the City of Richmond also elected to include a health and wellness element.

## HEALTH AND WELLNESS

The Health and Wellness section of the general plan is meant to be used as a policy framework to inform Richmond’s work on improving residents’ physical health and emotional well-being. It covers current conditions and supplies recommended actions to improve healthy living.

### Healthy Living Determinants:

- Parks and recreational facilities
- Healthy foods
- Medical services
- Walking, bicycling and public transit
- High-quality and affordable housing
- Economic opportunities
- Walkable neighborhoods
- Safe neighborhoods with public spaces
- Environmental quality and
- Sustainable development

2 City of Richmond HiAP strategy document, <http://www.ci.richmond.ca.us/DocumentCenter/View/28771/Attachment-2---HiAP-Strategy?bidId>.

3 Richmond General Plan 2030. Available online: <https://www.ci.richmond.ca.us/2608/General-Plan-2030>.

**High Quality and Affordable Housing:** For this section of the general plan, Richmond recognizes the need to provide a healthier living environment for residents living in affordable housing, noting that the presence of “lead paint, molds and mildew, deteriorating carpet, and poor air circulation” leads to occupant health risks.

Although they do not draw the explicit connection between material choice and health, it offers strategies to improve access and quality of affordable housing. Among these strategies, Richmond will work to:

- Upgrade and improve existing housing units that are not up to code while protecting architectural and neighborhood character, and
- Expand lead and asbestos abatement grant programs for low-income households.

## Tackling Health from Multiple Angles

In addition to including health in their General Plan and working on integrating health and equity into all policies, the City of Richmond operates a green building and environmentally preferable purchasing policy. **Both of these policies address buy local and buy healthy concepts, allowing Richmond to reduce emissions, grow the green economy, and ensure healthy indoor environments.**

## Environmentally Preferable Purchasing

Like many cities, Richmond operates an environmentally preferable purchasing policy to direct city agency spending. Although this policy does not directly address materials used in low-income housing, it implements strategies and guiding principles for all city officials to consider, **placing emphasis on locally-made and healthier materials.**

## Richmond Environmentally Preferable Purchasing Policy

### 2.0 PURPOSE

This Policy is adopted in order to:

- Protect the health and safety of workers and citizens,
- Conserve natural resources,
- Minimize greenhouse gas emissions,
- Minimize environmental impacts,
- Eliminate or reduce toxins that create hazards to workers and our community,
- Reduce the amount of material sent to landfills,
- Support strong recycling markets,
- Increase the use and availability of environmentally preferable products that protect the environment,
- Identify environmentally preferable products and distribution systems,
- Reward manufacturers and vendors that reduce environmental impacts in their production and distribution systems or services, and
- Create a model for the successful purchasing of environmentally preferable products that encourages other purchasers in our community to adopt similar goals.

The policy also encourages that city officials “give preferences to local contractors and vendors who abide by a similar environmentally preferable purchasing policy,”<sup>4</sup> which could work to encourage local suppliers and manufacturers to adopt better sourcing policies, greening the local economy as a whole.

4 City of Richmond Environmentally Preferable Purchasing Policy, <http://www.ci.richmond.ca.us/DocumentCenter/View/4858/Environmentally-Preferable-Purchasing-Policy?bidId=>.

## Buying Healthy

### 3.6 Toxics and Pollution

*Procure non-toxic products and products that minimize environmental pollution. Consider toxicity and pollution from a product's resource extraction, production, transport, use and disposal when purchasing products.*

*3.6.6 When maintaining buildings, the City of Richmond shall use products with the lowest amount of volatile organic compounds (VOCs), highest recycled content, and low or no formaldehyde as practicable when purchasing materials such as paint, carpeting, adhesives, furniture and casework.<sup>5</sup>*

## Buying Locally

### 3.10 Local Products

*Favor products that are extracted, processed, produced and/or sold locally to reduce GHG emissions and packaging waste associated with transport and to support the local economy.*

*3.10.1 The City of Richmond shall, whenever practicable, favor products that are extracted, processed and manufactured locally.<sup>6</sup>*

## GREEN BUILDING POLICY

In addition to their preferable purchasing policy, the City of Richmond also manages a green building program for commercial and residential buildings. The policy applies to all construction and renovation projects and requires them to meet or exceed the energy requirements of the 2008 California Building Energy Efficiency Standards. All buildings undertaken by Richmond with more than 5,000 square feet or receiving more than \$300,000 of aid from Richmond must attain LEED Silver standards for commercial buildings and 70 points on the Build It Green's GreenPoint Rated system for residential buildings.

**"The City Council of Richmond finds as follows:**

**(d) Green Building can include, among other things...enhancement of indoor air quality by selection and use of construction materials that do not have chemical emissions that are toxic or irritating to building occupants..."**

Although the green building policy does not directly mention buying locally, LEED Silver offers points for regional prioritization. The materials and resources section offers incentives for builders to purchase domestic or locally manufactured products and materials.

The residential Build It Green system touches on healthy materials, offering points for low/no-VOC paintings, coating, caulks, adhesives, and sealants. They offer additional points for using local materials for interior finishes and flooring and points for low-emitting flooring. However, like LEED, these options are part of a variety of measures that builders can choose from to meet the point's total and are not strict requirements.<sup>7</sup>

## IMPACTS OF THIS APPROACH—HEALTH IN ALL POLICIES

Integrating health equity into all city decision-making involves city agencies, community partners, and city residents. It is a comprehensive undertaking that necessitates continuous collaboration and innovative ideas.

One year after the adoption of the policy, an internal HiAP review showed the City of Richmond remediated 85 units for lead and tested 337 children for toxic lead levels—which reversed two years of no funding for remediation and testing—and new

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> City of Richmond green building policy, <http://ci.richmond.ca.us/1812/Green-Building>.

## HiAP INTERVENTION AREAS



plans to rehabilitate vacant properties for sale to first-time, low-income home buyers. They have completed an air monitoring project in six sites to increase responsiveness due to the close proximity of a Chevron plant.<sup>8</sup>

In the 2020 progress report, the City of Richmond cited the need to take a more aggressive stance on reducing air pollution. Compared to the rest of Contra Costa County, residents from Richmond, particularly low-income people of color, have higher child hospitalization rates from asthma. To help achieve this, Richmond installed 50 community air monitors in partnership with Groundwork Richmond—a local environmental conservation organization.<sup>9</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The City of Richmond, California is leading the charge on integrating health equity into city policy, but they are far from being done. Rather, the HiAP approach should be seen as a complete overhaul of how cities build their local economy and ensure their residents live well-rounded lives. When you put health at the forefront of every decision, you can ultimately create better policy and mitigate negative consequences for your residents.

Tackling health from multiple places and ensuring healthy indoor environments necessitates collaboration among city departments, city officials' training, constant evaluation, and clear goals. As we learn more about health equity's role in ensuring a robust and vibrant local economy, city planners and policymakers must evaluate their decisions and analyze how they affect resident health outcomes.

**The City of Richmond, through its purchasing policy, green building requirements, and HiAP strategy, looks at health from multiple places. In doing so, they are greening their local economy, reducing emissions, and prioritizing their decisions' impacts on resident health and long-term well-being.**

<sup>8</sup> Information provided by Gabino Arrendondo, Health and Wellness Coordinator – City of Richmond, 2018 and 2021.

<sup>9</sup> HiAP progress report, <http://www.ci.richmond.ca.us/DocumentCenter/View/57209/HiAP-Report-2020>.

*The BlueGreen Alliance Foundation would like to thank Karsyn Kendrick for her work developing this case study.*

### FOR MORE INFORMATION:

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