In January, 2015, 7th District Councilperson Cynthia Newbille initiated the process of implementing the Fairmount Health Plan developed by VCU’s Urban Planning Program in 2013. The Action Planning effort sponsored by Dr. Newbille brought together community partners who considered the accuracy of the health plan’s vision and updated its goals, tying original objectives to current public needs and priorities. The implementation process began to connect participants as they move the broad vision of the health plan forward. The planning team organized the core group of community members who will kick off the first action steps, making the strategic plan to shape the neighborhood into a reality for its residents.
The Action Planning team met with many current and potential partners to gain a fuller understanding of the varied groups working with East End residents. Those with missions that closely relate to Health Plan goals joined the planning process to link present activities to action items that meet the interests of their program participants. They were guided by existing survey-based public health research that identified resident priorities and preferences for improving community health and well-being. This, demography data, and existing conditions analysis of neighborhood characteristics formed the knowledge base for the planning process. Action planning partners began by conducting a series of community meetings so local residents could drive the process of setting its immediate goals and selecting action items. Their implementation team included a core staff of local residents, who were compensated and trained as part of the skilled workforce that has begun the Action Plan’s first steps. The information they gathered during community meetings, site visits, and workshops was used to identify its first priorities.

Re-Engage Stakeholders

The VCU Studio team reached out to area civic associations to rejoin the planning process, engaging their current members to gain input on priorities for the 2015 Action Plan. The New Visions Civic League, Union Hill Civic Association, and Church Hill Central Civic Association have historically improved neighborhoods through volunteer work and organizing, and they provided a forum to increase community awareness and input during planning. Their members attended workshops and offered their time as potential participants in a process led by the growing community of interest that shares the vision of the health plan.

Build Partnerships with Community

Dr. Newbille and the VCU Studio team reached out to community organizations guided by Fairmount Plan’s vision. The team located existing initiatives to build capacity around their efforts, building on the current momentum moving healthy East End programs forward. Organization partners include the Youth Health Equity Leadership Program at East District Family Resource Center, Renew Richmond, GroundWorks RVA, Storefront for Community Design, Renew Richmond, and Tricycle Garden. This core group of initiatives has well-established relationships with residents and a track record of success leading community dialogue. Their partnership coordinates cross-organizational community development efforts to increase access to nutritious food options and improve active use of public space. Members have tied their mission-based program plans to the short term goals of the Action Plan.
Youth Involvement in the Process

During the 2013 Community Health Plan, youth community organizers affiliated with the Youth Health Equity Leadership Program and Groundworks RVA are leading the Action Plan in process. During the 2013 Fairmount Health Plan process, participants under the age of eighteen were underrepresented. Youth play a vital role in shaping communities, and their interest in using local gathering space determines its social value. To reach out to middle and high school students, the VCU planning group relied on community partners with established Out-of-School-Time programs in the East End. This group of partner organizations provided the management structure to prepare Fairfield Middle School and Armstrong High School Students to lead the community engagement effort. Their program participants, students enrolled in FRC’s Youth Health Equity Leadership Initiative and Groundwork’s Green Team, joined the group as staff members to host ground-up planning workshops. This group of community residents was able to encourage broader public participation, using their social ties to engage neighbors. Youth participants brought new perspective and envisioned creative ways to shape community space, and the voices of a broader age group were represented during the Action Planning process.

The voices, interests, and capacities of this broad group intersected to reveal realistic steps toward goals of the Action Plan associated with healthy eating, active living, and building critical connections. Civic associations, local nonprofit organizations, youths, and the broad resident community came together to guide the plan’s strategies. They identified the Action Plan’s current goals and objectives and began the first steps prioritized during the planning process.
The purpose of a strong Action Plan is to implement and sustain the broad vision of a strategic plan. Potential participants assess their readiness to begin the process, identify project champions, and focus the leadership team’s goals so they are actionable. All participants work together to form an understanding of what tangible present-term outputs will be produced and how they link to planning goals and objectives. The key stakeholders in the process form a coalition to ensure that a clear, shared mission guides them as they promote the implementation process. Their budgets are linked to priority action steps and they develop the management capacity to begin action steps. The management structure of the leadership team is used to develop the staff needed to implement the project. Participants in the planning process develop a flexible schedule to manage projects and establish incentives to work together for the long term. (Implementing and Sustaining Your Strategic Plan, 2011) From Understanding Implementation and Assessing Readiness.

LIST GOALS WITH SINGULAR OBJECTIVE

Healthy Eating

Goal 1: Increase access to nutritious food options that fit into community culture and lifestyle. Develop life-long healthy eating habits and facilitate education about food and nutrition.

• **Objective 1.1: Increase knowledge about healthy eating.**

Active Living

Goal 2: Re define existing green and public spaces to promote safe physical activity and recreational options.

• **Objective 2.1: Reinvent the pocket park 25th Street and Venable Street as a central space for community recreation.**

Critical Connections

Goal 3: Engage community organizations and encourage them to work collaboratively to support a unified community health infrastructure.

• **Objective 3.1: Coordinate on-going efforts and assets pertaining to food and nutrition to create an organized educational resource for the Fairmount community.**