Sample Reflection

Healthy People Healthy Places

The most interesting thing I learned this week was the built environment has big impact on the way people practice their physical activity. After reading the chapters, I know that the built environment is divided into three parts: land use pattern, urban design characteristics, and transportation systems. These three models are determinants that decide whether a community is designed well or poorly. I learned from Health and Community Design (HCD) that land use patterns are the arrangement of residencies, offices, restaurants, and stores in the built environment. In addition, I also learned that land use patterns are analyzed by using two variables: density and land use mix. Density is used to measure the compactness of a neighborhood. I was surprised to know that higher density levels lead to closer distances between places and as a result, attract people to walk and ride bikes. Land use mix is the composition of uses in an area such as residential, educational, industrial and commercial uses. Before reading these chapters, I did not know that land use mix can change people’s levels of physical activity. However, after this week, I leaned that land use mix decides the closeness between destinations in a neighborhood and also the levels physical activity.
Besides land use pattern, from this week’s readings, I know that urban design characteristics are the determinants of closeness between places, safety and attractiveness of streets. The same as land use patterns, urban design characteristics affect people’s decisions about whether walking, biking or driving. From my own experiences, most pedestrians prefer interesting things along their route such as stores, trees, benches, etc; while bicyclists do not need those details. I think it is very difficult to build streets that satisfy all types of users because each type of users has different requirements. However, urban design characteristics are considered as the most important in the built environment because they have very big influences on people’s levels of physical activity.
Finally, I have been taught that the transportation systems are the networks of physical infrastructure in an area, such as street network, transit system, and the system for nonmotorized users. There are two kinds of systems in the transportation systems: continuous and fragmented system. I think the best example for continuous system is street network and the example for fragmented system is pedestrian network. I was surprised to find out that transportation systems also have significant impact in the physical activity levels of people in a neighborhood. For instance, when the street network includes sidewalk for walkers and bike lanes for bicyclists, those street networks help increasing the number of people engage in physical activity.