



Berlin HEAL COMMUNITY GARDEN & PARK PROJECT

“Through Berlin HEAL’s community meetings, residents told us they wanted community garden space closer to the downtown. With the help of city-wide partners and community members, we are able to create that space!”

Angela Martin-Giroux
Administrator of Welfare & Health Officer
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Berlin’s Top HEAL Strategies

- **Develop a community garden and playground by repurposing a green space left by the demolition of dilapidated housing**
- **Develop Complete Streets guidelines to increase pedestrian and bicycle safety**
- **Install wayfinding signs for local trails and walking routes in the City**



Community Garden
Berlin

HEAL NH • Healthy People Healthy Places • www.healnh.org

HEAL NH funding is provided by HNH Foundation, Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield Foundation, Endowment for Health, NH Charitable Foundation, and NH Department of Health and Human Services.

Berlin has a population of 9,500 residents and is the largest city in Coos County, NH.

Prevalence of overweight (36.9%) and obesity (31.9%) was the highest among Coos County residents when compared with state averages. Similarly, the prevalence of reported no leisure-time physical activity (29.5%), cardiovascular disease (5.9%), and diabetes (14.9%) was the highest among adults living in Coos County.

Poverty and unemployment rates in Berlin are approximately double that of the state average with a poverty rate of 16.6% (vs. 8.7% NH avg.) and unemployment at 7.4% (vs. 3.1% NH avg.). Of the 1,292 children enrolled in the public school system, nearly 50% (693) receive free or reduced lunch.

The Berlin HEAL projects focused on improved access to healthy food options and safe physical activity in downtown Berlin.

Sources: US Bureau of Census, 2014; New Hampshire Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance Survey (BRFSS), 2009, 2010 & 2012; Economic & Labor Market Information Bureau, 2015.

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Healthy People Healthy Places: Addressing Obesity in New Hampshire

In 2008, New Hampshire's first Healthy Eating Active Living (HEAL) Action Plan was launched, followed by the release of the state's second obesity prevention plan in 2014, the Healthy People Healthy Places Plan. These plans were developed through a collaborative effort of public- and private-sector partners to address the increasing overweight and obesity rates within the state's population, particularly in highest need communities.

Since 2008, the HEAL Home at the Foundation for Healthy Communities has led implementation of the healthy eating active living strategies outlined in these plans with support from philanthropic and government organizations, and partners across multiple sectors, including public health, land use and planning, transportation, education, health care, and food systems. The HEAL Community Grant Program (CGP), was established in 2009 to provide funding and technical support to promote healthier people and places at the local level. In 2009, four community coalitions received three-year grants of \$150,000. In 2012, four more coalitions – Ashland, Berlin, Laconia, and Nashua – received two-year \$10,000 grants. The HEAL Home provides communications, community assessment, and coalition building technical assistance. This case study highlights the Berlin HEAL coalition's achievements and progress.

Berlin HEAL's Priorities and Partners

HEAL funding initiated a municipal project to improve the environment in Berlin's downtown to make it easier and safer to be physically active and to provide more options for fresh, healthy food. The Berlin HEAL coalition was led by the Berlin City Health and Welfare Departments. Multi-sector partnerships throughout the process included:

- City of Berlin/Health & Welfare
- City of Berlin/Housing Coordinator
- Parks and Recreation Dept.
- Coos County Family Health Services
- UNH Cooperative Extension
- North Country Health Coalition
- Retired Seniors Volunteer Partners (RSVP)
- Berlin Public School District / SAU 3
- Enriched Learning Center in Berlin
- Androscoggin Community Partners
- Northern Human Services
- Tri County Cap
- Neighbors and citizens
- Salvation Army
- Senior Center





CASE STUDY: Berlin HEAL

Community Garden & Park

Goal: Increase access to healthy food and physical activity for Mason and Granite Streets neighborhood residents

- Provide a space and the opportunity for area residents to grow their own vegetables in their neighborhood
- Use the garden to teach gardening skills to people of all ages
- Provide a space for children and families to play and be physically active

In early 2013, Berlin decided to repurpose a property on the corner of Mason and Granite Streets, demolishing a dilapidated apartment building to make room for a community garden and park. Funding came from HEAL NH and a Neighborhood Stabilization Project grant.

Located in a neighborhood where residents had to travel over a mile to get to a park for recreation, the park was designed for people of all ages and abilities to enjoy and be active. A swing set was installed for children, a fence around the perimeter increased safety, and shade trees were planted. The garden was built with 10 raised garden beds, including two with ADA compliant transfer benches for gardeners in wheelchairs. All the beds are now being utilized with two plots taken by Community Service Center, an organization that assists developmentally disabled adults, and another one for youth and family activities organized by the Appalachian Mountain Club (AMC).

When the park first opened in Spring 2014, neighborhood families immediately began enjoying the facility... but, it did not yet have a name. The City conducted a "Name the Park" contest for elementary school students. The winning submission, "Friendship Park," was from a third-grader, Isaiah Waning, who received a new bicycle and helmet as a prize. The official grand opening celebration was in Spring 2015. Since the park first opened, there have been several improvements and activities added to the park. Three free-standing 55 gallon rain barrels were installed to meet water needs. Summer camp is now offered at the park for neighborhood children and subsidized lunch is offered through the USDA Summer Food Service Program. AHEAD (Affordable Housing, Education & Development) helped build a permanent shade canopy in the park to make the space even more inviting.



Isaiah Waning, 9, submitted the winning name for the new park: Friendship Park. Pictured with Isaiah are members of the Community Garden Committee.

HEAL Efforts Continue in Berlin

The success of the Friendship Community Garden and Park motivated the city to expand its parks with gardens to three other locations: Community Field, Brown School, and Brookside. In 2015, Berlin received a Harvard Pilgrim Healthy Food Fund Grant which enabled them to hire a summer gardener who worked with children at the four playground sites to establish gardens, teach gardening, and share the produce. The grant also allowed for the purchase of equipment cabins and gardening tools. Berlin also received a Community Facilities grant for permanent canopies over the picnic tables for the Community Field and Brown School parks.

Berlin HEAL will continue to advocate for adopting Complete Streets language that provides a reminder for the City to consider all users during street renovations and planning. The City is working on a new sign system, and the coalition is advocating for including wayfinding signs that promoting walking as part of that project.

Further, in 2015, Berlin and its partners, Coos County Family Health Services, AMC, UNH Cooperative Extension, and Dr. Traci Wagner, received a Tillotson grant for a two-year pilot focusing on healthy eating and physical activity programming through a prescription model.

The Berlin Daily Sun

COUNCIL APPROVES PARK PLANS

Excerpts from article published May 7, 2013

BERLIN – The city council gave its blessing Monday night to two proposals for projects that will create small parks in different sections of the city.

One, at 3 Glen Avenue, will clean up the southern entrance to the downtown and provide general and handicap parking. The other, at 115 Mason Street, will expand an existing park to provide a small playground and community garden space. In both cases, the land was or will be obtained from demolishing dilapidated buildings the city obtained through tax deed...

...The [Mason Street] project, developed by city staff, calls for a mixed-use park and community garden area at 115 Mason Street. Former Housing Coordinator Andre Caron created a small park area a couple of years ago at the corner of Granite and Mason Streets but the city postponed developing the park further because it appeared the city would obtain the 115 Mason Street property by tax deed. The city did get the property and earlier this year demolished the building.

The city has \$26,750 left from its first Neighborhood Stabilization Program grant for the project. [Housing Coordinator Linda] White developed a budget that includes some playground equipment, picnic tables, and fencing for the park. She also included in the budget money for summer playground staff time and park maintenance. Money for the raised garden beds and soil will be covered by funds from a Healthy Eating Active Living grant.

There will be parking at the site for three cars. Initial plans call for 12 to 14 raised garden beds that will be assigned to interested residents through Berlin Parks and Recreation.

White said she hopes to get the project underway immediately so the park can be available for use this summer. The council formally voted to approve both projects.



In early 2013, a dilapidated building was demolished on Mason Street to create space for a new community park.



By late 2013, the park had benches, a perimeter fence, playground for children, and a name – Friendship Park.



In 2014, 10 raised garden beds were added to the park and all are being used by members of the neighborhood.