On August 14th, 2019, America Walks hosted the webinar, “Connected and Engaged: Community Outreach Strategies for Transportation”, where we explored the importance of community participation and collaboration in transportation planning.

It featured Paulina Baeza, Senior Planner at the Tulsa Planning Office at INCOG, Dr. Danielle Spurlock, city and regional planning scholar, and Anne Wallace, Deputy Director for the Office of Redevelopment at the City of Knoxville. Our inspiring panelists shared their own experiences, research and lessons in community engagement and collaboration in designing and creating walkable and movable neighborhoods.

America Walks received many questions and comments from attendees. Panelist Anne Wallace took time to offer her expert answers, to continue the conversation and provide further insight on best practices used for creating safe, accessible, and enjoyable walking conditions in her work, so you can too.

*The Cumberland Ave. improvements look great for pedestrians. But what about cycling infrastructure? I didn’t notice that.*

**Anne:** With the right of way being smaller than originally estimated and the prioritization of sidewalk space, there wasn’t room for bike lanes on Cumberland, but there are parallel one way pairs north and south of Cumberland Avenue (on Lake and White Avenues) and their ADT is less than 10,000 while Cumberland is north of 30,000; they are also flatter (less slope); we also converted all the side streets to two way traffic to allow bikes easy access to any block on Cumberland. Of course cyclists are still allowed to use the street, and some choose to do so, but the marked bike routes are on these parallel streets. We did also add bike racks throughout the street.

**Of the 25M budget for the Cumberland Ave. project, what was the cost to relocate/reguild utilities?**

**Anne:** The overhead power lines were moved to the alleys north and south of the street and that was a huge cost savings to the project (ended up being about $500,000). We investigated putting the electric lines underground in a vault in the street that cost was projected at $5 Million.

**What pushback did Knoxville experience from people who did not want the road diet?**

**Anne:** Pushback popped up from a variety of places, interests and at different times; one of the biggest challenges we faced were some influential property owners who during and after the right of way process who advocated for the removal of the medians in front of their businesses/properties. Thankfully we had both the safety data from traffic studies and a Mayor and Council that saw the value of the medians to improve safety and therefore the owners were not successful in their lobbying.
How can local neighborhoods be made more walk friendly for people with physical disability?

Anne: This is a broad question, but some elements that we used were ADA curb ramps with tactile warning mats at each intersection, using a stamped asphalt crosswalk to delineate crossings, reducing the crossing distances for pedestrians (which limits their exposure to vehicles), providing walk signals with traffic signals, and spacing benches for wheelchairs to be able to sit next to a bench.

Violence is ever on the increase in many neighborhoods, including previously safe neighborhoods. In what ways can we increase safety and awareness in our communities?

Anne: I have found that often reasonable people can disagree, but if a reasonable goal has been established through a public process with good participation, then most people are willing to support that goal. By communicating clearly what the goal is, generally increased safety is a reasonable place to start and certainly was one of our goals for Cumberland Avenue, then even if people disagree with the method of how to get to a safer community they will agree to support the goal. I found sometimes it just took listening to someone’s concerns and explaining why we chose a specific course of action went a long way to alleviating fear and anxiety.

Do you have any experience with digital engagement you can also share?

Anne: Our website was a great resource during the project - www.cumberlandconnect.com and we also maintained a blog www.cumberlandconnections.blogspot.com

How much outreach should be done for a temporary demonstration project?

Anne: We didn’t do a temporary demonstration project with this project, but in general I have found that people will work with you if they know what to expect and when it is scheduled to happen - most of us are not excited about surprises!

Please include the connection between the subject matter and "complete streets" I’m interested in how to engage rural residents with limited options for active transportation on potential alternatives to the much-relied-upon car to connect with other communities/larger metro areas.

Anne: By having streets that support pedestrians, cyclists, cars and transit, it provides users choices about how to get where they want to go. This can be especially challenging for rural communities because typically the areas are more spread out and resources are further than people are willing to walk, but biking or transit may be an option. Most people are willing to walk between 5-20 minutes for something which equates to about a quarter to 1 mile. This of course depends on how pleasant the experience is of walking and what they are going for (i.e. to meet a friend for coffee, pick up an item at the store, etc).

What motivates stakeholders? How does one capture the attention of elected officials?

Anne: Lots of things motivates stakeholders, in the case of Cumberland Avenue it was a street that was not working well and saw a lot of accidents. The merchants association advocated for years to elected officials that the street needed to be changed, that set the stage for the study that
recommended the road diet, the merchants stayed engaged throughout the planning, design, right of way and construction process and in turn engaged their elected officials about the project and its status.

I am looking to identify how we as a region can implement forward thinking transit ideas. How can planners reach out to school districts to engage in consideration of projects design element and creating safer and walkable routes to schools Often projects don’t seem like they will generate students initially but over time younger families stay.

Anne: I would recommend that you talk with Ellen Zavisca at the Knoxville, Knox County Transportation Planning Organization, she has been active with Safe Routes to Schools programs and may be able to share good ideas about this topic.