Enhancing the built environment by design: Memphis Walks

The School of Public Health, in partnership with the UofM Department of Architecture, has been named by the Architects Foundation, the American Institute of Architects (AIA) and the Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture (ACSA) as a member of the AIA Design & Health Research Consortium. The consortium helps translate research on design's influence on public health into architectural practice for the public, policy makers, and design and public health professionals.

This Partnership resulted in the implementation of the Memphis Walks initiative, designed to enhance walkability in a revitalized inner city neighborhood of Memphis named Crosstown. Memphis Walks represents an interdisciplinary, community-engaged effort to enhance health through re-design of the built environment. With the goal of increasing walkability in an urban community, Memphis Walks addresses many social determinants detrimental to health: crime, inadequate lighting, deteriorating sidewalks and crosswalks, dangerous traffic patterns, poverty, inadequate access to health care, and lack of social cohesion. This University of Memphis design collaborative is a partnership among the Departments of Architecture, City & Regional Planning, Engineering, Criminology & Criminal Justice, and the School of Public Health, as well as five community partners: the Shelby County Health Department (SCHD), Shelby County Office of Sustainability, Church Health, Livable Memphis, and Crosstown Concourse. Our most important priority was to engage community residents from the very outset and address their priorities. As crime and personal safety were expressed concerns, a community perception survey was developed to gauge perceptions of crime, safety, neighborhood blight, walkability, traffic congestion, social engagement, and health status. Moreover, University faculty and students conducted environmental assessments related to crime patterns, community lighting, walkability, traffic speed, pedestrian counts, unsafe sidewalks, and physical design. The ultimate intent is that research and dialogue from this initiative will influence public policy that supports the development of more safe, walkable places within our region.

