

FOREST GROVE: Working Together to Create a Place for Families and Businesses to Thrive



IN MANY WAYS, WASHINGTON COUNTY IS AN OREGON SUCCESS STORY.

On important metrics of economic health—like median household income, wages, educational levels, and unemployment rates—Washington County emerges a winner, consistently among the best in the state.

Washington County also has one of the lowest tobacco use prevalence rates in Oregon, with only 13% of adults reporting current cigarette smoking.

However, county-level statistics mask disparities related to overall income and tobacco prevalence, and the two issues are related. Oregon adults with lower income and/or educational levels are almost twice as likely to smoke compared to Oregonians whose income is above the poverty line and/or have more than a high school education.

Forest Grove, a community of 20,000 residents on the west side of Washington County, reflects some of the diversity hidden beneath county-level statistics.

For example, about 1 in 5 Forest Grove residents lives beneath the poverty level compared to about 1 in 10 people in Washington County overall.

Forest Grove also has a growing Latino community: as of 2014, half of Forest Grove School District students are Latino, the largest percentage in the Portland metropolitan area.

Overall, Latinos use tobacco at lower rates than other racial/ethnic groups, but, again, differences exist within groups. Data show that more recent immigrants smoke less, but healthy habits wane with acculturation, and subsequent generations tend to more fully embrace the habits of the dominant culture. Consequently, tobacco use—and all of its associated health consequences—could increase among the next generation unless the community takes steps to change social norms around tobacco use.

DIVERSE COMMUNITY MEMBERS WORKING TOGETHER

Since 2005, Adelante Mujeres has managed the popular Forest Grove Farmers Market, which operates as a city-permitted, public event on a downtown street in Forest Grove. According to the agency's website, the market *"provides an outlet for small farmers and food producers ... to offer fresh, local goods. It attracts a weekly crowd of almost 2,000 visitors of all ages and demographic groups to share good food and listen to local musicians."*

In 2013, Farmer's Market Manager, Kaely Summers, received feedback that smoking was becoming a nuisance. Customers didn't want to smell or breathe tobacco smoke while they shopped for fresh produce or shared prepared meals with their families, and vendors felt the secondhand smoke was bad for business. Summers understood their concerns. She reports that Adelante Mujeres has had a 'no smoking' policy for staff and vendors for at least five years:

“The farmer's market is the public face of Adelante Mujeres and tobacco use isn't consistent with our values and mission, which is to create spaces for families to live healthy lives.”

However, since the event is held on city property, Summers had no jurisdiction to intervene. Adelante Mujeres initiated conversations with the Forest Grove mayor and the local Tobacco Prevention & Education Program (TPEP) at Washington County Public Health Division to explore possible solutions.

THE LOCAL TOBACCO PREVENTION & EDUCATION PROGRAM (TPEP) IN ACTION: EDUCATING DECISION MAKERS AND FINDING CHAMPIONS

The local TPEP Coordinator, Carla Bennett, had already been hard at work raising public awareness through her facilitated discussions on emerging tobacco issues. Bennett had spoken with many community groups and leadership bodies about tobacco, particularly electronic cigarettes, hookah, flavored tobacco, and their relationship to the rise in youth smoking. She found community leaders receptive to the message: *"Beyond conventional cigarette use, tobacco is a unique topic to be able to talk about with diverse community leaders at local jurisdictions, law enforcement agencies, park districts, community-based organizations and safety advisory groups... People seem to agree that this is personal:*

'THESE ARE OUR KIDS; THESE ARE OUR COMMUNITY MEMBERS.'

Most of the leaders that I've met with have said: 'We have to do something about this.'"





Forest Grove Mayor Peter Truax became interested in looking at a policy to address smoking and tobacco use at the Farmer’s Market, as well as on all city properties, assuming there was enough community support. He sent Bennett to Parks & Recreation Director, Tom Gamble, to gauge his interest, and that of the Parks Commission.

Gamble was concerned about tobacco use in the parks—his staff spent at least two hours each week picking up cigarette butts in city park shelters—and agreed that a ban on smoking and tobacco use was consistent with a healthy parks and recreation system. Soon after, Forest Grove Parks & Recreation, with support from the local TPEP, presented and carried a proposed ordinance banning smoking and the use of tobacco on city property and at city-sponsored events to the Parks Commission and the Forest Grove Public Safety Advisory Committee. Both groups voted to support the ordinance and recommend it be adopted by City Council.

GROWING PUBLIC AWARENESS AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Media coverage was heavy, with more than 10 stories and an Oregonian editorial that focused on the proposed ordinance. Bennett says:

“ I was grateful for the media coverage because there were quite a few people in the community that came forward in support of the policy. ”

Some residents came forward to provide written or oral public testimony in support of the policy; no one testified against it.



Pacific University’s Forest Grove campus, who had worked with Washington County Public Health Division on other community wellness activities, also voiced public support for the tobacco-free policy on city properties. In a letter sent to the Forest Grove City Council in March 2014 Ann Barr-Gillespie, Vice Provost and Executive Dean of the University’s College of Health Professions, said the university’s Forest Grove campus was



working towards a similar policy for all of its campuses, in order to *“help improve the health and wellbeing of our community.”* Because Pacific University has an agreement with the City to use Lincoln Park, located in downtown Forest Grove, it was especially important that the two entities develop consistent social norms and policies governing that shared-use space.

POLICY ADOPTION AND IMPLEMENTATION

On June 9, 2014, the Forest Grove City Council passed an ordinance banning smoking and tobacco use within “all city owned and leased properties,” excluding streets and sidewalks. The ordinance also prohibits smoking and tobacco use at city-sponsored public events, including the Farmers Market. At the end of the first summer following adoption of the new policy, Parks & Recreation Director, Tom Gamble, said he’s already witnessed positive outcomes: “My staff noticed a difference immediately. They pick up very few butts now.” Likewise, he reported that “compliance has been a nonissue.”



TPEP Coordinator, Carla Bennett, cites “the relationships and support to improve the health of our communities built through the policy change process” as an important TPEP success: “We have great partnerships.”



CREATING SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENTS FOR A HEALTHIER GENERATION

Kaely Summers of Adelante Mujeres and the Forest Grove Farmer’s Market says that she is pleased with the new tobacco-free and smokefree policy and that, similar to other reports, there have been no problems with compliance and enforcement during their busy summer season. She said going smokefree is a good business decision for the Farmer’s Market, in addition to being supportive of the “healthy, family-friendly environments” that Adelante Mujeres promotes.

According to the website, the Forest Grove Farmer’s Market “cultivates a space for sharing and celebrating cultural and community traditions.” Now, thanks to the combined efforts of diverse community members, tobacco use is no longer one of the community traditions being passed to the next generation of Forest Grove’s citizens.