



BLUE ZONES[®]

ACTIVATE MASON COUNTY



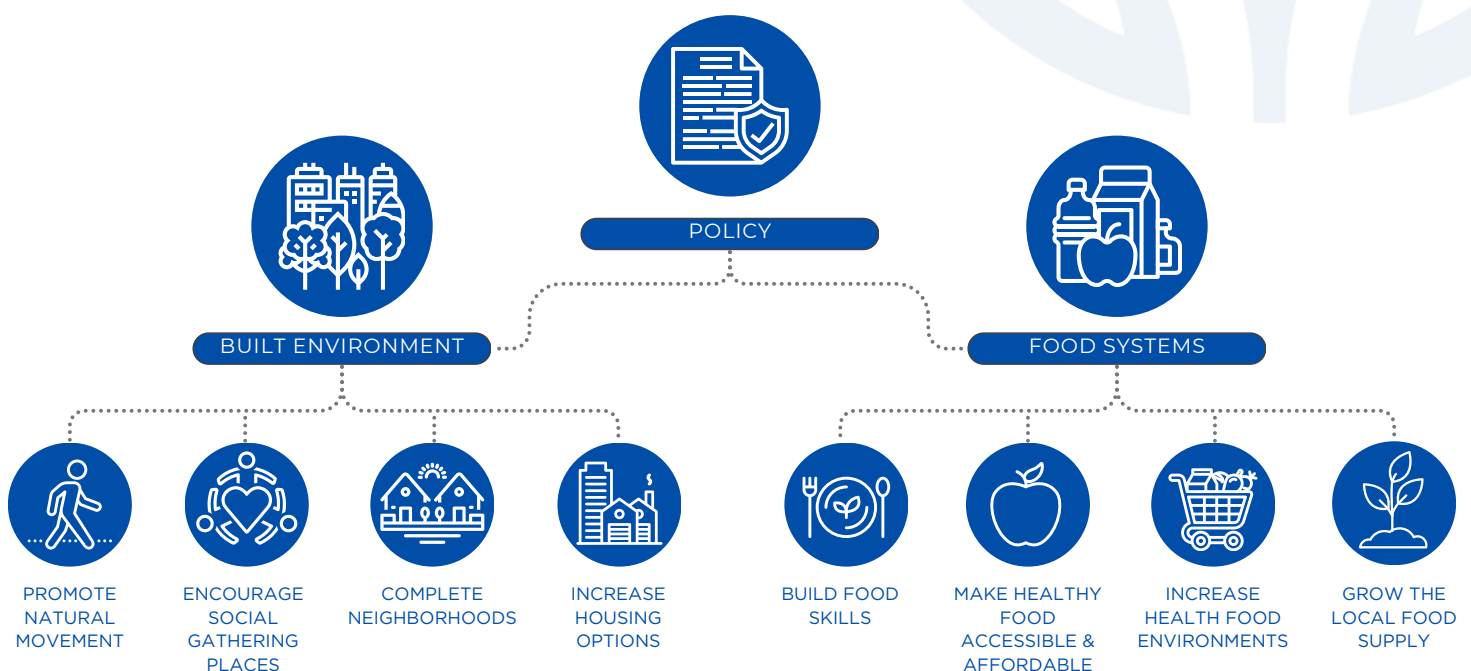


Intro & Background

Blue Zones Activate® was sponsored on a regional level by CHOICE (Community Health Organization Improving Care and Equity). CHOICE is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to transform the landscape of community health in Central Western Washington. CHOICE serves everyone in the region under the jurisdictions of Cowlitz, Grays Harbor, Lewis, Mason, Pacific, Thurston, and Wahkiakum counties and the sovereign nations of the Chehalis, Cowlitz, Nisqually, Quinault, Shoalwater Bay, Skokomish, and Squaxin Island tribes.

Mason County, as well as Grays Harbor and Lewis counties, were selected for the Blue Zones Activate® initiatives based on readiness, feasibility, and overall community need.

Blue Zones Activate® is a policy-focused initiative that uses evidence-based strategies to make it easier for people to make healthy choices in the communities in which they live. Activate specifically focuses on policies, projects, and programs within the communities' built environment and food systems.



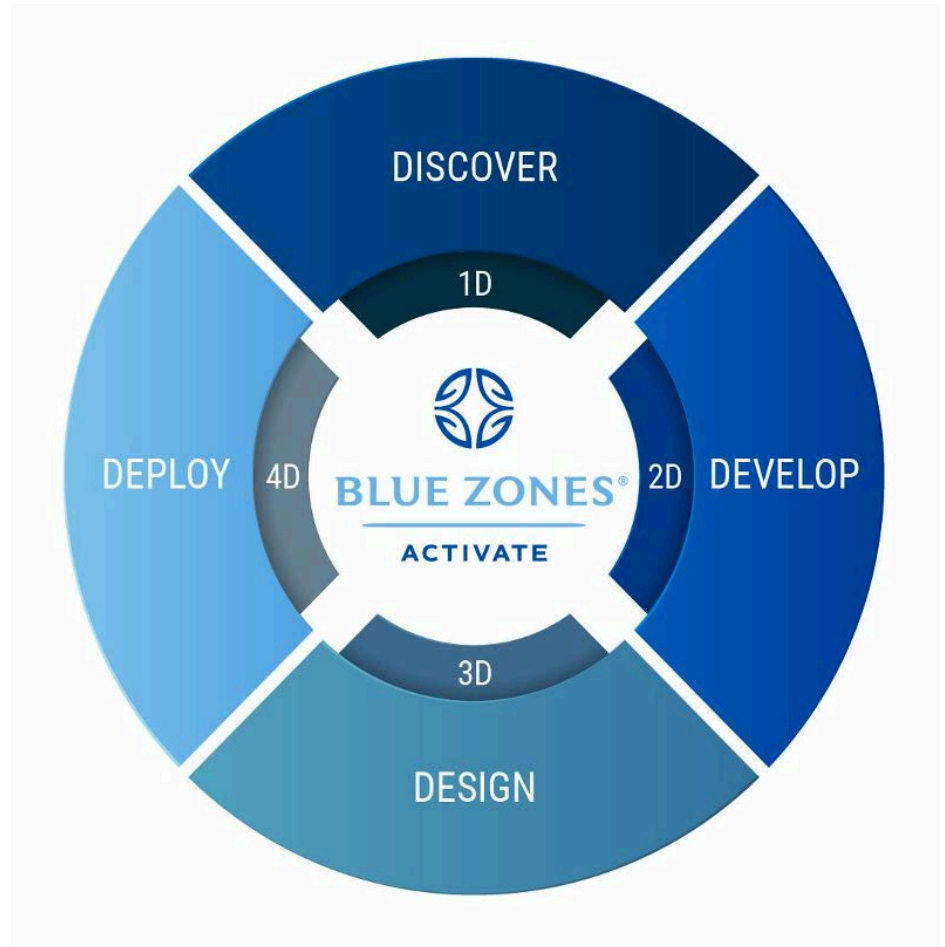
Julie Knott was hired as the Executive Director (ED) for Blue Zones Activate® Mason County in February 2023. Julie came into her new role with a wealth of experience in building coalitions among diverse groups to improve community health, education, and workforce and economic development. Julie is a trainer with the Rural Development Initiative specializing in the unique opportunities in rural leadership. She has a passion for rural communities, and her work and projects have been recognized at the national level for innovation. Julie was the regional director of the Emerald Coast Opportunity Zones, leading a cutting-edge rural economic development initiative with five sovereign nations, two counties, four municipalities, and two port authorities; she has served as founder and director of innovative housing projects; and her leadership includes serving on the board of directors for the Lower Elwha Klallam Tribe's Elwha Enterprises.

All Blue Zones Activate® initiatives rely on the knowledge and guidance of the communities we work with. Steering committees composed of local leaders and champions help inform and guide our work throughout the Activate project timeline. Blue Zones Activate® Mason County's steering team includes the Mason Matters Board of Directors, leaders in Mason County for over 50 years, along with the Mason County Economic Development Council and local leaders.





BLUE ZONES ACTIVATE® FOLLOWS THE BLUE ZONES 4-D PROCESS™: DISCOVER, DEVELOP, DESIGN, AND DEPLOY.



Discovery

In the Discovery phase, Blue Zones national subject matter experts Marcy McInelly and Dr. Margaret Adamek, with support from Blue Zones Activate® Mason County ED Julie Knott, conducted background research, interviews, focus groups, and site visits. A two-day, on-site Discovery assessment was held for both built environment and food systems, which included windshield tours of the community, interviews with local leaders and champions, and a public open house. This helped to create a picture of Mason County.

- ✓ Food Systems on-site Discovery: April 12-13, 2023
- ✓ Built Environment on-site Discovery: July 17-29, 2023

FOOD SYSTEMS DISCOVERY ENGAGEMENT ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ESTEBAN GASPAR	Community Navigator	CIELO
HEATHER HAMILTON	Farm Manager	Hood Canal Salmon Enhancement Group & Salmon Center
MENDY HARLOW	Executive Director	Hood Canal Salmon Enhancement Group & Salmon Center
ASHLEE JOHNSON	Head Chef and Director of Culinary and Nutrition Services	Mason Health
PAUL MILLER	Production Manager	Skokomish Valley Farms
RACHEL UBERMAN	Executive Director	HOPE Garden Project
BRIAN WINDROPE	Executive Director	Senior Services for South Sound



BUILT ENVIRONMENT DISCOVERY ENGAGEMENT ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

THERA BLACK	Coordinator	Peninsula Regional Transportation Planning Organization
SARAH DEHART	Advisor	Shelton Parks Advisory Committee
TIANA DUNBAR-WILES	Marketing and Communication's Specialist	Mason County Economic Development Council
DANN GAGNON	Advisor	Shelton Parks Advisory Committee
JAY HARRIS	Director	Shelton Public Works
JAE HILL	Director	City of Shelton Economic Development
JOHN KEATES	Director	Mason County Parks
JORDANNE KRUMPOLS	Coordinator	Shelton Parks & Recreation
MARK NEARY	Mason County Administrator	Mason County
SUE PATTERSON	Advisor	Shelton Parks Advisory Committee
MONTA RITTER	Director	Vance Trestle Project
KELL ROWAN	Director	Mason County Community Development
MEL SCHNEIDER	Advisor	Shelton Parks Advisory Committee
MELISSA STEARNS	Advisor	Shelton Parks Advisory Committee
LORRETTA SWANSON	Director	Mason County Public Works
MARISSA WATSON	Long Range Planner	Mason County Community Development
DAVE WINDOM	Director	Mason County Public Health
MARK ZIEGLER	City Manager	City of Shelton

Develop

Following the Discovery Phase, the subject matter experts, in partnership with Julie and the Blue Zones National Policy Team, compiled and analyzed the findings to create the Discovery Report. The report highlights the strengths, challenges, and opportunities that Mason County experiences in the built environment and food systems sectors and provides a menu of opportunities for where the work of Blue Zones Activate® could focus efforts over the following two years.

The Discovery Report was shared with local champions and leaders to review the findings and opportunities and help to make decisions on the action plan development.

- ✓ Food Systems Discovery report completed: June 27, 2023
- ✓ Built Environment Discovery report completed: September 20, 2023



Design

Summits were held for both food systems and Built Environments, where participants from the Discover Phase were united to discuss the findings and opportunities of each report and to narrow and prioritize each list of opportunities. Utilizing the Summit outcomes, the subject matter experts worked with Julie and the Blue Zones Policy Team to narrow and ultimately recommend a set of strategies for implementation in the Deploy Phase. Those strategies were presented to the Steering Committee to confirm community buy-in. After the committee meeting, the experts and Julie worked to craft goals, objectives, and implementation steps per policy area to develop the Action Plan, which was finalized on January 24, 2024.

- ✓ Food Systems Summit: September 27, 2023
- ✓ Built Environment Summit: October 11, 2023
- ✓ Summit reports drafted November 24, 2023 and finalized: December 11, 2023
- ✓ Steering Committee reviewed and provided input to the proposed policy strategies: November 17, 2023
- ✓ Action Plans finalized: January 24, 2024



FOOD SYSTEMS SUMMIT ENGAGEMENT ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

VALERIE AUBERTIN	LMTAAA, Nutrition Contract Manager
PAMELA BISH	WSU Extension, Health Education Manager
MELISSA CASEY	Mason County Public Health, Community Health Manager
MIKE ESTES	Alderbrook Resort/Harmony Hill, Garden/Landscape
DONNA FEDDERN	Lewis-Mason-Thurston Area Agency on Aging (LMTAAA)
CAROLINE FIDANZATO	HOPE Garden Activate, Executive Director
KIM GOWER	Hood Canal Salmon Enhancement Group/The Salmon Center, Project Administrator
HEATHER HAMILTON	Hood Canal Salmon Enhancement Group/The Salmon Center, Farm Manager
MENDY HARLOW	Hood Canal Salmon Enhancement Group/The Salmon Center, Executive Director
ASHLEE JOHNSON	Mason General Hospital, Chef
EMILY LAYMAN	Mason County Public Health, Community Health Educator
AMY ROSKO	Alderbrook Resort & Harmony Hill, Garden/Landscape
REBECCA SHIPMAN	Mason County Public Health, Public Health Nurse
CLAUDIA SUASTEGUI	Shelton Family YMCA, Executive Director
JOANNE TEJEDA	Hood Canal Salmon Enhancement Group/The Salmon Center, Marketing Associate
DAVE WINDOM	Mason County Public Health, Director

BUILT ENVIRONMENT SUMMIT ENGAGEMENT ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

JENNIFER BARIA	Mason Economic Development Council Executive Director
PAMELA BISH	WSU Mason County Nutrition Education Manager
DANN GAGNON	Shelton Parks Advisory Committee
TESSA HALLORAN	Mason County WSU Master Gardener/Small Farms Coordinator
JAE HILL	City of Shelton Community & Economic Development Director
TED KYLLONEN	Vance Creek Society
KITTY LUNDEEN-NESS	Master Gardener
BETH MIZUSHIMA	CHOICE CFO
MARK NEARY	Mason County Administrator
MONTE RITTER	Vance Trestle Project Director
KELL ROWAN	Mason County Community Development Director
MEL SCHNEIDER	Shelton Parks Advisory Committee
DOROTHY SHAW	Master Gardener
MARISSA WATSON	Mason County Community Development Long Range Planner
MARK ZIEGLER	City of Shelton City Manager





Deploy

To celebrate the commencement of the foundation and planning stage of the project and the beginning of the transformation work in Mason County, a kick-off event was held on January 27, 2024, at the Mason County Senior Activities Association. This event showcased the past and upcoming work of Blue Zones Activate® Mason County and served as an educational event for all community members. The event invited health and well-being related community organizations, provided activities that highlighted Blue Zones founding principles, and included speeches from Blue Zones Co-Founder Nick Buettner and Blue Zones Activate® Mason Executive Director Julie Knott. Hoola-hooping by an 84-year-old member, boxing, and tai-chai taught by a 92-year-old, and Nick Buettner on the stage next to her were a few noteworthy highlights. Everyone enjoyed delicious samples of Blue Zones-inspired recipes.

The action plan was made available to the community attendees to provide transparency and insight into the work Activate Mason County would be working on. Julie continued to work diligently alongside the community throughout the course of the project on placemaking efforts in Shelton, community gardens support, uplifting community organizations, and partnerships.



FOOD SYSTEMS ACTION PLAN

A community's food environment is the most important determinant of whether a resident will experience diet-related chronic diseases. By designing local environments that make the nutritious choice the easy choice, we can meaningfully improve the health of residents. Policy and systems changes, combined with shifts to community infrastructure, are proven ways to move the dial on health outcomes.

The following are the community-identified food systems improvement strategies that were the focus for the duration of the project.



Engage with The Salmon Center Executive Team and Staff to develop a master plan to advance a sustainable food production program, including staffing, equipment, funding, partners, and expansion planning requirements.

Affordable sources of healthy, locally grown food are highly sought after and much needed in Mason County. The Farm at Waters Edge, an initiative of the Hood Canal Salmon Enhancement Group, provides free food to anyone who wishes to harvest it from the Farm. Staff would like to considerably expand their productive and infrastructure capacity, grow the availability of healthy food to members of the community most in need, and create a sustainable business model for the farm and its food distribution program.



Engage with the Board of Directors, Executive Team, and culinary leadership at Mason General Hospital to establish and enact Healthy Eating Policy Guidelines that encompass all foods served to patients and sold in vending machines and the cafeteria onsite, based on Blue Zones nutrition guidelines, CDC healthy hospital food guidelines, Good Food Purchasing Practices, and other best practices.

This effort will lay the foundation for implementing a comprehensive array of strategies to create an exemplary hospital food environment based on the agricultural bounty of Mason County, the skills of the culinary team, and an abundance of healthy options.



BUILT ENVIRONMENT ACTION PLAN

Our built and natural environments have a direct impact on our health. The built environment encompasses the human-made spaces where we live, work, learn, and play, which includes our streets, intersections, buildings, homes, and sidewalks. How well our built and natural environments are integrated is an essential predictor of natural movement, socializing, and downshifting in any community.

The following are the community-identified built environment improvement strategies that were the focus for the duration of the project.



Advance the Catalyst Park Improvements Plan by facilitating a community visioning process and developing a Plan that includes concepts, budgets, and resourcing to guide next steps.

This strategy at the intersection of built environment and food systems work is intended to build early momentum for Blue Zones Activate® by facilitating community visioning and making tangible improvements in Shelton that are enjoyed by residents throughout Mason County. The role of Blue Zones is a convener and implementation partner focused on articulating the vision for the park improvements and providing technical assistance to develop strategies and leverage funding for implementation. These improvements will improve access to healthy food and help foster social connectedness for residents throughout Mason County.



Provide technical support to implement the vision of a Shelton Downtown Arts District, including the Washington State Creative District Program application, and implementation of downtown placemaking efforts.

The Cota Street Art District, conceived by the community in the Shelton Downtown Revitalization Plan, would serve as an arts and community hub for the City of Shelton and a cultural center for Mason County residents. The strategy will actively involve current downtown residents, business owners, artists, government, organizations, and community members to craft an inclusive strategy for the district and bring foot traffic and increased business downtown. In the short-term, organizing temporary events such as pop-up exhibitions, art showcases, and Art Walks will stimulate Downtown Shelton's vibrancy. In the medium-term, placemaking improvements detailed in the 2015 plan will be implemented, possibly including traffic calming, alleyway activation, art installations, and/or green space improvements that will build a sense of community as stakeholders work together to implement the catalytic vision from robust community involvement.

Support and Planning Partnership with the Salmon Center

The Salmon Center, headquarters for the Hood Canal Salmon Enhancement Group, creates educational programming, conducts research, and demonstrates sustainable agricultural practices at the edge of salmon habitat. Blue Zones Activate® Mason is working with the leadership team on master planning to support the expansion of this organic non-profit educational farm. The Salmon Center Master Plan drawings and plans are complete and will be utilized for funding and educational purposes.



Food Systems Support for Mason Health

Mason Health provides healthcare to the entire county and is home to a Bistro that serves meals to patients, staff, visitors, and the general public. Blue Zones is supporting Mason Health's hospital Bistro's mobile food delivery system, food policy development, local purchasing program, and their role as food leadership convener for the entire county.



Support in the Expansion of the Catalyst Park Demonstration Garden

Washington State University's Catalyst Park Demonstration Garden is a 12,000-square-foot demonstration garden that includes a food bank and learning garden, as well as raised beds for the community. Blue Zones is supporting the expansion of Catalyst Garden through a community vision process resulting in plans, sketches, and detailed planning to support future funding and bond initiatives.

Catalyst Park Demonstration Garden drawings and plans are complete. Master Gardeners attended a funding strategies workshop led by BZ Activate Mason ED to plan for the next steps. The Master Gardeners are using the materials and skills to advance funding goals and were recently bequested with a significant donation.



Capacity & Visioning Support for the City of Shelton Creative District

The City of Shelton is the only incorporated city in Mason County, WA, and serves as the hub for community events and activities. Blue Zones is supporting the City of Shelton's downtown walkability and enhancement plans by providing vision and general capacity support. The city plans to become a Washington State Certified Creative District and will implement upgrades such as lighting, trees, benches, improved striping, and wayfinding.

Downtown Shelton Art Walk completed July 2025 - This is a required step in the Creative District designation application. It is estimated that a record-setting 1200 community members, businesses, artists, and visitors attended.



Community Engagement

While Blue Zones Activate® is a policy-focused initiative, it is critical to engage the community throughout the process to ensure transparency and obtain support. Julie has reached across the vast Mason County to include all members of the community.



FACEBOOK

Blue Zones Activate® Mason County utilizes Facebook to spread news and awareness about general Blue Zones resources and news, the current work in the community, and other related happenings from organizations across Mason County. The Facebook Page amassed a following of over 150 people across the community.

LIST OF ACTIVITIES

Mason County Event Engagement

- Mason Built Environment Summit
- Oysterfest
- Mason Food Systems Summit
- EDC Mason Business Appreciation
- Timberline Library System
- Mason County Commissioners Meeting
- Sunrise Rotary
- Salish Sea Rotary
- Moving Mason Forward
- Tour de Health w/ BZ Grays Harbor
- Mason County Health Coalition
- Mason County Association of Realtors
- Shelton Parks & Recreation Advisory Team
- Forest Festival
- Board of Health - Mason County
- Shelton Chamber After Hours
- Mason County Community Development/Long Range Planning
- Shelton Parks & Recreation Dept
- Shelton City Council
- Fjord Oyster Bank/Hoodspout
- Skokomish Indian Tribe CEO/Staff
- BZ Activate Mason Open House
- Peninsula Credit Union
- Senior Services for South Sound
- Mason General Hospital Food Services
- Mason County Health Consortium
- Shelton Family YMCA
- Shelton Art Walk

Mason County Media Engagement

- Health Coalition Newsletter
- Healthy Mason County
- KMAS 1030 AM & 103.3 FM
- Tracing the Fjord



Conclusion

Blue Zones Activate® has sparked incredible momentum in Mason County bringing people together to create healthier places to live, work, and play. The passion and dedication of local leaders, organizations, and residents have been at the heart of this progress – and that work isn't stopping.

While CHOICE's formal partnership with Blue Zones will conclude in May 2025, the work inspired by this initiative will continue to thrive under local leadership. The vision has always been for this initiative to evolve into a community-led movement, and this transition marks an exciting step forward as local leaders and residents build on the progress we've achieved together.

CHOICE remains dedicated to investing directly in local communities to sustain and expand the projects and initiatives developed through Blue Zones Activate®. Our focus is on completing key initiatives, ensuring long-term sustainability, and fostering continued growth.

This shift also creates new opportunities. As the funding landscape for healthcare and related services changes, we can explore fresh ways to support local well-being efforts, connect existing programs, and ensure impact.

Between now and the end of 2025, CHOICE will continue working with local teams to complete major projects, including improvements to parks and trails, food programs, and initiatives that bring people together in meaningful ways.

Julie Knott, former Blue Zones Activate® Mason County Executive Director, is stepping into a new role as the Executive Director of Mason Matters, ensuring a smooth continuation of the important work already underway.

Mason Matters will focus on:

- ✓ Strengthening local food systems through projects like:
 - ✓ Farm-to-table programs
 - ✓ Expanding specialty produce options
 - ✓ Supporting food banks and meal delivery services
 - ✓ Creating programs that celebrate and support culturally important agriculture.
- ✓ Moving forward with major community spaces, including:
 - ✓ The Downtown Shelton Walkability Projects, making it easier and safer to walk through town.
 - ✓ The Catalyst Park Demonstration Garden, a space designed to promote sustainable gardening and education.

Mason Matters will continue working closely with partners like Mason General Hospital Food Services and the Salmon Center to expand access to healthy food and wellness programs.

Julie and her team will keep the community updated through meetings, events, and online platforms. Stay connected through Mason Matters' website and social media channels, or reach out to Julie at masonmatters1@gmail.com.

From Blue Zones Activate®, we want to thank the entire Mason County community for your time, support, and continuous work to make Mason County a great place to live, work, and play.