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**TAHLEQUAH, Okla.**—The Cherokee Nation’s Healthy Nation department will host a public forum Oct. 3 on whether there is a community need in Tahlequah and Stilwell for more walking and biking routes near schools.

The forum is at 7 p.m. at the Tahlequah High School Performing Arts Center at 591 Pendleton Street and will include discussion on Stilwell safe routes to school, as well.

“Creating a healthy community is important for those living and visiting here and for our future generations,” said Julie Deerinwater-Anderson, project coordinator for Cherokee Nation Healthy Nation, which is co-sponsoring the event. “By creating a community where the healthy choice is the easy choice, we can lower our rates for preventable diseases such as diabetes, cancer, obesity and heart disease. That in turn builds stronger and healthier families here at the Cherokee Nation.”

Too many schools across the country do not have infrastructure to support children walking or biking to school, and the Cherokee Nation and other organizers hope to develop a plan to create safe routes to school, she said.

The forum is co-hosted by the Tahlequah BEST Community Coalition and the Adair County Environment Health Initiative. Facilitators hope to eventually conduct site visits at several schools in Tahlequah and Stilwell and identify tools and strategies for change.

The forum’s guest speaker is Dan Burden, an internationally recognized expert on walkability, which is whether a community is considered “outdoor friendly” and provides walking paths and bicycling and pedestrian programs.

“Active living is the partial healer of many negative effects that have led to isolation and the decreasing health of people. Through our work, we show that walkability and livability lead to more attractive and functional communities, which helps improve individual and community health,” said Burden, the co-founder of the internationally acclaimed Walkable and Livable Communities Institute in Washington. “Building towns to a walkable scale helps restore health and well-being.”

The Cherokee Nation Healthy Nation is providing the document and technical assistance through a Community Transformation Grant with the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to help lower the rates of obesity, cancer and heart disease in Indian Country.

The event is free and open to the public. For more information, call Cherokee Nation Healthy Nation at 918-453-5600.