

Healthy & Walkable Communities

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Institute for Public Administration
College of Human Services, Education & Public Policy
University of Delaware

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University of Delaware's Department of Health, Nutrition and Exercise Sciences
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Healthy & Walkable Communities

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Preface

As the Director of the Institute for Public Administration at the University of Delaware, I am pleased to provide this report, *Healthy/Walkable Communities*. Funded by a grant from the Delaware Department of Health and Social Services' Division of Public Health through the University of Delaware's Department of Health, Nutrition, and Exercise Sciences, this report will serve as a public education piece and a resource to Delaware municipalities wishing to become more walkable.

This report describes the issues of obesity-related health problems in America, discusses a number of the root causes, and explores community-based remedies towns and cities may employ in order to give their residents convenient, safe, everyday opportunities for physical activity. The paper also details how a handful of national and local communities have managed similar efforts.

Jerome R. Lewis, Ph.D.

Director, Institute for Public Administration

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Institute for Public Administration

This report was prepared by the Institute for Public Administration (IPA), a unit within the College of Human Services, Education & Public Policy at the University of Delaware. IPA links the research and resources of the University of Delaware with the management and information needs of local, state, and regional governments in the Delaware Valley. IPA provides assistance to agencies and local governments through direct staff assistance and research projects as well as training programs and policy forums. Jerome R. Lewis is the director of the Institute.

IPA staff member William DeCoursey served as project coordinator. Troy Mix oversaw the development of this report, authored by IPA Research Assistants Megan Lehman and Michelle Boyle, with much appreciated support and input from Dr. Avron Abraham, Eric Jacobson, Martin Wollaston, Ed O'Donnell, and Elizabeth Orsega-Smith.

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Introduction

This paper is a part of a larger project, the University of Delaware's Healthy/Walkable Communities initiative, which is an ongoing collaboration between the University's Department of Health, Nutrition and Exercise Sciences (DHNES) and the Institute for Public Administration (IPA). Funding for this project was provided by the Delaware Department of Public Health through DHNES. The Nemours Foundation also deserves recognition for its input and vision.

This document is intended to serve as a resource for Delaware municipalities wishing to improve the walkability of their towns and, in so doing, the activity levels and health of their residents. In addition to conducting research, IPA staff and students are working with a handful of Delaware towns to identify a study area. Each study area is jointly walked and assessed with regard to its strengths and deficiencies. Phase one of this project will be completed in June 2007, with each municipality having received a written report with suggested implementation items from IPA. Also, potential sources of funding will be identified. During phase two, and possible subsequent phases, the Healthy/Walkable Communities team will offer continued assistance to the initial set of towns and begin the process with new communities.

Why Are Our Communities Less Walkable?

Walking is the best possible exercise. Habituate yourself to walk very far.
—Thomas Jefferson (August 19, 1785, in a letter to Peter Carr)

Before there was a car in every driveway and a gas station on every corner, before Henry Ford brought the horseless carriage to the masses, traditional towns and cities were created on a human scale. Walking was the practical transportation mode of choice for most Americans, regardless of age and class. Compact, mixed-use development allowed most business and leisure trips to be made by foot.

The arrival of the automobile and massive federal investments in the highway system made it feasible to live many miles away from work. Land outside the city was more affordable and offered a “blank slate” for development. Decentralization of metropolitan populations and centers of employment to suburban locations increased travel distances to work, school, and other daily tasks. Subsequently, the typical American family became largely dependent on the automobile. Zoning codes and local ordinances were written in a way that encouraged the trends toward larger lot sizes and the separation of different types of land uses from one another; new development could not legally conform to the historic patterns that were so pedestrian-friendly.

At the same time, technological innovations, such as the television and personal computer, and the decline of jobs requiring physical labor have helped make America more sedentary (Committee on Physical Activity, Health, Transportation and Land Use, 2). It is now common to go through the day without walking more than a few hundred feet—from the kitchen to the garage, the parking lot to the office, the school steps to the curb, the parking space to the store, and the cul-de-sac to the front door.

These lifestyle changes have had a wide range of consequences, perhaps most dramatically to our health. Public health efforts focused on the prevention of chronic disease have turned a spotlight on how the places we live affect the way we live. “The question has arisen of whether decentralized and largely automobile-dependent development patterns...are contributing to the increasingly sedentary lifestyles of the U.S. population—a known risk factor for many chronic illnesses” (Committee on Physical Activity, Health, Transportation and Land Use, vii). As you will see, communities across the country have begun to recognize and address this problem. This report will outline the value of a walkable community, summarize key components of walkability, and offer case studies that illustrate proven strategies for Delaware communities to consider in their efforts to become healthier by becoming more walkable.

Why a Walkable Community?

The Health Benefits

The most obvious advantage of a walkable community is the health benefit of exercise to individual citizens. It is no coincidence that the rise in obesity in the United States has coincided with decades of development patterns that have made walking difficult or impossible. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the National Center for Health Statistics, 30 percent of U.S. adults 20 years of age and older (over 60 million people) are obese. The percentage of young people who are overweight has more than tripled since 1980. Among children and adolescents between 6 and 19 years old, 16 percent (over nine million young people) are considered overweight (“Overweight and Obesity: At a Glance”). Being overweight or obese puts people at risk for cardiovascular disease, diabetes, hypertension, high cholesterol, stroke, cancer, and higher rates of anxiety and depression (“Physical Activity for Everyone: The Importance of Physical Activity”). Even people who are not overweight suffer declines in physical and mental health if they are sedentary. The direct medical costs of physical inactivity were estimated by the CDC to total more than \$76 billion in 2000. Another study found that inactive people without physical limitations (such as a chronic medical condition or disability) still had higher medical costs than physically active people without limitations (Committee on Physical Activity, Health, Transportation and Land Use, 24).

The Surgeon General advises that 30 minutes of walking five days a week will significantly reduce the risks to adults for the aforementioned health conditions while contributing to healthy bones, muscles, and joints. The CDC recommends that children and adolescents participate in at least 60 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity most days of the week, preferably daily (“Physical Activity for Everyone: Recommendations: Are There Special Recommendations for Young People?”). In a walkable community, it is easy to accumulate 30 minutes of activity or more because daily tasks, such as going to and from school or work and running errands, can be performed by walking rather than driving. Walkable communities create a culture that encourages and supports healthy lifestyles (“Overweight and Obesity: At a Glance”).

Families also benefit from walkable communities and the lifestyles such places encourage. The barriers to escaping sedentary activities, namely loading everyone into the car for a 20-minute drive, are eliminated. Moreover, active parents set an example, and their children are more likely to be active throughout their lives. Physical activity can be part of the family’s daily routine by designating time for family walks, active games, and other outdoor recreation together (“Physical Activity for Everyone: Recommendations: Are There Special Recommendations for Young People?”). Walking the dog can even become a family activity. Walkable communities also impact the family dynamic by providing parents with a natural opportunity, free of distractions, to bond with their children on functional or recreational walks. This improves the quality of life of both parents and kids, keeping them engaged in each other’s lives.

Staying physically active will increase the number of years family members have together. According to the CDC, active people have lower premature-death rates than people who are the least active. Evidence suggests that muscle-strengthening exercises can reduce the risk of falling and fracturing bones and can improve the ability to live independently (“Physical Activity for Everyone: The Importance of Physical Activity: Can Everyone Benefit from Physical Activity?”).

The Safety Benefits

Making a community more walkable can also make it safer for all who live and work there. The primary safety benefit of increased pedestrian activity is that drivers, seeing pedestrians, often become more cautious and alert and may reduce their driving speeds.

Most reported pedestrian injuries are the result of collisions with motor vehicles. In 2003, 4,827 pedestrians were killed nationwide while walking down the street (Ernst 6). Most of the fatalities occurred in urban areas at non-intersection locations at night. “Pedestrian injury is the third-leading cause of unintentional injury-related death among children ages 5 to 14,” even though fewer children are walking (Ernst 11). On Delaware state highways in 2006, 26 pedestrians were killed, up from 10 in 2005 (Sanginiti).

Assuming the presence of adequate pedestrian facilities, when the number of pedestrians increases, walking becomes safer; drivers see the pedestrians and become more alert and cautious, and in time acclimate to their presence. In communities that do not provide adequate pedestrian facilities, fewer people walk, and those who do are in far more danger of pedestrian injuries and fatalities because motorists are not accustomed to watching for them. The lack of adequate facilities (sidewalks and crosswalks) also means that pedestrians are physically competing with cars for the same space. Safer streetscapes put the pedestrian first, raising the pedestrian profile through signage, lighting, and clear lines of sight (*Pedestrian and Streetscape Guide*). Other methods of increasing safety include slowing traffic in residential neighborhoods and near schools, maintaining safe walkways separate from the road, providing ample, well-designed crosswalks, and teaching children to cross the street safely.

The Quality-of-Life Benefits

In addition to their physical health and safety benefits, walkable communities generally enhance residents’ quality of life. Getting out of the house for a walk contributes to emotional, mental, and spiritual well-being and provides opportunities for spontaneous social interactions not possible in automobiles. According to the CDC, exercise such as walking can improve psychological well-being and quality of life by increasing the ability to perform daily activities, improving one’s mood, relieving depression, and increasing feelings of well-being (“Physical Activity for Everyone: The Importance of Physical Activity: Can Everyone Benefit from Physical Activity?”). Children who walk to school are more alert and ready to learn when they arrive, and they enjoy the increased responsibility and independence (*WalkBoston*). People who

walk will find opportunities for personal interactions with neighbors they may not otherwise meet; this fosters a sense of community and increases quality of life. When people walk in public spaces, it contributes to their town's unique identity. A walkable community has a natural sense of place and an identity that cannot be achieved by the typical suburban strip-mall development.

How Does the Physical Environment Impact Walkability?

Think of a place you have lived or visited where you enjoyed taking a walk. Picture the street in your mind. What made your walk pleasant? Did you pass interesting buildings, enjoy natural scenery, or people-watch? Did you have an objective—were you trying to get from point A to point B—or did you take a walk for its own sake? Were you able to make your journey while feeling safe and comfortable? Most likely, it just felt right to walk in this place. You did not have to think very much about why.

The way a community is designed, built, and maintained determines its walkability. Even when you do not perceive these things, they affect your likelihood of walking. The place you remember walking drew you outside, but the wrong environment can deter or even scare would-be pedestrians. Without sidewalks, crosswalks, pleasant scenery, a place to go, or the presence of other pedestrians, most people walk only as far as their cars.

Many “scorecards” have been created for the assessment of a community's walkability. Residents, public officials, and researchers use these assessments to determine areas where the community could become more walkable. Although they use various formats, most assessments include a common group of features, or key components. The IPA Planning Services Group has organized these features into a user-friendly concept called NED: Network, Environment, and Destinations. We have invited Delaware communities to “Take a Walk with NED!”

Network: *Just as cars require a continuous, well-maintained road system to travel, pedestrians require a network suitable for safe, comfortable walking.*

Sidewalks—Sidewalks are continuous, complete, and in good repair. It is possible to push a wheelchair or stroller without experiencing a bumpy ride. Sidewalks are wide enough for two people to walk side-by-side comfortably.

Crosswalks—Crosswalks are pedestrian-friendly and located both mid-street and at intersections. Signals, signage, and pedestrian refuges are provided at major intersections. Signals allow enough time for elderly or disabled persons to cross.

Directness—Walking paths allow for a relatively direct trip from point A to point B. Pedestrians do not have to make long detours to go around barriers or unsafe areas. Streets laid out in a gridded (rather than curvilinear) pattern create multiple route options.

Environment: *At the human scale and the pedestrian pace, a walk allows for maximum enjoyment of the neighborhood or city environment. Pedestrians are more likely to walk if they know the journey will be safe and pleasant.*

Aesthetics—Pedestrians encounter visually appealing architecture, landscapes, clean streets, and good signage.

Security—Walking paths are safe and secure, well lit, and buffered from the street. There is a sense of “eyes on the street.” Pedestrians have a line of sight to see other pedestrians. In their work, “Designing Out Crime: Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design,” authors Susan Geason and Paul Wilson explain how appropriately designed, pedestrian-friendly communities can act to deter criminal activity. According to the authors, good visibility and clear lines of sight provide a community with two important characteristics: natural and social surveillance. Natural surveillance refers to residents observing and monitoring the public and semi-public areas in their community, recognizing and possibly intercepting would-be criminals. Similarly, social surveillance refers to residents’ willingness to actually challenge intruders. Both theories presuppose a strong sense of place, community, and territorial behavior. Though initially written to explain behavior in public housing developments, the argument translates well when applied to a well-designed, open, accessible, vibrant, and walkable community.

Building Orientation—Proximity of buildings to walking paths gives a “Main Street feel.”

Destinations: *Walking for its own sake is nice, but most people walk to get somewhere. The most walkable street system may not be used if the network does not provide access to destinations.*

Daily Functions—Residents can walk to some or most of their daily functions, such as school or work, the post office, a corner store, family and friends’ homes, the library, their place of worship, parks, and trails.

Land Use Pattern—Compact, mixed-use development patterns provide residents with more destinations, including defined town centers, within walking distance of their homes.

How Are Other Communities Becoming More Walkable?

Individuals and families make personal choices about their modes of transportation, but the decisions and investments of local governments can influence those choices. In many cases, people who may want to walk or bike have no choice but to drive, because of decades-old development patterns, traffic conditions, or road designs. There are a variety of ways that local governments can make it easier for people who want to walk and even encourage sedentary and car-dependent residents to become more physically active in their daily routines. From the planning perspective, zoning codes and other regulations can be updated to encourage walkable development. From the advocacy perspective, organized efforts can be made to get residents excited about walking. From the engineering perspective, roadways can be made pedestrian- and bike-friendly using a variety of design standards.

Few communities face challenges in creating walkable communities that are completely unique; when there is work to be done, chances are, others have already gone through the process. In this section, we will present ideas and tools that have been used, from local towns to national model cities, to make communities more walkable. It is our hope that the efforts profiled here can help leaders imagine their own walkable communities and start planning their route to get there.

Newark, Delaware: Making Connections on the Human Scale

The City of Newark has historically been very accessible because of its numerous bike lanes and sidewalks, the University of Delaware campus, and a pedestrian-friendly Main Street. When the James F. Hall Trail opened in 2003, Newark residents and visitors enjoyed a whole new level of walkability and bikeability within the city limits on a safe, dedicated trail ideal for both commuting and recreational trips.



Above left: Entrance to the paved James F. Hall trail. (Courtesy of Pennoni Associates)

Above right: Joggers enjoy the fall foliage on mature trees along the trail. (Courtesy of WILMAPCO)

Photos from www.deldot.gov/static/Community_programs_services/te/hall_trail.shtml

The Hall Trail, named for the city's former parks and recreation director of 30 years, stretches for 1.76 miles, from Wyoming Road in the east, to Bradford Lane and Apple Road in the west. It connects three city parks, several neighborhoods, and the university campus. It allows quick access to the Delaware Technology Park, College Square Shopping Center, and the Newark Train Station. Trail users enjoy streams and wetlands, woods, and flowers without having to worry about cars. A paved section accommodates cyclists, skaters, walkers, and joggers ("James F. Hall Trail in Newark, Delaware").

Running parallel to an active Amtrak line, the trail represents the conversion of unused railroad property into a valued community resource. Situating the trail next to the tracks allowed the trail to be built without coming into conflict with traffic, because most streets dead-end before reaching the tracks ("James F. Hall Trail"). The path goes under two main roads and has a series of marked "exits" for major streets. The entire trail is well lit, with police call boxes, bike racks, benches, and trashcans placed intermittently ("Transportation Enhancements Program: James F. Hall Trail").

"We've been pleasantly surprised by how heavily it's been used," said Charlie Emerson, Newark's current parks director (Emerson). "When we have snow, we give the trail priority in getting it cleared because we know people use it to get to and from work. A lot of residents use the trail for their daily exercise routines."

The project, sponsored by the City of Newark and the University of Delaware, was assisted by the Newark Bicycle Committee and the Wilmington Area Planning Council (WILMAPCO). The university donated two acres of land to build the trail. The proposed Pomeroy Trail will link to the Hall Trail and run north-south along an unused rail line, connecting directly with Main Street and the White Clay Creek State Park. The Frazier Field Bikeway is also being planned to run from the Newark Shopping Center to North College Avenue ("James F. Hall Trail in Newark, Delaware").

Milford, Delaware: Rediscovering a River

Like so many towns, Milford was built around a river. A dam built in the late 1700s was soon followed by the subdivision of a plantation into the city's first building lots. The city prospered around its "river highway." People traveled, goods were shipped on the river, and a significant shipbuilding industry developed in the 1800s, along with tanneries and canneries. The Mispillion River was the lifeblood of commerce and the central feature of Milford until the railroad arrived and wooden ships became obsolete. The river became less visible and less accessible as the town and its focus spread outward ("Mispillion Riverwalk").

The City of Milford sought a way to refocus the town's activity around the river, this time with recreation rather than industry. In recent years Milford has regained its river vistas with the creation of the Mispillion Riverwalk. According to the town's website, "This riverside greenway has fundamentally changed the downtown landscape and restored the Mispillion to its role as the

centerpiece of downtown Milford” (Mispillion Riverwalk). A network of paths, raised boardwalks, and a 50-foot pedestrian bridge, linking the north and south sides of the river, lead people from historic downtown buildings through green riverside areas to Goat Island on the east side and Silver Lake on the west. The walk was built out from an existing walkway on the north bank of the river near the Inns of the Mispillion. Victorian lighting fixtures, benches, and trash cans add to the walk’s ambience and convenience (“Park and Greenway Planning”). The banks of the Mispillion were stabilized with engineering techniques and the planting of native wetland plants. The walk passes through Bicentennial Park, which was given a makeover with new landscaping, lighting, benches, and a renovated pavilion (Emory). Visitors can enjoy a picnic, fish in the river, and play on the grass. Milford’s downtown-revitalization organization sponsored streetscape improvements to make the downtown more attractive (Miller).

The riverwalk is a source of pride for the community and contributes to the town’s charm as a tourist destination. By bringing people closer to the river, it provides physically active opportunities for reflection on the town’s history and the value of natural resources. The riverwalk is within walking distance of most of the town’s public amenities, including the library, museum, city hall, and senior center. The town’s population of more than 7,000 can use



the riverwalk as a pleasant and convenient walking path to these destinations. More than 20,000 people live within five miles of Milford and can bike or drive into town, park for free, and enjoy the walk. Milford sponsors festivals and events throughout the year that draw large crowds of people into town, offering additional exposure for the Riverwalk (“Downtown Milford’s History”).

Above: A section of the span over the Mispillion River.

Source: www.downtownmilford.org/riverwalk.html

Indiana, Pennsylvania: A Historically Walkable Small Town

Indiana, Pennsylvania, is Jimmy Stewart’s hometown—a real-life Bedford Falls (the fictional town depicted in “It’s a Wonderful Life”). With about 15,000 residents, it is the kind of town that grew up walkable and has only in recent decades acquired a handful of suburban-style developments and a large shopping strip stretching away from the gridded streets of the town center. The home of Indiana University of Pennsylvania (IUP) and the county seat of Indiana County, the town of Indiana is naturally walkable, to the benefit of students from elementary school to college, residents, and visitors. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, 8.3 percent of employed adults in Indiana walk to work, which is more than four times the national average (“American FactFinder”).

A community partnership called LINC (Livable Indiana Neighborhood Connections) promotes “healthy lifestyles and neighborhoods through increased biking, walking and transit use” (“A More Livable Indiana”). LINC member and IUP geography professor Dr. Whit Watts described the town’s walkability:

The future of Indiana Borough doesn't need to be invented. It needs to be remembered. The Borough of Indiana was effectively "built out" prior to the Second World War. Much of Indiana Borough's character—and a most of its small town charm—can be attributed to this pre-war development pattern. Many features of Indiana Borough—intimate narrow tree-lined streets, sidewalks, alleys, mixed uses and a grid street system—are typical of this pre-war pattern. Designed and constructed prior to the advent of mass automobile ownership, the borough's streets still retain much public spatial dignity and their pedestrian character; features of the traditional American small town (Chaney).

Below: Indiana's main downtown area, Philadelphia Street, is lined with stately buildings, many of which contain small businesses in the lower floor and offices and apartments above.

Photo courtesy of Indiana County Office of Planning and Development



A "Safe Routes to School" program initiated by LINC includes both physical improvements around the borough's schools and a Walking School Bus program. The Indiana Area School District paid for the design, and a half-million-dollar grant was obtained from PennDOT for construction, including curb extensions, crosswalk improvements, sidewalk extensions, and pedestrian refuge islands. The Walking School Bus began in May 2002 and has included up to five routes. "The focus is on three area schools (an elementary,

middle, and high school), with plans to create a pedestrian convergence zone to increase walking and bicycling, improve safety, and implement changes to the physical infrastructure within the zone" ("Safe Routes to School Projects and Related Efforts"). LINC also has sponsored a Bike to Work Day for the past seven years. The county is currently developing a bicycle and pedestrian plan as part of its 2007 comprehensive plan.



Above left: Curb extension under construction in front of Horace Mann Elementary School. The street was narrowed, shortening crossing distance and slowing traffic.

Above right: Students and a “driver” follow the Yellow Route to school.

Source: Indiana County Office of Planning and Development

Louisville, Kentucky: A Mayor on the Move

Mayor Jerry Abramson wanted to do something about the fact that 60 percent of metro Louisville’s residents were overweight. In a letter on the city website, Mayor Abramson tells citizens, “We are long overdue to begin changing the way we value fitness and health in this community. The benefits are real in terms of reducing health care costs and being more attractive for businesses looking for an active and healthy workforce” (Abramson).

The Mayor’s Healthy Hometown Movement (MHHM) was created as a long-term, multi-phase program that builds on social marketing and public/private partnerships to “create a community-wide culture that encourages and supports healthy lifestyles by promoting increased physical activity, better nutrition, healthy public policy and access to needed resources” (“The Mayor’s Healthy Hometown Movement”).

MHHM works through its partners and general community outreach to encourage physical activity, especially walking, as part of residents’ daily lives. The program’s website provides ideas for getting started, including ideal walking places like the city zoo, parks, and forest. Encouraging people to walk and exercise with partners, use pedometers, and set personal goals provides methods for accountability and positive reinforcement. The “Take Charge Challenge” is a ten-week program specifically designed for city employees; participants work in teams and receive incentives for achieving goals (“About the Movement”).

Table 1: Goals of the Mayor's Healthy Hometown Movement, Louisville, Kentucky

Improve health equity by supporting physical activity programs in communities most adversely impacted by poor health.
Develop a strong baseline of worksite-wellness programs and activities in the community.
Increase from 22% to 38% the number of people in Louisville Metro who eat five or more servings of fruits and vegetables per day.
Increase the number of people in Louisville Metro who engage in 30 minutes of moderate physical activity at least five days a week by 15%.
Decrease the number of overweight or obese people in Louisville Metro by 10%.

Source: www.louisvilleky.gov/Health/MHHM/About_the_Movement.htm

Arlington, Virginia: Designing a Walkable Community

The neighborhoods of Arlington, a suburb of Washington, D.C., have grown more walkable thanks to conscious efforts by the county and community groups. The county has engaged in traffic-calming measures—using traffic circles, raised crosswalks, speed bumps, and other design elements—to protect pedestrians and cyclists (“Arlington County”). Pedestrian routes link to Arlington’s many transit systems, including the D.C. Metro. Most notably, the WALKArlington program employs pedestrian-friendly street design to make the streetscape safer and more inviting (“What Do Pedestrians Really Want?”). The photos below, taken from Arlington’s Pedestrian Design Guidelines, illustrate just some of the elements that can be engineered for greater walkability.



Above left: This streetscape uses parallel parking, street trees, and building orientation to make the pedestrian feel buffered from the street and close to buildings. Sidewalks are wide and in good repair. Emphasis is placed on the design of storefronts’ facades, entries, and windows.

Above right: This crosswalk is easily identified, even at night, by motorists and pedestrians.

Photo source: www.walkarlington.com/walkable/forpeds.html



Above left: A countdown light lets pedestrians know how much time they have to clear the crosswalk.

Above right: This residential street uses curb nubs and colored pavers to increase pedestrian awareness and safety.

Photo source: www.walkarlington.com/walkable/forpeds.html

Arlington engages its citizens through a variety of programs. In partnership with county schools, it has a Safe Routes to School Program. Within neighborhoods, citizens can help plan how public infrastructure funds will be spent through Neighborhood Conservation. To increase the aesthetic quality of the experience, public art has been installed along walking corridors and attention has been placed continually on architecture and design. The WALKArlington website offers news, events, walking-club listings, and maps (“What Is WalkArlington?”).

Somerville, Massachusetts: A Community Path in Boston

Shape-Up Somerville began as a research project at Tufts University and is now a community-wide partnership sponsored by the Somerville Health Department. Once nicknamed “Slumerville,” this small city (77,000 residents in 4.1 square miles) is part of the Boston metro area and has the highest population density in New England (“About the City of Somerville”). The city’s many squares, public spaces, and civic coalitions create a sense of place and community. One-third of residents are foreign born, more than 50 languages are spoken, and obesity statistics are staggeringly high (Keane; “Shape Up Somerville: Community Partnership”). By capitalizing on existing infrastructure, like the Somerville Community Path, Davis Square, sidewalks and transit, the partnership promotes walking and biking in the community, especially among seniors, and wants to “create a community where active transportation is no longer the alternative, but the mainstream” (“Keane; Shape Up Somerville: Community Partnership”).



Left: Somerville volunteers clean up a section of the path during “Somersday” spring clean-up.

Source: www.pathfriends.org

Foremost among its many initiatives promoting nutrition and exercise in the community is the Somerville Community Path (“Shape Up Somerville: Community Partnership”). The path bisects the center of the city, providing a linear central artery that joins with three of Boston’s four subway lines and connects a poor neighborhood with jobs. The group wants the path to eventually connect with a new riverfront park and existing pathways along the Charles River. Plans for completing the path include extensions to bike and pedestrian paths, e.g., the Minuteman Bikeway (the most used rail trail in the country), and the installation of mile markers, directional signage, and activity posts along the route. They plan to create distinctive signage for the non-English speaking communities in Somerville and support walking groups among families, immigrant groups, and youth. Other initiatives include mapping and assessment of high-risk locations for bicycle and pedestrian safety and improvements to the aesthetic quality of the walking routes (“Shape Up Somerville”).

Table 3: Recent Accomplishments in Somerville

Distributed copies of “Safe Routes to School” maps in four languages to elementary children.
Installed bicycle parking at two elementary schools.
Obtained right-of-way from regional rail company to extend community path.
Led physical activity classes for Portuguese-speaking residents.
Installed thermoplastic striping on city crosswalks to improve visibility.
Created healthy eating strategies for distinct cultural groups.

Source:

www.activelivingbydesign.org/cgi-bin/albd.org/view_services.cgi?request=show_public_home&dept_id=122

Conclusion

To be walkable, a community must have an adequate pedestrian network, a safe and pleasant environment, and ample destinations. While traditional neighborhoods, towns, and cities grew up walkable, most recent development has typically been built with cars in mind. Whether a project entails renovation of existing pedestrian infrastructure or requires an inventive new route, creating a more walkable community requires time, leadership, resources, and public support. The communities profiled in this report and dozens of others offer successful examples of how local leaders and residents envisioned their own walkable communities and took specific steps to make them more walkable. Some focused on the nuts-and-bolts design of streets, others launched bold public awareness campaigns, and still others used regulatory reforms; however, communities employed a mix of these options in order to become more walkable. Together, these cases offer a “walkable tool box” and a starting point for a community’s brainstorming process. Additional resources on walkability, including illustrated online guides, are listed in the bibliography. Whether leaders are able to take a small step or a giant leap forward, any action they take to make their communities more walkable will benefit the health, safety, and general welfare of their residents.

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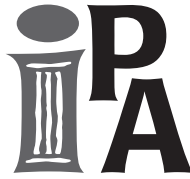
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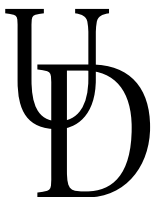


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