Walkable communities are a rising trend in real estate and the demand for walkable communities impacts your members and the home buyers they serve. A walkable community is one where residents can walk, bike or take public transit (light rail, trolleys and/or buses) to grocery stores, shops, schools, work, cafes, markets, playgrounds and parks. Walkable communities have a mix of housing types and mixed-use buildings that combine residential, office, and retail. They can be high-rise urban neighborhoods, traditional downtowns and main streets, or suburban town centers.

See more details on walkable communities, including demand for and impact on real estate, in Walkable Communities for REALTORS® Overview Guide.

Challenges to Making Communities More Walkable

Walking may not be easy to do in some communities due to many factors including concerns about safety, no connectivity to transit or destinations and lack of infrastructure such as sidewalks, lighting and crosswalks.

In addition, zoning put in place in the 1940s, ‘50s, ‘60s mandated a separation of land uses such as residential-only or commercial-only, rather than mixed land uses, and are often recognized as a major obstacle to more walkable communities.

Addressing These Challenges

Urban, suburban, and rural communities across the United States are addressing these challenges by updating and revising policies, land development plans and land use regulations to support the creation of more walkable communities and pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly built environments.

You can play a key role in making your community more walkable by reviewing your city’s local land use policies and advocating for regulatory and land use revisions and new policies to ensure that they support the development of more walkable, accessible, human-scaled communities.

Long-term land development plans (e.g. comprehensive, general, or master plans) are used by local governments in their decision-making process to direct future physical, social, and economic growth in their community. They outline a community’s vision with goals, objectives, policies, and implementation strategies related to different topic areas.

You can advocate to include topics in these plans that address walkability-related issues such as land use, design, transportation, open space/recreation, and health.

Land development regulations are often guided by policies outlined in community long-term development plans. Regulations are created at the local level and need to
be approved by the local city council or county board. Land development regulations consist of zoning codes (also known as zoning ordinances or regulations), subdivision regulations, unified development ordinances or codes, or planned unit developments.

These regulations also can be revised to incorporate pedestrian- and/or transit-oriented elements in existing districts or zones. You can advocate for their revision.

Your community’s current zoning may limit building height, restrict mixed use or first floor retail, or impose requirements for setbacks and parking spaces—all of which impact the walkability of a community. A zoning code divides the land in a community into separate areas, districts or zones, and (1) determines what can or cannot be built on the land (e.g. residential, commercial, industrial); and (2) the height, bulk, and placement of structures.

You may want to work with local planning or transportation officials to revise or completely overhaul local zoning codes.

Advocate for Zoning Code Reforms

Zoning code reforms can support a mix of land uses and building designs that are associated with walking, biking, and public transit. Specific types of zoning code reforms include form-based codes, new urbanist districts or zones, pedestrian-oriented districts or development (POD), transit-oriented districts or development (TOD), and traditional neighborhood development or districts (TND).

- Form-based codes. A type of zoning code reform that regulates the built environment based on building form, including building mass, scale, and type of streets or blocks,

Zoning Update in Action

The Prince George’s County Council (MD) is considering overhauling their 50+ year-old zoning code and adopting a new one to guide future development.

The County’s proposed zoning ordinance includes new regulations to encourage connectivity between developments for people walking, bicycling, and driving. It aims to better reflect the urban, suburban, and rural development patterns in the county. It encourages transit-oriented development, reduces parking requirements where transit is an option, constructs more environmentally-friendly buildings, improves public participation in the development review process, and increases access to food, among other things.

One element of the proposed ordinance is stronger connectivity requirements for new development projects.

Vehicle cross-access is required in the proposed ordinance. That means when a commercial development like a store or office or restaurant is built, the developer will be required to build a roadway connection between itself and the neighboring property.

The draft ordinance also proposes using a Connectivity Index for new residential subdivisions, which is new for the county.

For people walking and bicycling, the proposed ordinance recommends additional connections between a new development and adjacent transit stations, bus stops, public parks, greenways, schools, community centers, and shopping areas.

The proposed regulations also include new walkways for crossing large parking lots.

Read more.
rather than, or in addition to, building use. These codes are based on pedestrian accessibility and the character and scale of the surrounding buildings. Form-based codes are being adopted by more cities looking to create accessible, human-scaled communities.

**Columbia Pike, VA,** used a Form Based Codes to transform the “Pike” into a walkable community anchored by a lively “Main Street” that is lined with restaurants, businesses and attractive public spaces, while preserving housing options for residents with a mix of incomes. The revitalized Pike will accommodate more people and higher density development. The plans endorsed by community stakeholders called for mid-rise, mixed-use buildings with up to six stories along the Pike frontage, and lower buildings to ease heights into the adjacent neighborhoods. Taller heights, some up to 10-, 12- and 14-stories are possible in the east and western ends of the Pike.

**Transect-based codes.** Form-based codes that are typically comprised of six zones ranging from a natural environment zone (T1) through an urban core zone (T6).

In **Lancaster County, PA,** a transect-based code was used as the foundation for their visualization project. The countywide transect is comprised of the following zones, each of which was loosely based on a place in Lancaster County:

- **T1 Natural Areas** - Susquehanna River Hills
- **T2 Agriculture** - East Earl Township farmland
• T3 Rural Centers – Village of Maytown
• T4 Suburban – Suburban West Hempfield Township
• T5 Urban – Grandview Heights
• T6 Urban Center – Lititz Borough
• T7 Urban Core – Lancaster City Central Business District

► New urbanist districts. Districts that follow the New Urbanism planning and development approach that promotes the creation and restoration of diverse, walkable, compact, vibrant, mixed-use communities with accessible public spaces.

The Wheeler District, OK, was designed through a community charrette in the summer of 2014. Its layout encourages walking or bicycling to school, work, dining, the Ferris wheel and beyond. From urban cottages to townhomes, Wheeler features a range of for-sale and for-rent housing featuring the convenience and quality of newly constructed homes connected to the amenities and offerings of Oklahoma City’s dynamic urban core.

► Pedestrian-oriented districts or developments (POD). Creates an environment conducive to pedestrian activity in proximity to locations of specialty retail, entertainment, restaurants, and other residential uses.

The City Code of Minneapolis, Minnesota, provides for pedestrian oriented overlay districts (“PO”) for smaller sized areas throughout the city in the vicinity of public transit service stations (bus, train, or both) that consist of regulations aimed to promote pedestrian activity and street life in addition to the underlying zone’s original regulations. The ordinance prohibits drive-through facilities and automobile service uses.

► Transit-oriented districts or developments (TOD). Located near transit stops and are characterized by compact developments, higher density, and a mixture of land uses.

California’s Senate Bill 827, which did not get adopted, was “a strong step toward denser housing near transit and a more sustainable development patterns.” It would have required that zoning rules along transit corridors “have no density maximums (such as single-family home mandates), no parking minimums, and a minimum height limit of between 45 and 85 feet.” It also would have set height limits to a minimum of 55-85 feet closest to transit (within a quarter mile, or a five-minute walk, of service that runs every 15 minutes or better), and to heights of 45-55 feet in areas a bit further from transit (within half a mile of rail stations and other hubs).

► Traditional neighborhood districts or developments (TND). Traditional Neighborhood Development (TND) is a development strategy designed to create complete neighborhoods and communities that mimic those built in pre-1950s America before the shift to low-density, automobile-dependent suburban developments.

Source: Kirkland Municipal Code Design Guidelines

The Three Springs Neighborhood in Durango, CO, is founded on the principles
of Traditional Neighborhood Development (TND), a responsible land stewardship ethic, and the historic and cultural values of Durango and Southwest Colorado. The neighborhood concept is the fundamental building-block of development at Three Springs. It encourages a diverse and interesting mix of uses and emphasizes a compact form of development with opportunities for an improved quality of life for residents and visitors. The Codes and Standards created specifically for the Traditional Neighborhood Development at Three Springs are administered by the City in place of the City’s Land Use Development Code (LUDC).

- **Subdivision regulations.** Control the division of land to accommodate land uses by including standards for street and lot layouts and public improvements. The development standards that are most applicable to creating a walkable community are lot size and width standards for buildings, block length and width standards, and street standards which includes roadway, intersection, and sidewalk design.

- **Unified development ordinance/code (UDO or UDC).** Combines both zoning and subdivision regulations along with other development regulations, like design guidelines, into one document.

- **Planned unit developments (PUDs).** Allow developers to develop a large area of land or multiple building lots as a single entity. They allow for creativity, flexibility, and more efficient use of land.

- **Overlay zoning.** A regulatory tool that communities may adopt when they want to create additional standards that address specific purposes for certain areas in their community. Zoning overlay districts are applied over one or more general use-based districts (i.e., commercial or residential districts) and establish additional regulations. To create walkable neighborhoods, communities are adopting mixed-use, pedestrian, and transit-oriented overlays.

For more details see [Components of Land Development and Related Zoning Policies Associated with Increased Walking](#).

**Policies & Strategies**

Community planning and land development policies can be used to guide future development and support walkable communities. These include Smart Growth, Complete Streets policies, Safe Routes to School policies, Vision Zero commitment, and policies to promote alternative forms of transportation.

- **Smart growth.** An “approach to development that encourages a mix of building types and uses, diverse housing and transportation options, development within existing neighborhoods, and community engagement.” Smart Growth approaches focus on creating pedestrian-friendly communities by integrating community design features such as sidewalks, increased density, connectivity of routes, and mixed land uses which have been shown to increase walking.
  - **Mixed-use development:** When housing is located near jobs, retail, services, and schools, walking is a convenient option to meet residents’ daily needs
  - **Complementary uses & access to local services:** A mix of uses reduces the distance between homes and services, thereby improving access. Shorter trips are more
likely to be done by walking. Having basic services within easy walking distance enables more of these trips to be undertaken on foot.

- **Parks and open space policies**: Promoting the development of open or green space can encourage opportunities for recreational walking.

- **Complete streets policy.** A Smart Growth initiative that directs local planning, transportation, and/or public works department members to design and create streets that are safe and accessible for all users. Complete Street policies are designed and operated to enable safe access for all users, including pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists and transit riders of all ages and abilities. Complete Streets make it easy to cross the street, walk to shops, and bicycle to work. They allow buses to run on time and make it safe for people to walk to and from train stations. Creating Complete Streets means transportation agencies must change their approach to community roads. By adopting a Complete Streets policy, communities direct their transportation planners and engineers to routinely design and operate the entire right of way to enable safe access for all users, regardless of age, ability, or mode of transportation.

  Over 1,200 Complete Streets policies have been passed in the United States, including those adopted by 33 state governments, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, and the District of Columbia. The [National Complete Streets Coalition](https://www.completestreets.org) collects final, adopted policies. Is your city on the list yet?

- **Safe routes to schools policies.** Policies and initiatives that encourage and enable children to walk or bike safely to and from schools and parks. All across the United States, cities and schools are promoting walking and bicycling, and Safe Routes to School is serving as a catalyst for policy-makers to create healthy and active community environments. The Safe Routes to School Local Policy Guide provides a primer for what policies can be targeted to influence transportation and land use that benefits children’s mobility, how to go about initiating policy change and examples of communities that have successfully enacted policies.

- **Vision zero.** A multidisciplinary campaign that promotes collaboration among local traffic planners and engineers, police officers, policy makers, and public health professionals to prevent traffic fatalities and severe injuries and increase physical activity while also benefiting the environment and local economy through the implementation of proven strategies such as lowering speed limits, redesigning streets, implementing meaningful behavior change campaigns, and enhancing data-driven traffic enforcement.

  - **Prioritized roadway area:** Minimizing the space given to motorized forms of transportation provides more space for walking infrastructure, such as sidewalks, and minimizes car speeds and volumes, leading to a safer, more convenient walking environment.

  - **Driveway density:** An urban walking environment that minimizes the locations where pedestrian must cross the path of cars leads to a safer and more comfortable walking experience.

- **Policies to promote alternative forms of transportation.** Encourage people to take alternative modes of transportation rather than being car-reliant. These include employers incentivizing transit by providing subsidized transit passes; developing
more flexible parking standards by allowing shared parking and bike share programs.

- **Prioritized connectivity**: Connectivity that prioritizes walking over motorized forms of transportation improves walkability by making walking more convenient relative to other modes of transportation.

- **Bike/pedestrian and street connectivity**: Bike, pedestrian, and street connectivity provisions promote efficient and easy access to destinations by providing numerous direct routes from one point to another within a community.

- **Bike and pedestrian plans**: Trails and path systems are options to encourage physical activity by accommodating a range of users including walkers, hikers, and bicyclists. Read about the [City of Santa Monica Pedestrian Action Plan](#).

### Elements That Support Walkable Communities

Source: Components of Local Land Development and Related Zoning Policies Associated with Increased Walking

![Graph showing the prevalence of elements in zoning codes that promote walking.](image)
Streets and Infrastructure

- **Road diets and traffic calming measures**: Slower speeds for traffic, by both design and enforced speed limits, make it safer and more enjoyable walking environments. Head-out diagonal parking, lane narrowing, medians with traffic islands, roundabouts, traffic circles, curb extensions or bulb-outs, speed tables or humps, chicanes (artificial feature creating extra turns in a road), crossing islands, safety buffers, sharrows (shared-lane marking).

- **Small blocks**: Small blocks reduce trip distances, making walking more convenient for trips.

- **Sidewalks**: Sidewalks make streets safer by separating pedestrians from automobile traffic, and the presence of sidewalks is associated with higher levels of walking. Sidewalks should be sufficiently wide, in good condition, clean, unobstructed and protected.

- **Walkways**: The most basic feature of urban walkability is complete, continuous, and safe walkway networks that provide clear protection from motor vehicles and are accessible to all people, including those with disabilities.

- **Crosswalks**: Crosswalks can reinforce walkability by allowing residents to conveniently and safely cross streets. Crosswalks are necessary for safely connecting the walkway network across vehicle traffic and are a critical part of making walkable areas accessible to all people, including those with disabilities.

- **Shared-use paths and bicycle lanes**: Shared use paths can serve a variety of purposes. They can provide users with a shortcut through a residential neighborhood (e.g., a connection between two cul-de-sac streets). Shared use paths can be located along rivers, ocean fronts, canals, abandoned or active railroad and utility rights-of-way, limited access freeways, within college campuses, or within and between parks. Shared use paths can also provide bicycle access to areas that are otherwise served only by limited access highways closed to bicycles.

Buildings, Landscaping and Amenities

- **Visually active frontage**: Visually active frontages promote safety from crime in walkable areas through informal observation and surveillance by people inside buildings. This is often described as “eyes on the street.”

- **Physically permeable frontage**: Sidewalks that are lined with continuous ground-floor activity and services have fewer zones of inactivity, thereby creating a more attractive walking environment that is safer from crime.

- **Activities**: A mix of activities and services activate the street from morning to night making it safer and more interesting to walk.

- **Parklets and pocket parks**: Pocket parks are urban open spaces on a small-scale and provide a safe and inviting environment for surrounding community members. They also meet a variety of needs and functions, including: small event space, play areas for children, spaces for relaxing or meeting friends, taking lunch breaks, etc. Parklets
Advocating for a More Walkable Community Guide

(Continued)

convert parking spaces into small pocket parks. See Parklets: Spots for People, not Cars.

- **Wayfinding:** Information systems that guide people through a physical environment and enhance their understanding and experience of the space. Wayfinding is particularly important in complex built environments such as urban centers, healthcare and educational campuses, and transportation facilities.

- **Shade and shelter:** Shade and shelter help to make the walkable environment more comfortable and more accessible by protecting pedestrians from heat, rain, and other elements.

- **Landscaping and street furniture:** Street trees, rain gardens, games, hanging planters & flower boxes, benches, café tables

- **Pedestrian-scaled lighting:** Proper street lighting illuminates pedestrian crosswalks and reduces glare to motorists. It can also enhance commercial districts and improve nighttime security. Appropriate quality and placement of lighting can enhance an environment as well as increase comfort and safety.
The Possibilities

Take a look at some street scenes that are common in many neighborhoods and what they could look like if some of the policies and elements noted above were implemented. Note: these images are from the WalkShops NAR supported.

Boise, ID

Cross Lake, MN

Myrtle Beach, SC

St. Paul, MN
Action Steps

NAR provides resources to our state and local REALTOR® Associations that can help them to partner with others in the community to achieve a more walkable community. Here are some of the projects and actions to consider.

- Read and subscribe to On Common Ground which includes articles on cutting-edge land planning techniques. You can distribute to local officials and stakeholders.
  - On Common Ground
- Plan and offer educational sessions, including NAR’s Smart Growth class, or bring in an expert speaker on walkable communities
  - NAR Smart Growth Grant
- Conduct a community preferences poll on transit and walkability
  - State & Local Growth Polling Program
- Create a new destination or green space to make your community more walkable
  - NAR Placemaking Guide for REALTOR® Associations
  - NAR Placemaking Grant
  - Watch a video on Northwest Oklahoma Association of REALTORS® Pocket Park project
- Conduct a Walkable Communities WalkShop/Audit to initiate an action plan
  - Walkable Community WalkShop How-to Guide
  - NAR Smart Growth Grant
- Read about the WalkShop in Myrtle Beach, SC, where city leaders and the Coastal Carolinas REALTORS® are now working together to make the city safer and more walkable for residents and tourists.
- Read about the WalkShop in Boise, ID, where Boise REALTORS® worked with local officials and stakeholders to see how Orchard Street, a busy, four lane road without a center turn lane, inadequate crossing options for foot traffic, limited-to-no parking, and missing sidewalks in a number of areas—making it unsafe for motorists and pedestrians, could be made more walkable.
- Develop a Complete Streets policy to plan, design, operate, and maintain streets that are safe for all users of all ages and abilities
  - NAR Smart Growth Grant
- Advocate for updated zoning and legislation to enable the development of walkable communities
  - NAR Issues Mobilization Grant
- Review proposed zoning for an analysis the impact on real estate
  - NAR Land Use Analysis
Resources

Organizations

- **Smart Growth America**: Smart Growth America works with elected officials, real estate developers, chambers of commerce, transportation and urban planning professionals, governors, and leaders in Washington to improve everyday life for people across the country through better development.

- **Change Lab Solutions**: Change Lab Solutions creates innovative laws and policies to ensure everyday health for all, whether that's providing access to affordable, healthy food and beverages, creating safe opportunities for physical activity, or ensuring the freedom to enjoy smokefree air and clean water.

- **Safe Routes to School National Partnership**: The Safe Routes to School National Partnership is a national non-profit that advances policy change and catalyzes support for healthy, active communities, starting with walking and bicycling to school. We are dedicated to creating livable, sustainable communities where all people can be healthy and physically active.

- **AARP: Livable Communities**: AARP Livable Communities supports the efforts of neighborhoods, towns and cities to become great places for people of all ages. We believe that communities should provide safe, walkable streets; age-friendly housing and transportation options; access to needed services; and opportunities for residents of all ages to participate in community life.

- **America Walks**: Leads a coalition of national, state and local advocacy groups who share a vision for a Walkable America.

- **The National Center for Bicycling & Walking**: A resident program at Project for Public Spaces created to create bicycle-friendly and walkable communities.

- **National Complete Streets Coalition**: Integrates people and place in the planning, design, construction, operation, and maintenance of our transportation networks.

- **Alliance for Biking & Walking**: A nonprofit coalition of over 200 state and local bicycle and pedestrian advocacy organizations.

- **8 80 Cities**: 8 80 Cities improves the quality of life for people in cities by bringing citizens together to enhance mobility and public space so that together we can create more vibrant, healthy, and equitable communities.

- **Acting Living Research**: Works with governments, the private sector, and advocacy groups to apply the lessons of research to building great communities, including walkability audits.

Guides & Resources

- **Components of Local Land Development and Related Zoning Policies Associated with Increased Walking**: A Primer for Public Health Practitioners provides a primer for engaging with local planning and zoning officials, specific community examples, and links to key resources along with a glossary of key terms used by the planning and zoning sectors.
Advocating for a More Walkable Community Guide

(Continued)

- **Zoning Code Reforms are Associated with Walking Behaviors in a Nationwide Evaluation**: A factsheet companion document to the Primer above. It summarizes key findings from a recently completed nationwide evaluation of the relationship between zoning code reforms and both leisure time and active travel-related walking and activity.

- **Walkable 101: The Walkability Workbook**: Guides community members and leaders through organizing a walkability workshop, conducting a walking audit, and documenting findings.

- **A Resident's Guide for Creating Safer Communities for Walking and Biking**: Assists residents, parents, community association members, and others in getting involved in making communities safer for pedestrians and bicyclists.

- **AARP Livability Fact Sheets**: Easy-to-understand information to help make a community (yours?) a great place for people of all ages. Topics include Density, Parking, Road Diets & Traffic Calming.

- **Creating Walkable Communities**: Presents guidelines, suggestions, and techniques on how to make communities more walkable and pedestrian-friendly.

- **Walkability Comes to the American West**: Mixed-use development and pedestrian-friendly downtowns are the next frontier for the Rockies.

- **The Imagining Livability Design Collection**: Describes some of the most common tools and treatments for creating age-friendly environments — from the least-expensive, short-term wins to dramatic changes and long-term initiatives.

- **Aging Issues in Brief: Walkable Communities**: A short brief outlining key concepts of walkability and benefits of walking.

**Surveys, Reports & Studies**

- **NAR National Community and Transportation Preference Survey**: A national poll of 3,000 adults in the fifty largest metro areas found that Millennials are distinguishing themselves as the generation that, more than any other generation, prefers to walk.

- **The WalkUP Wake Up Call**: A series of reports take a look at three metropolitan areas and find pent-up demand for walkable urban neighborhoods across the country. The reports identify regionally significant walkable urban places, or “WalkUPs,” and rank them based on economic performance, measured by the real estate valuations for each product type and the fiscal revenues generated for local governments, and by social equity performance, measured by accessibility, opportunity, and affordability for residents.

- **Core Values: Why American Companies are Moving Downtown**: Hundreds of companies across the United States are moving to and investing in walkable downtown locations. Why are companies choosing these places? What are the competitive advantages they see in these locations? And what features do they look for when choosing a new location?

- **Walkability Premium Found in Price Trends for Commercial Property**: Real Capital Analytics (RCA), continuing its innovation in commercial real estate information,
announced today the launch of the RCA & Walk Score® Commercial Property Price Indices (CPPI) the first of its kind to quantify the price value of walkability for commercial properties.

- **Commercial Assets in Walkable Locations Command Premium Prices, Rents**: A new Walk Score Commercial Property Price Indices (CPPI) released by research firm Real Capital Analytics (RCA) shows commercial properties in “walkable” locations, in both city cores and suburban markets get premium pricing from tenants and real estate investors.

- **Preferred Office Locations**: Comparing Location Preferences and Performance of Office Space in CBDs, Suburban Vibrant Centers and Suburban Areas.

### Walkable Communities Audits and Tools

- **Walk Audit Tools & Checklists**: Audits involve a review of all the data for a location or travel corridor analyzed by a multi-disciplinary team independent of the site or project being audited. Informal audits can be performed by any individual or community group.

- **Microscale Audit of Pedestrian Streetscapes (MAPS)**: Three different audits (120 items, 60 items and 15 items) developed by the University of California San Diego.

- **AARP Sidewalks and Streets Survey Tool**: Adapted from PBIC’s Walkability Checklist and focusing on older pedestrians, this toolkit is designed so that communities can make walking safer by teaching small groups to take simple “walkability” surveys and to take recommended actions for community improvements.

- **Walk Score**: Walk Score is available for any address in the United States, Canada, and Australia. The largest 3,000 cities and over 10,000 neighborhoods are ranked so you can find a walkable home or apartment.

- **Bike Score**: Bike Score service measures whether a location is good for biking on a scale from 0 - 100 based on four equally weighted components: Bike lanes, Hills, Destinations and road connectivity, Bike commuting mode share.

- **Transit Score**: Transit Score is a patented measure of how well a location is served by public transit on a scale from 0 to 100.

- **ParkScore**: The Trust for Public Land’s ParkScore® index is the most comprehensive rating system ever developed to measure how well the 100 largest U.S. cities are meeting the need for parks.

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