

Paul Beyer, Director of Smart Growth  
Governor's Smart Growth Cabinet  
Albany, NY

## PEDESTRIAN-FRIENDLY COMMUNITY DESIGN

### Description:

In the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, most cities and villages were developed in a dense grid pattern—easily serviceable by streetcar, rail, and bus systems. Those tightly developed communities were, *by design*, pedestrian-friendly—built on a scale that permitted residents to easily walk from their homes to merchants and, sometimes, to their places of work. In addition, if those destinations were not within an easy walk, transit stops often were.

Most housing developments, shopping centers, office complexes, and industrial parks built since the 1950s have been oriented toward facilitating easy automobile travel and parking, while separating residential and commercial uses by distances that almost mandate the use of a car to make even short trips. For example, even if the distance between a housing development and a shopping center is a short one, walking along roads without sidewalks, crossing a highway, and traversing a large parking lot is less attractive, and often dangerous, for most people compared to driving in such an environment.

Typically, land-use arrangements since the 1950s do not provide an environment conducive to walking, biking, or jogging, thus placing constraints on residents' mobility and social interaction. Residents, including older adults and individuals with disabilities, are more inclined to use alternative mobility modes in a tightly built neighborhood with sidewalks and other pedestrians and where there are no highways, traffic on local streets moves slowly, and parking lots are small. Very recent planning trends have returned to valuing places that accommodate walking, biking, and public transportation as alternatives to driving personal cars. People of all ages and abilities are discovering the many benefits of pedestrian-friendly communities, including physical fitness and greater opportunities for interactions with other people.

### Benefits:

- *Placement of Land Uses*—  
Compact development (density) reduces the distance required for travel between residences, employment, commercial and retail establishments, and services. Mixed-use zoning places a variety of life's daily needs—home, work, school, recreation, retail, health, civic, others—within close and/or accessible proximity via travel modes other than the car. The combination of density and mixed-use creates a built environment that is more conducive to walking, as well as to using bicycles, roller-blades, wheel-chair travel, small motorized vehicles, and mass transit—all to the benefit of older adults, children, people with mobility impairments, and individuals with and without disabilities—who prefer or require alternatives to the automobile. Both density and mixed-use

require zoning codes that accommodate these pedestrian-friendly design attributes.

- *Street and Streetscape Design—*

Streets and streetscapes can be designed to create a safe and comfortable pedestrian experience, which is important to people of all ages and abilities. In many cases, poor design entirely precludes walking or any other mode of travel but the automobile.

Pedestrian-friendly street and streetscape design includes wide sidewalks, narrower streets, cross-walks, landscaped medians, street trees and planting strips, and generous bike lanes. In addition to creating a safe and comfortable physical environment for pedestrians and bicyclists, these design elements also calm traffic (see *Safe Driving Strategies: Traffic Calming* in the *Resource Manual*). Drivers respond to their surroundings and most often adhere to the speed that streets were designed to be driven; if those streets are designed for slower travel, drivers will respond accordingly; if their surroundings signal pedestrian activity and set boundaries to their driving, drivers slow down—for their own safety and that of the pedestrians.

- *Grid-Style Street Connectivity—*

"Street connectivity is a measure of how well the roadway network connects what planners call origins and destinations. Good street connectivity means providing a *variety* of ways to get from Point A to B. The traditional grid-style street layout of older towns provides excellent connectivity—streets are interlinked at numerous points, intersections are closely spaced, and there are few dead-ends."<sup>1</sup> The goal is to narrow the gap between the *actual* distance from Point A to Point B and the *real travel* distance between the two destinations, which is accomplished by connecting homes and land uses in a more gridded, inter-connected pattern. Greater street connectivity and linkages between land uses offer more travel route options, quicker and easier access to daily destinations, and reduced traffic congestion and traffic bottle-necks created when all residential streets converge on single, over-loaded arterials.

Public trails can also be used to connect land uses; trail and street connections to parks and other public spaces are particularly important because they allow residents of all ages and abilities to walk or bike to outdoor areas for recreation, exercise, and social interaction (see *Complete Streets* in the *Resource Manual*).

- *Neighborhood Scale—*

Many experts agree that the ideal size for a pedestrian-friendly neighborhood with an accessible town/urban center is a quarter-to-a-half-mile radius; this is the distance that people will walk to access daily amenities and destinations. The author/planner, Leslie Kettren, broke down this analysis as follows: "A five-minute walk (one-quarter mile) is as easy as a trip by car. A 10-minute walk (one-half mile) is easily achieved and is a good basis for planning a compact neighborhood or village. A 20-minute walk (one mile) is a reasonable distance to walk for exercise when the area is pleasant."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Leslie E. Kettren (2006), *Talking the Walk: Building Walkable Communities*. Chicago, IL: Congress for the New Urbanism:

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