

CONSIDER AN AREA'S WALKABILITY

By Rod Groff
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Walkable neighborhoods offer many benefits to society, notably better health, more vibrant local economies, and increased social interaction.

Although the Valley of the Sun has its share of sprawling development, there are many areas, and pockets of development, that have excellent walkability. And with the price of gasoline at record highs, home buyers, renters and business owners deciding where to locate their business all may want to pay special attention to a particular area's walkability.

Features that make a neighborhood pedestrian-friendly include having a discernible center, such as a shopping district, a main street or a public meeting space. Neighborhoods offering a variety of businesses and services in close proximity to each other and near residential development make it easier for people to begin using their cars less.

Pedestrian-friendly neighborhoods offer accessibility to everyone. Children, elderly and disabled people all benefit when sidewalks run along all streets, sidewalk ramps are in the right places and shade structures or

trees are readily available. Shaded benches and bus stops all help to improve walkability.

Why are these things important? According to the Web site WalkScore.com, walkable neighborhoods “help their residents stay fit, spend less on cars and transportation, support their local economies, and talk with their neighbors.” Although higher-density development carries a negative connotation in some circles, “walkable neighborhoods” sound incredibly desirable!

WalkScore.com helps home buyers, renters and real-estate agents find houses and apartments in walkable neighborhoods. The site shows you a map of neighborhood amenities and calculates a “walk score” for any property.

Out of curiosity, I used this online tool to calculate the walkability of all 11 addresses (in six states) where I have lived at during the course of my life. Most surprising to me was that the highest-scoring address (98 of 100) was found in Los Angeles County, a region of the country not exactly known for walkability.

There are places throughout the Valley of the Sun that score in the 90-100 “Walker's Paradise” range. Perhaps you already live or work in a Walker's Paradise. If not, perhaps you can think of ways your community can boost its score and work with your local government and local businesses to improve both your neighborhood's walkability and sustainability.

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