INTRODUCTION

Walkability is a catch-all term used to describe how attractive a street, neighborhood, or city is for pedestrians. This includes not just how accommodating the facility such as sidewalk or footpath is, but also how well it connects the user's origin to destination as well as the aesthetics along the way. Walkability is a key measure for transportation and community planners interested in creating vibrant neighborhoods and transportation systems for all users.

The first consideration for assessing walkability is to look at system connectivity. Do pedestrian facilities exist? If so, are they connected in a way that makes walking a viable choice for a person wishing to get from where they are to where they want to be?

The second consideration for assessing walkability involves street design, block length and aesthetics. Many potential pedestrians consider more than just travel time when decided to get from point A to point B. Creating a walkable neighborhood or community also involves making their sidewalks and footpaths attractive and inviting.

It is generally accepted that 400- 600 foot block lengths break up linear distances and provide more route choices. Additionally, wide sidewalks free of obstructions like utility poles and fire hydrants allow for more freedom of movement and are more accommodating for disabled users. Amenities such as plantings and benches can attract recreational walkers and create public spaces that double as transportation corridors. Large picture windows and minimal setbacks for buildings as well as parking to the rear give pedestrians a sense of scale and interaction with the built environment.

A perception of safety is also an important aspect of walkability. Timely removal of snow and ice during winter months is important to minimize injuries and signal that the facility is open for travel. Adequate lighting and the presence of law enforcement will promote use during night hours. Finally, bollards, on street parking or other barriers between the facility and road traffic can make pedestrians feel more secure.

Block length, building setbacks and parking lot design requirements can be addressed through SALDO and Zoning Ordinances. Safety and security concerns require a more in-depth assessment of the system. Community groups can help identify areas perceived as unsafe or unattractive to walk. GIS can be used to map amenities. Municipal policies should be drafted regarding snow and ice removal from pedestrian facilities and placement of utility poles, hydrants and other potential obstacles within sidewalk and footpath rights-of-way.

BENEFITS

- Environmental – lower CO2 levels, less pollution
- Health – lower rates of obesity, heart diseases, and respiratory issues
- Economic – more accessibility to local businesses, increased property values, accessibility to all socio-economic groups, accessibility to public transportation

DRAWBACKS

- Can be difficult and expensive to implement depending on the location (suburban vs. urban areas)
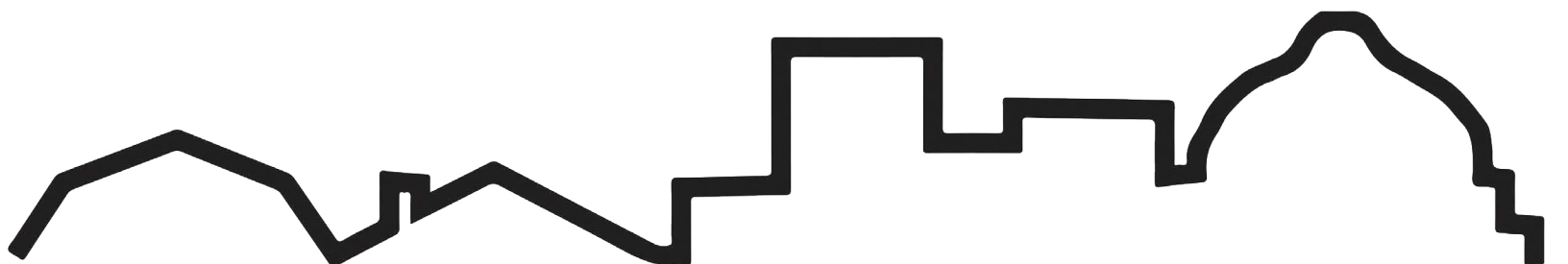
PRACTICAL TIPS

- A sidewalk audit is a good way for communities to evaluate the extent of their pedestrian facilities. Mapping the current sidewalk network using Geographic Information Services (GIS) software can help decision makers identify underserved areas, system gaps and needs.

- Another useful tool for municipal self-assessment is to measure the intersection density of the area. Neighborhoods with higher intersection densities tend to have more and better sidewalks and road systems with better connectivity.

- It is also possible to improve walkability through SALDOs. It is common for sidewalk construction to be a requirement during the subdivision process. Additionally, SALDOs can effectively prohibit cul-de-sac and dead-end streets in the SALDO design standards to improve connectivity.

RESOURCES

- **Walkability Checklist**
- **PennDOT Safe Routes to School Program**
- **The Pedestrian & Bicycle Information Center**
- **Walk Score**
- **NACTO Urban Street Design Guide**
- **Walkable City by Jeff Speck (Book)**

RELATED TOOLKIT FACT SHEETS

- **Complete Streets**
- **Connectivity**
- **Traffic Calming**
- **Transit-Oriented Development**
- **Main Street Programs**

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