



*SUSTAINABLE
ENVIRONMENT
for QUALITY of LIFE*



PEDESTRIAN-FRIENDLY STREETSCAPES

What is it?

Pedestrian-friendly streetscaping is the process of re-creating streets and sidewalks as the center of communal life. At one time, streetscapes were where people of all ages walked, biked, shopped, ate, played, and met their neighbors. But today, streets with this kind of activity are the exception rather than the rule. Towns and cities are full of barriers that discourage walking or bicycling as a means of transportation, recreation, commerce or keeping fit and healthy. The occasional pedestrian is often made to feel like an alien in a world made only for cars. Addressing these barriers means more than just building more sidewalks or adding trails. Land use and transportation planning, ordinance revision, and developing economic incentives for businesses all play important roles toward creating an environment that makes walking easy, safe and convenient, and brings vitality back to city streets.

How long does this take to implement?

Once a vision is developed and a good implementation strategy is in place, major changes to a community can be seen in just a few years.



This Action Item can be implemented as a

- POLICY
- ORDINANCE
- PROGRAM

Shared Impact and Benefits

- Whenever walking becomes a reasonable alternative to driving, some people will walk rather than drive, and taking those extra cars off the road will help to reduce vehicle miles traveled and have a positive impact on air quality.
- Fitness experts agree that regular daily activity is the key to good health. Walking is the most affordable and convenient way for most of us to stay active.
- Pedestrian-oriented streets encourage shoppers to linger. Retail and commercial developers have learned, that walkable context sells.
- Street trees not only attract pedestrians, they also help clean the air, reduce storm water runoff, and moderate temperatures.
- Walking is the cheapest form of transport for everyone. Walkable communities have the most affordable and most efficient transportation system available.
- Streets that draw more pedestrians and encourage social interaction tend to have lower crime rates and other social problems.
- Cities and towns that offer interesting streets with active pedestrian life become vibrant cultural and economic centers that draw visitors from the surrounding region.

Costs

Many grants are available for existing streetscape redevelopment. Policy changes can direct new development to meet updated streetscape requirements with private funds.

The Bottom Line

In just a few years, investments in a community through pedestrian-oriented streetscape improvements may show visible and economic results. These improvements can help make the community healthier, more vibrant and a more attractive place to live, work and own a business. Such revitalized communities offer more incentive to visitors and new businesses.

Interested? Read on!



Who needs to be involved in implementation?

- City or town governing board
- Other community leaders
- Planning board (to develop policies and codes to encourage reinvesting in the town center and other commercial nodes)
- Planning consultants and other architectural design professionals, as budgets permit
- Architectural review team composed of architects and landscape architects familiar with principles of good street design
- Historic preservation groups and other concerned special interest groups
- Chamber of commerce
- Retailers and citizens who interact with leaders in the design process
- Municipality web site manager who presents an image of the community that focuses attention on downtown, neighborhood quality of life, and active citizen participation
- Neighborhood groups interested in neighborhood revitalization

Who's doing this?

- City of Belmont, NC, Pedestrian Transportation Plan—
www.cityofbelmont.org/BelmontPedestrianMasterPlanProject.aspx
- Town of Cary, NC—Design Guidelines:
http://www.townofcary.org/Departments/Planning_Department/Projects_Plans/TCAP/Design.htm
- Town of Huntersville, NC—http://www.huntersville.org/planning_0.asp
- City of Rock Hill, SC—Contact the Office of Planning and Development 803-329-5591
- Other communities include: Town of Davidson, Town of Locust, City of Lincolnton, Town of Mooresville, City of Salisbury and the City of Concord

Although most of the list above focuses on municipalities, there is no reason that a county cannot pursue improvements in streetscaping with the assistance of the State Department of Transportation in more developed unincorporated areas. In fact, it makes good sense to remember these principles in county zoning, so as to reduce suburban sprawl.

Action Steps

1. Read the **Basic Information** section of this action item and become familiar with pedestrian-friendly street and urban design principles and tips for implementation.
2. Assemble a stakeholder group that fully represents the members of all community interests groups, including local business owners, informed citizens, elected officials, and others.
3. The stakeholder group should appoint a steering committee of “key players” to oversee the entire process. The steering committee should:
 - familiarize itself with examples of existing quality streetscapes and their associated development codes to use as models; and
 - develop and implement the plan of action, which should include clearly defined short-term, mid-term, and long-term goals.
4. Begin seeking out immediate sources of funding for design and other initial costs. Tap into potential contributions from various stakeholders. See **Resources** for details.
5. Stage a design charrette. See the **Basic Information** for details.
6. Prepare a design code/revise ordinance/design guideline for streetscape improvements.
7. Invite public review of the code.
8. Make necessary revisions to the code and implement it.
9. Streamline the permitting process and consider other incentives to attract new development.
10. Hire a full-time staff person and give them adequate authority to oversee implementation.



Resources

- In SC, some street enhancement funding comes through C-Funds (County Funds) that are a portion of the gas tax distributed to each county. Pedestrian sidewalk and streetscape projects are funded through the SC Department of Transportation (SCDOT) office of Beautification under the TEA-21 Enhancement Program. For further information visit <http://www.scdot.org/doing/cprogram.shtml>
- The NC Main Street Center (NCMSC), operating out of the Office of Urban Development in the Department of Commerce's Division of Community Assistance, provides technical assistance in the areas of organization, design, promotions and economic restructuring. Other services include guidance, training, and networking. NCMSC itself does not provide funding for downtown programs. For additional information, visit: <http://www.nccommerce.com/en/CommunityServices/CommunityPlanningAssistance/NCMainStreetCenter/>
Or contact:
Liz Parham, Director
NC Main Street, 4313 Mail Service Center,
Raleigh, NC 27699-4313
919-733-2850, FAX: 919-733-5262
- In NC, transportation related landscaping and pedestrian improvement projects under \$100,000 could qualify for NC Department of Transportation (NCDOT) funds. Contact your local NCDOT division office.
 - ◆ Division 9 - Rowan County:
Pat Ivey, Division Engineer, 336-631-1340
 - ◆ Division 10 - Anson, Cabarrus, Mecklenburg, Stanly and Union Counties:
Barry Moose, Deputy Div. Engineer, 704-982-0101
 - ◆ Division 12 – Catawba, Cleveland, Gaston, Iredell, Lincoln Counties: Rubin Chandler, Division, Operations Engineer, 704-480-9020
- SAFETEA-LU grants – For projects expected to exceed a cost of \$100,000, the Transportation Equity Act of the 21st Century (TEA-21), administered by NCDOT, is designed to help communities improve safety, public health, and quality of life through transportation enhancements.
- In SC, Community Builders, housed in the Municipal Association of SC, provides community development and Main Street program assistance. Visit: www.masc.sc/programs/knowledge/pages/Main-Street-SC.aspx
- Active Living by Design grants are designed to fund projects that promote exercise, like walking or biking, as a part of daily routine. Contact them for available grant opportunities at: <http://www.activelivingbydesign.org/>
Active Living by Design
400 Market Street, Suite 205,
Chapel Hill, NC 27516
919-843-ALBD (2523), Fax: 919-843-3083,
Email: info@activelivingbydesign.org
- For a \$4.00 CD full of PowerPoint presentation (Designing Better Places) that present practical steps of how small town streetscapes can be transformed, contact Ginny Faust, AICP, at the NC Division of Community Assistance, 828-251-6914 or vf Faust@nccommerce.com.
- Some communities want to use a charrette process for developing the streetscaping plan. Costs then depend on the duration and the size of the charrette and its consultant team. Consider a minimum length of two days, unless it is only to plan a simple conceptual streetscape, which could be accomplished in one day. Costs per day might run between \$3,000 to \$6,000.

Tracking Progress

- **Let CCOG know when you have implemented this action by calling 704-372-2416 so that we may document regional progress on this item and results.**
- Implement a program to count pedestrians. Evaluate who is using particular streets and intersections and when. Look for possible deficiencies. Identify possible problems such as conflicts with vehicles (pedestrian-vehicular accidents, etc.). Documentation of this type can help make the case to funding agencies for the need to provide pedestrian amenities.
- Try the Walkability Checklist to help determine where improvements are needed or to evaluate streetscapes after improvements are made: <http://www.walkinginfo.org/pdf/walkingchecklist.pdf>



Basic Information

- People feel more comfortable in neighborhoods where buildings and landscaping frame the street. Developments that feature wide roads with no sidewalks and which contain large front setbacks with massive parking lots do not encourage pedestrian use. Buildings that are closer to the lot line give the street definition, which calms traffic and makes the street more inviting to pedestrians.
- Pedestrian-friendly streetscaping is one of the tenets of “New Urbanism” and “Traditional Neighborhood Development.” Some people tend to view these as urban design “fads” that will come and go. However, local planners and governing boards may want to consider that many of the neighborhoods that tend to hold or increase their property values are strong on streetscaping and walkability.
- When building the stakeholder group, and at every subsequent stage in the planning and design process, it is vital to the success of the project to repeatedly invite participation from every facet of the community. Many will choose not to participate, but this will help to avoid potential backlash from groups who might otherwise feel shunned or disenfranchised in the process.
- Many communities begin their streetscaping design process with a “charrette,” which brings the community together to identify common goals and evaluate various design strategies for meeting them. These facilitated processes work because they involve a broad range of participants in the initial planning process and because they allow participants to visualize the impact of various design elements and alternatives. The charrette can produce the initial vision, or further refine an existing one, then lay out the subsequent planning and work that needs to be done to accomplish the vision.
- As a community engages in the redesign or revitalization of its streetscapes, media participation is important. It helps to educate the public, build momentum for change, and create excitement about the new “feel” the streetscaping project will give to the community.
- An overlay district can be an extremely effective zoning tool for individual street improvements.
- Developers are generally willing to abide by design guidelines if they know compliance will assure a permit. Clear, explicit, well-written design guidelines ensure a sense of predictability for both developers and the public.
- For information about traffic calming strategies to make streets safer, see: <http://www.trafficcalming.org>
- Remember that pedestrian-friendly streetscaping does not have to be a “downtown” phenomenon. Some of Charlotte’s best loved, and most highly-valued and actively-walked streets, are in neighborhoods such as Plaza-Midwood, Dilworth, and Myers Park. In each case, the development pattern features sidewalks, mature street trees, visual interest from buildings, and neighborhood destination points such as parks, restaurants, and neighborhood businesses.

FAQ’s

Q: Is this all just about spending money for brick sidewalks, benches and street trees?

A: Such “pedestrian furniture” has a role to play, but these elements do not draw pedestrians to a location. Pedestrians need a reason to be there and that usually requires the “3 R’s”: Retail, Residential, and Restaurants. A mix of land uses within walking distance is critical to creating vibrant, pedestrian-friendly streets.

Q: If Mixed-use Development is so favorable, why don’t we see more of it already?

A: Many local governments’ zoning codes actually impede this type of development. Traditional codes often require a separation of uses; putting miles between homes and the services residents might otherwise walk to. Mixed-use zoning facilitates walkable communities and neighborhoods where housing, shopping, work, recreation, and civic and educational institutions are contained within a more compact, walkable area. Change, therefore, often needs to start with a review of the existing zoning ordinance.



FAQ's (cont.)

Q: This sounds expensive. How do we know it will work?

A: It is not inexpensive, but it does work if lot sizes are small enough and destination points (those "3 R's") create walkable destinations. However, if development patterns provide no place to go, it's very hard to get people to walk other than simply around their neighborhoods for exercise. Even this type of streetscaping has public health benefits, but it won't get many people out of their cars.

Q: Big cities have had a lively street life for years, and they still have air quality problems.

A: A number of larger cities have experienced multiple problems that have led to declining inner-city areas, and the growth of suburbs—and now many of those suburbs and the cities themselves are rediscovering pedestrian-friendly streetscaping. Many books have been written about older cities' decline, and revitalization, and in each case, re-capturing active street life has been a part of the revitalization process. However, pedestrian-friendly streetscaping is not a cure-all for air quality issues, but only one tool in the toolbox. Its greatest benefits lie in making it desirable to live closer-in, so that walking is a possibility.

Intersecting Interests



ENHANCED OZONE AWARENESS

With the decrease of automobile traffic in pedestrian-friendly communities, the ground-level ozone producing byproducts of automobile exhaust also decrease resulting in cleaner air.



TREE PLANTING STANDARDS

A primary element of pedestrian-friendly streetscapes is street trees. Trees provide beauty, shade and a physical and visual buffer from automobile traffic, and give sidewalks a comfortable, human scale. Shoppers tend to linger and shop longer along streets lined with trees.



TRANSIT CONNECTIVITY

Making streets safer and more comfortable and attractive to pedestrians encourages more people to walk longer distances, or use bicycles and be more amenable to public transportation.



EFFICIENT PARKING

As streets become more attractive for walking, motorists will tend to walk longer distances from their vehicles, parking once and walking to several destinations, rather than driving to, and parking at, each destination. Overall parking needs will be decreased or reduced.



SEDIMENTATION & EROSION CONTROL

Increased landscaping at the street means a decrease in the amount of impervious surface. Streets that are pedestrian-friendly pose less of a strain on storm water infrastructure, which drives down the costs of storm water management.



Bay Meadows by Cooper/Robertson Architects

For More Information

- Walkable Communities, Inc., P. O. Box 1451, Port Townsend, WA 98368, 614-940-9780, www.walkable.org
- A *Traffic Calming Guidelines* manual is available through the SCDOT Traffic Engineering Division. http://www.scdot.org/doing/pdfs/SCDOT_TCG_06.pdf
- Partners for a Walkable America, Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center, USDOT *The Walkability Checklist* - <http://www.walkinginfo.org/pdf/walkingchecklist.pdf>
- A Practical Guide to Traffic Calming and Neighborhood Traffic Management <http://www.trafficcalming.org>

For advice about streetscape improvements and pedestrian friendly urban design, contact:

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