

FEET FIRST: Civic leader speaks about "walkability"

A FEW DAYS AGO, I had the opportunity to attend a presentation by Dan Burden, a guy who has been named one of the six most-important civic leaders in the world by Time magazine. Dan is renowned for his work on walkability.

As the name might suggest, walkability is a measure of how friendly an area is to walking. This is becoming more important from a real estate perspective, as many people are now looking at this factor as they make decisions about what neighborhoods and communities they are interested in living.

Dan has been helping communities become more pedestrian- and bike-friendly for nearly 40 years. He has been putting our cities on what he calls a "road diet" by reducing sprawling thoroughfares by adding sidewalks and bike paths.

He has shown that creating walkable neighborhoods offer tremendous benefits to the environment, our health, and our finances. For example, the more we walk and bike, the less



NATE K. JOHNSON

President, St. Louis
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we are driving our pollution-emitting cars.

Studies show that cities and towns that are walkable have lower levels of obesity. In fact, the average resident of a walkable neighborhood weighs 7 pounds less than someone who lives in a sprawling neighborhood.

From an economic perspective, can I just ask if you've seen the price of gas lately? Let me say that as an active Realtor, I spend more time in my car than I do at the office. So, I understand the need of cars and effective road systems. However, what Dan has proven is that reducing traffic lanes can have a positive impact on traffic issues. I certainly don't have the space here to explain how that happens; but, I would encourage you to look into his work at www.walkable.org.

I believe that the most positive impact of creating walkable cities is recreating a sense of community that has vanished from many of our neighborhoods. Studies show that for every 10 minutes a person spends

in a daily car commute, time spent in community activities falls by 10 percent. Dan suggests that we replace the word "loitering" with "lingering" and encourage it in many cases as opposed to frowning on it.

It was great to hear Dan referencing the internationally acclaimed architect Oscar Newman and his work on "Creating Defensible Space". In a nutshell, Newman's designs call for an environment where the front facing buildings "watch over the common ground" and create safe spaces that are visible by the residents of the buildings.

Let's imagine a region where we can safely and efficiently get to wherever we need to go using one of the most efficient vehicles that we have, our feet. St. Louis has done some great work in achieving this goal, but there is a lot more work to do and it is up to us to continue to encourage pedestrian and bike friendly development, as we strive to improve our great region.

To help you find a walkable community in our area, contact your local Realtor. To find a Realtor, visit www.stlrealtors.com.

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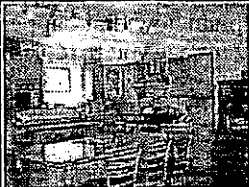


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