



How Walkable is Your Neighborhood?

Posted by [Glenn](#) on August 26, 2007 - 10:00am in [The Oil Drum: Local](#)

Topic: [Alternative energy](#)

Tags: [neighborhood](#), [new york city](#), [retail](#), [transportation](#), [walkability](#), [walkscore](#)

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Walk Score™ How walkable is your house?

Why Walking Matters | Walkable Neighborhoods | How It Works | How It Doesn't Work

Please type an address
Address: United States

Walk Score: 6 out of 100 Worst Best What it means

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| Category | Name | Distance (Mi) |
|-----------------------|---------------------|---------------|
| Grocery Stores | Clark's Market Acct | 4.51 |
| Restaurants | Margarita Grill | 0.31 |
| Coffee Shops | Two Leaves & A Bud | 4.65 |
| Bars | Sage Catering at Sn | 1.37 |
| Movie Theaters | Movieland Cinemas | 8.14 |
| Schools | Schools-Public: Bas | 4.54 |
| Parks | Basalt Recreation D | 4.54 |
| Libraries | Basalt Regional Lib | 5.05 |

Map | Satellite | Hybrid

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Amory Lovins' Rocky Mountain Institute: Not Exactly Transit Oriented!

Typically, when people think about how sustainable a neighborhood is, they probably think of neighborhoods with lots of organic stores, solar paneled roofs, small hybrid cars and a strong recycling/composting culture. And all of those ideas have their place, but I would argue that the most important is how walkable/bikable a neighborhood is. From [Streetsblog](#), we discover a new website, [Walkscore](#) gives us a chance to calculate this aspect of different neighborhoods. While this is admittedly a crude measure and has some fairly obvious flaws, it is in many ways a good rough measure of how walkable a given location is compared to others.

Just pure density does not a walkable neighborhood make. It requires a healthy mix of residential, retail, services and office space. It means basically being able to accomplish pretty much any of your necessary daily trips by foot and not requiring an automobile.

For instance Amory Lovins' Rocky Mountain Institute gets a fairly low score since pretty much anyone that works there or wants to get lunch off campus HAS to drive there. However, most of Manhattan gets a 90+.

[What is Walkscore? How Does it work?:](#)

Walk Score helps people find walkable places to live. Walk Score calculates the walkability of an address by locating nearby stores, restaurants, schools, parks, etc. Check out how Walk Score doesn't work.

What does my score mean?

Your Walk Score is a number between 0 and 100. The walkability of an address depends on how far you are comfortable walking—after all, everything is within walking distance if you have the time. Here are general guidelines for interpreting your score:

* 90 - 100 = Walkers' Paradise: Most errands can be accomplished on foot and many people get by without owning a car.

* 70 - 90 = Very Walkable: It's possible to get by without owning a car.

* 50 - 70 = Some Walkable Locations: Some stores and amenities are within walking distance, but many everyday trips still require a bike, public transportation, or car.

* 25 - 50 = Not Walkable: Only a few destinations are within easy walking range. For most errands, driving or public transportation is a must.

* 0 - 25 = Driving Only: Virtually no neighborhood destinations within walking range. You can walk from your house to your car!

It would be an interesting exercise to overlay these results with car ownership. If anyone can attempt this with census data on car ownership and commuting patterns, it would certainly be an interesting contribution to showing how walkable neighborhoods have reduced carbon footprint.

[Walkscore](#) is self-admittedly not perfect. It only uses an "as the crow flies" distance calculation which does not take into account how far something is to actually walk there on legal sidewalks. For instance, what if there is a retail strip half a mile away, but there is no direct pedestrian access to get to it because of how the streets are arranged, requiring a mile and a half trip instead. But in discussing that with some urban planning folks, this is still interesting information, because potentially the barriers and obstacles could be removed and pedestrian access could be prioritized over other rights of way. It also is not 100% up-to-date with all the potential destinations that contribute to the score. So if the nearby grocery store recently closed, that might not be included.

One key lesson from walkscore after taking a tour of various places that I have lived before is that while DENSITY is pretty important, ZONING is probably even more important. My childhood home in Staten Island, which was in residential only zoned area, received a score of 50, while similarly dense places I have lived in Ithaca received over 80. Also, ultra-dense places like Manhattan have fairly similar scores to mixed use areas of the outerboroughs and even small town centers.

A low-cost, pro-small business initiative that would vastly improve the walkability of any neighborhood, would be to ban residential-only zoning and specifically encourage mixed use zoning everywhere, even in the heart of the most suburban sub-divisions. Even if all plots at street intersections became eligible for commercial, retail or other uses, it would go a long way to producing more walkable communities.

Another lesson that I hope people have started to realize is that transportation is not just Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) and trying to figure out how to replace all of them with non-petroleum sources of energy. People in walkable communities make just as many, if not more, trips in a given week and they travel much shorter distances. Transportation policy should be about providing people with access to the goods, services, workplaces that they need, not encouraging land use patterns that place all of these as far from each other as possible and desperately trying to link them all together with roads and highways that are costly to build and maintain.

And not only are walkable communities more resilient to oil shocks and produce less carbon



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