

# The Boston Globe

June 18, 2007

Keeping Boston walkable

By Michael F. Flaherty and Wendy Landman

GOING TO WORK or going to church. Picking up groceries or picking the children up at school. Taking the baby out in the stroller and taking the dog to the park. There are many reasons why Boston residents have to -- and want to -- walk our city streets. And with warmer, sunnier weather finally here, more people will be out, requiring drivers to exercise extreme vigilance for pedestrians in the crosswalks and on our sidewalks.

While drivers bear the brunt of the responsibility for the alarming number of recent pedestrian-vehicle accidents, the city has an equally important responsibility to ensure that pedestrians are adequately protected. To that end, the city must provide walking routes that have well maintained side walks and cross walks, as well as working traffic lights, visible signs, and other appropriate traffic calming measures. At nighttime, walking routes must be well lit and visible from the street. Pedestrian crosswalks need to be placed in locations where pedestrians and oncoming cars can see one another.

According to the National Safety Council, the physical environment has a direct impact on how frequently and how safely residents are able to walk. By adopting a thoughtful city plan that incorporates pedestrian safety measures, Boston becomes a city that encourages more walking. We may also hope that at the same time such walker-friendly settings and a newfound walker presence will help deter criminal activity that has typically capitalized on dark, empty streets and neighborhoods.

Increased walking opportunities have vast benefits for Boston. Inevitably, more walking leads to healthier lifestyles, cleaner air, reduced traffic congestion, a greater sense of community, and an economic boost for neighborhood businesses.

Our streets should be traveled by all kinds of pedestrians. Whether they are older or younger, healthy or a person with a disability, they see Boston's streets as their gateway to the city's parks, schools, stores, restaurants, libraries and churches. If at any given time you look and see that pedestrians along our streets are not diverse, it may be a signal to us that we are not making our community as accessible as we should. A walkable city means walkable for everyone.

The city has an obligation to make walking safe, convenient, and fun for Boston residents and visitors. If we are to continue to pride ourselves as a walkable community, we must give all pedestrians the assurance that they are adequately protected.

Michael F. Flaherty is an at-large Boston city councilor. Wendy Landman is the executive director of Walk Boston.

© Copyright 2007 The New York Times Company