

# 12.11

MAKING OUR COMMUNITIES MORE WALKABLE

# walk

BY KEN KRAUSE

## Walk Score = walkability

It's prominent on most every real estate listing, right up there with number of bedrooms and baths, lot size and estimated property taxes. Prospective home buyers ask about it. It even has its own iPhone app and a Facebook page.

Walk Score, established in 2007, has taken its rightful place in real estate lexicon as a popular measure of a neighborhood's attractions.

To those who sell real estate for a living, it's a wonder someone didn't devise such a tool much sooner.

"Walkability is absolutely huge and definitely a common theme among the distinct majority of my clients," said Liz Bolton, a real estate agent for Coldwell Banker in Cambridge. "For most of my buyers, neighborhoods with walking access to shops, restaurants, and especially the T, are at the top of their list."

Deb Agliano, who works mostly on behalf of sellers as a representative for ERA Andrew Realty in Medford, says: "For every property I put on the market I ask: 'What is walkable here?'"

Walk Score helps answer that question, providing comparative ratings for neighborhoods based on an important consumer consideration: a property's walking access to shopping, services, schools, transit and parks.



A walkable, convenient neighborhood

"Walk Score has definitely taken off over the last three years, particularly since gas prices went up from \$2 a gallon to approaching \$4," Agliano said. "Instead of just listing a Walk Score, agents are elaborating on it in their comments, describing how good and solid a neighborhood is because you can walk to almost everything."

A 2009 study by the organization CEOs for Cities, titled "Walking the Walk: How Walkability Raises Home Values in U.S. Cities," found that homes in walkable areas command a price premium over otherwise similar homes in less walkable areas.

"I can't say a Walk Score quotient specifically increases property values, because that also depends on the vibrancy of the neighborhood," Agliano said. "But it all comes down to that old saying: location, location."

Added Bolton, "Intuitively, I think walkability leads to increased values and Walk Score is a valuable tool to measure walkability. It would be really cool if you could assign that same metric to compare everything a home buyer considers when looking at a property."

Along with the desire to reside in a walkable neighborhood, both agents noted that the need for automobile use remains a factor in where people choose to live.

"Many people, especially in Somerville, are looking for places with parking so while they can commute to work without a car, and walk to their favorite shops and restaurants, they still have their car to use it on weekends or when they really need it," Agliano said.

"Part of the appeal of walkable neighborhoods is the comfort of having things around you, whether or not you're going to use them all the time," said Bolton. "You're happy they are there."

BY NINA COHEN

## Convenience = housing value

A 1999 Urban Land Institute study identified a \$20,000 premium on real estate value in four pedestrian-friendly communities compared to similar real estate in auto-dependent suburbs. Studies since then show that walkable downtowns offering a mix of restaurants, offices and housing support growth of a creative, knowledge-driven and service-oriented economy.

Is the creative economy with its focus on interactive and walkable environments here to stay? According to a 2010 Brookings study by Christopher Leinberger and Patrick C. Doherty, homes and commercial space in walkable neighborhoods do not exist in near sufficient quantity to meet demand. They identify two distinct demographic groups driving demand for walkable communities: boomers—Americans born between 1946 and 1964 who are looking to live near public services, cultural activities and health care—and their children born between 1977 and 1994 who approve

change to seek a return to land-use patterns of early industrial times with small building footprints and an open-air retail environment. If these authors are right, the demand by these large demographic groups for walkable communities will attract invest-

ment capital and enable development of homes and commercial spaces in transit-oriented, economically dynamic neighborhoods.

BY NINA COHEN

## TOD issues of equity

The rising interest in Transit Oriented Development sometimes can lead to an unintended result: the displacement of low-income residents from the neighborhood, unfortunately, relocating those who could benefit most from the new transit.

A typical example: the announcement of new rail stations stimulates an influx of real estate development, and land values gain in anticipation. Developers who pay higher land prices opt to build higher-cost housing than what was there before. Unless rental rates are stabilized, higher housing cost decreases not just income diversity, but also transit ridership. Those who most use transit are priced out of the local apartment market. In a few cases, it has been documented that the number of transit riders actually decreased when a new station was put in service.

Neighborhood change of this type is undesirable to the people who live—or used to live—there and bad for the health of the transit system as a whole, according to a 2010 study by the Dukakis Center for Urban and Regional Policy at Northeastern University. The study recommended addressing these issues through policy tools that maintain a mix of income levels, such as density bonuses and tax incentives for developers. WalkBoston is an active member of Transportation For Massachusetts [T4MA], a coalition of transportation, environmental, smart growth and equity organizations in Massachusetts working to add transit oriented development that explicitly supports diverse, mixed-income communities.

# Boston

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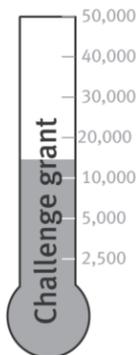
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## a challenge

Walking is taken for granted until you can't do it. People are surprised when we point out that the reason walking feels unsafe is that signals are timed poorly, crosswalk paint has faded, or cars are parked so that pedestrians are not visible to drivers. These are issues that can be easily fixed. Having funds for WalkBoston staff will help to fix them.

We have a \$114,000 challenge grant from the Barr Foundation to advance our mission. We must raise \$50,000 from our members in order to fulfill the challenge. So please support us with a generous donation.



## events

**February 1, 2012, 6:00pm**

### Technology for Advocacy

Learn about Apps for reporting issues in the built environment, the technologies being developed and the ways that smartphones are changing citizens' interactions with government. Panel discussion with City of Boston, MBTA and See Click Fix. MIT Stata Center, 32 Vassar Street, room 155, Cambridge. RSVP to reserve your spot: 617.367.9255 or [rsvp@walkboston.org](mailto:rsvp@walkboston.org)

**March 22nd, 2012, 4—8pm**

### Annual Celebration—Health

4pm: Kendall Square Walk  
5pm: Reception:  
Microsoft NERD Center  
6:30pm: Golden Shoes, Speaker

## meet Rachel Blatt, intern

Rachel was a terrific addition to last summer - arriving as a fully fledged walking advocate and community activist who helped to start and sustain, a summer festival in Glastonbury, CT, her home town.



*I study planning at MIT, with a focus on urban design and transportation. Researching WalkBoston's slideshow Good Walking is Good Business [GWIGB] persuaded me that in the coming decade walkability will separate successful towns and cities from others. People will want their homes to be within walking distance of restaurants, convenience shopping and specialty retail, and will invest in downtowns.*

*This view of the future is not limited to transportation wonks and New Urbanists. Most of the research for the GWIGB slideshow came from the popular press and business publications, which are mentioning that the choice to invest in a business or a residence is influenced by its walkability. The residential market is shifting toward renting over ownership and toward smaller homes. This shift is driven by the costs of commuting and by demographics, as baby boomers downsize and twenty-somethings buy homes.*

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WalkBoston encourages walking throughout Massachusetts for transportation, health and vibrant communities. Our education and advocacy programs give voice to citizens to make their communities walkable.

## mission

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## thank you!

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## membership application

### HOW CAN YOU HELP?

**Walk! Better yet, join WalkBoston today!** We work to make communities more walkable. SOUNDS SIMPLE, BUT WE CAN'T DO IT WITHOUT YOUR SUPPORT. Become a member and/or donate at [www.walkboston.org](http://www.walkboston.org)

Complete this form & mail along with your check made payable to: WalkBoston, Old City Hall, 45 School Street, Boston, MA 02108.  
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