



Street Smarts

Creating usable pedestrian-friendly paths means designing your communities for foot traffic—not for cars.

Incorporating walkways into a project is like a lot of other things in life: You get what you put into it. Sidewalks and walking paths can transform residential projects into thriving hubs of daily life, where neighbors know each other and stop to chat. Or they can sit unused save for the occasional jogger whom other residents know only through glimpses from car windows as they whiz by in their cars.

To successfully incorporate paths and sidewalks that are actu-

ally used, developers must look at walkway and street development from the pedestrian perspective.

"You need to make a compelling experience out of a walkway; tell a story," says Vaughan Davies, principal and director of urban design at EDA, a San Francisco, Calif.-based urban planning and design, landscape architecture, and environmental services firm. The master of walkway design, according to Davies, is entertainment mogul Walt Disney, who designed detailed streetscapes that compel theme park visitors

to explore his "wonderful world" extensively on foot.

Building retail, churches, and schools within walking distance gives people destinations, while mixed-use development creates interesting things to look at and brings in a greater diversity of people. "The most boring places in the world are just one use: Think of someplace that's just an industrial park or just a single-family subdivision," says Rudy Kadlub, CEO of Wilsonville, Ore.-based Costa Pacific Communities, which is developing the 1,010-home community of

MORE MEANDERING: Designers of the South Carolina community of I'On focused on creating beautiful "street rooms" to encourage foot traffic.

Villebois, in Wilsonville, Ore., a suburb of Portland. The project includes 10,000 square feet of retail/commercial space with 48 miles of sidewalks, bike paths, and off-road trails.

In Colorado's Stapleton community, master developer Forest City bases its multiuse plans on a 10-minute walk—a distance someone will walk for ordinary ventures. "A person can cover a half mile comfortably in 10 minutes," says Gregory Vilkin, president of Forest City Stapleton, which oversees development of the 12,000-unit, 4,700-acre city being redeveloped on Denver's former airport site.

The south portion of Stapleton, currently under construction, includes about 95 miles of trails, sidewalks, and walkways, compared with 47 miles of streets. The north part, not yet under construction, will feature about the same amount of walkways with half as many miles of roadway.

STREET ROOMS

Practicality isn't enough. Beauty also counts for a lot when it comes to making walking a part of a community.

Designers at I'On, a 243-acre, 700-plus home development in Mount Pleasant, S.C., consider aesthetics so important that they focus on creating "street rooms," using beautiful and varied architecture with greenscape and getting rid of less appealing sights, says Macky Hill, I'On's design coordinator.

Houses are built to the sidewalk to put things on a human scale and outfitted with tall, deep porches, so people can sit

SETTING PRIORITIES: The south portion of Stapleton in Denver offers 95 miles of walking trails, compared with 47 miles of roads.

comfortably outside in South Carolina's long, hot season. This design concept creates more social interaction, giving people more reason to walk through their community.

And, as in nearly all new pedestrian-oriented suburban developments today, garages are relegated to the back of the house, along alleyways, because "no one likes to walk past rows of driveways and garages," Hill points out.

Developers thoughtfully plan green areas and gathering spots, too.

If they are well-placed, shade trees, pocket parks, and fountains punctuate walkways with pleasing surprises. At I'On, rails lead to lakes and a rookery.

But such features don't have to break the bank. "You can make a big difference with just a fountain in a courtyard," Davies says, or a bench in a pretty nook where walkers can rest their feet.

To design successful walkways, designers have to think through each step. Too much wind on a path among vertical buildings can create a wind-tunnel effect.

"You have to study things like wind, sun, and air," says Thomas Cox, senior principal of Irvine, Calif.-based Thomas P. Cox Architects (TCA), which works with developers on pedestrian-friendly design.

Cox's more urban walkways create interest with unexpected angles or by leading to a plaza or a courtyard. In a few downtown Los Angeles projects, TCA inserted walkways with green space mid-block, so people can cut through from street to street.

"You have to think about the spaces between the buildings,"

says Davies. "Most developers don't. They're selling the apartment or house, but really the value is created by the environment around it."

YIELDING TO CARS

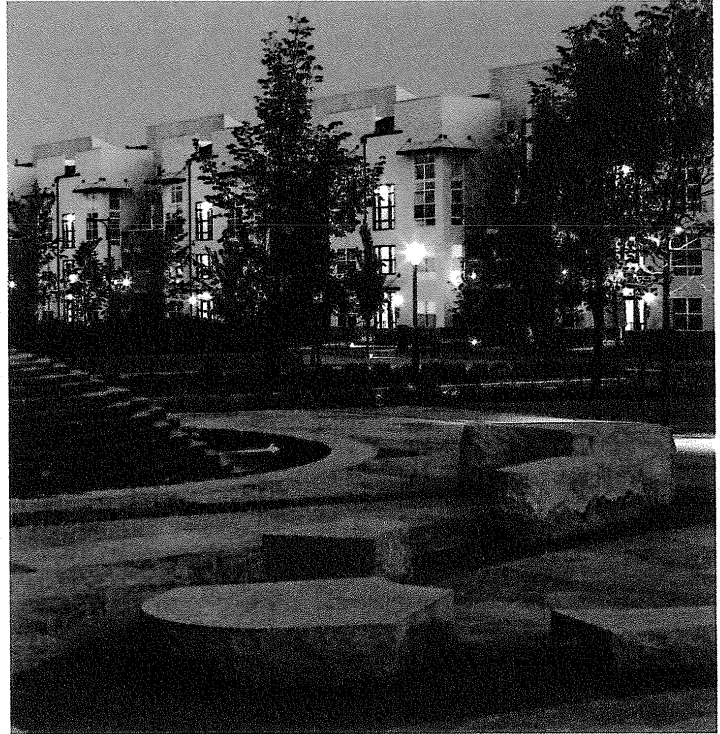
In the modern world, though, streets make up a big part of the environment around apartments or homes—one of the biggest challenges to building pro-pedestrian projects. And fast-moving cars and foot traffic don't mix well.

Developers should build shorter, narrower streets and install traffic calming devices. They also should provide street-side parking to act as a barrier between pedestrians and speeding cars.

But while developers want to slow traffic, local public works departments want to speed it up. "Our biggest battles are with the regulatory engineers and traffic engineers whose jobs are to move traffic as quickly as possible," Kadlub says. "Their job is to not have the mayor get a phone call [from a constituent] saying, 'I have to wait at two red lights before I get there.'"

Part of the problem is lack of knowledge or experience with a pedestrian-friendly approach. "How do you design a 5 mph street?" Hill says. "Traffic engineers didn't have any models for streets less than 30 mph. They didn't have the numbers for calculations."

I'On solved the problem by foraging through the city archives where they found plans for 5 mph roads used in the 1920s. Kadlub had to go to the local planning commission to get a variance allowing street-side parking on collector roads. I'On also struggled with the utility companies, which



like having ample space to bury wires and pipes. "They like the suburban model where there's this huge front yard nobody uses," Hill says.

Building walkways that become a functioning part of the community isn't easy, and it can cost more. But developers that make a walking-oriented

project come to life say the rewards are big.

"It takes a lot of brain damage to put a place like this together," Hill says. "But if you do it, there's a huge demand. There are a lot of people out there who want to live this way." ▸

Nichola Zaklan is a freelance writer in Portland, Ore.

THE POINTS

- **Place retail and commercial close to homes.** People like walking to perform ordinary errands or to take advantage of amenities, such as restaurants and cafes.
- **Make walking visually and psychologically appealing.** Design with green space, pocket parks, fountains, and resting spots as your building blocks. Simple touches, like tucking a bench in a shady nook, serves as a destination for walkers and a memory point for potential buyers.
- **Relegate less-attractive sights, such as garages and driveways, behind houses.** Study successful traditional neighborhood communities for clever ways to conceal community elements that detract from a serene atmosphere.
- **Design streets to slow traffic with calming devices and narrower, shorter streets.** Cars and pedestrians don't mix well, so it's best to avoid huge, multilane roads that overwhelm people on foot and prevent social interaction among neighbors.