walkers.

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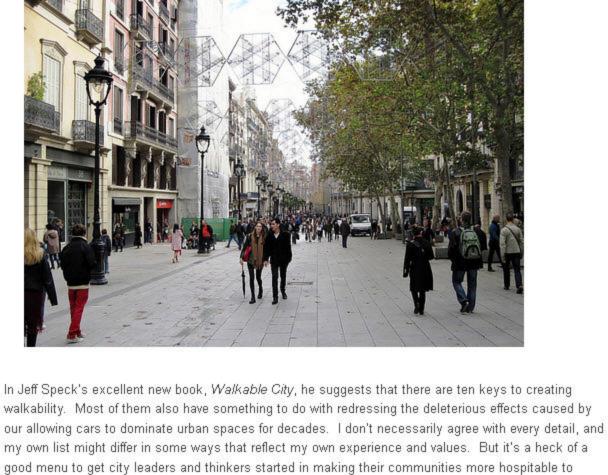
Economy

Posted by: Kaid Benfield

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acknowledgments, and one of my articles is cited in the narrative. I previously reviewed The Smart Growth Manual, which Jeff co-authored with Andres Duany and Mike Lydon.) Here are the author's ten steps of walkability, with a memorable line from his description of each: 1. Put cars in their place. ("Traffic studies are bullshit.") Startling quote, no? Jeff believes, and I tend to agree, that a car-first approach has hurt American cities. This is in part because traffic engineers too often have failed to acknowledge that increased roadway traffic capacity can lead to more, not fewer, cars on the road. The resulting phenomenon of "induced demand" creates

(I can't say that Jeff and I know each other well, but we're friends, and I like him a lot. I'm listed in the

unanticipated consequences not only for traffic on freeways but especially in neighborhoods and downtowns, where streets are sometimes treated not as

critical public spaces for animating city life but as conveyances for motor

vehicles. Jeff generally supports congestion pricing, but cautions that we must be very careful about assuming the merits of pedestrian-only zones. (I think there are also circumstances where we must be very careful about congestion

pricing, which I'll discuss below.) 2. Mix the uses. ("Cities were created to bring things together.") The research shows that neighborhoods with a diversity of uses - places to walk to - have significantly more walking than those that don't. Jeff makes the point that, for most American downtowns, it is housing - places to walk from, if you will - that is in particularly short supply. He also points out, quite correctly, that for most (still-disinvested) downtowns, affordability is not much of an issue, because relatively affordable housing is all there is. For those booming downtowns susceptible to gentrification, he recommends inclusionary zoning and "granny flats," or accessory dwelling 3. Get the parking right. ("Ample parking encourages driving that would not otherwise occur

downtown parking, routes separated from the busiest areas, infrequent service, and a lack of mixed-use, walkable neighborhoods near the stops.

addition of cycling infrastructure is thoughtful. Jeff does discuss the very interesting point that some experienced cyclists actually prefer riding in the main roadway rather than in a designated lane. Personally, if I'm on a busy downtown

enclosure we need to feel comfortable walking. And, once again, the main villain is the car, this time in the form of surface parking lots along

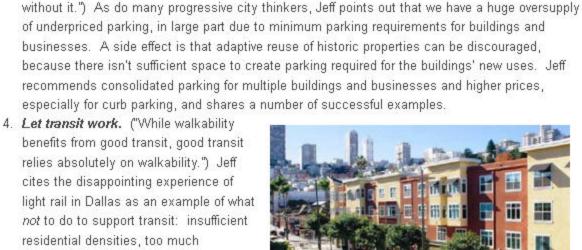
to absorb stormwater. (I respond below.)

spending the least money make the most difference?") The subtitle here could well be, "in the real world, you

10. Pick your winners. ("Where can

motivate more than to illustrate

Walking versus driving



Jeff recommends concentrating on those transit corridors that can be improved to support ten-minute headways, and working there to simultaneously improve both the transit and the urban fabric. Quoting transportation planner Darrin Nordahl, Jeff also reminds us that public transportation is "a mobile form of public space," and thus should be treated with respect and made pleasurable. Amen to that. (For the opposite, see my 2010 frustration with the deterioration allowed to the Washington Metro.) Protect the pedestrian. ("The safest roads are those that feel the least safe.") Here again, it comes back to driving. Jeff asserts that roadway "improvements" that facilitate car traffic - such

as wider lanes or one-way streets – encourage higher speeds; thus, we should instead use narrow lanes and two-way streets. Intriguingly, he argues - as have other new urbanists - for stripping some roadways of signage and mode delineation. The idea is that, if drivers feel they might hit someone or something, they really will slow down or change routes. Jeff supports, as I

do, on-street curbside parking, because it buffers the sidewalk from moving vehicle traffic. Welcome bikes. ("In Amsterdam, a city of 783,000, about 400,000 people are out riding their bikes on any given day.") This step is only minimally about walkability, except for the point that bike traffic slows car traffic. It's all about making cities more hospitable to cycling, which many US cities are now doing. Although the drivers complain, both the research and my personal experience as a driver suggest that car traffic isn't really inconvenienced much if at all when the

street, I'd rather have a dedicated lane; otherwise, I'd probably prefer to have full access to the road. Shape the spaces. ("Get the design right and people will walk in almost any climate.") Much as I liked this book, I'll admit to wondering when, if ever, my urban designer friend was going to get around to urban design. This chapter is mostly about providing the sense of

the walkway. But Jeff also takes some shots at blank walls (correctly) and look-at-me architecture (I somewhat, but not entirely, agree). He believes, as I do, that the amount of

Plant trees. ("It's best not to pick favorites in the walkability discussion— every individual point counts— but the humble American street tree might win my vote.") Even though street trees correlate with fewer automobile accidents, many public transportation agencies seek to limit

density to support good city walkability does not necessarily require tall buildings.

them because they believe they interfere with visibility. But Jeff points out that, in addition to contributing to auto safety, trees provide myriad public benefits, including natural cooling, reduced emissions and energy demand for air conditioning, and reduced stormwater pollution. 9. Make friendly and unique [building] faces. ("Pedestrians need to feel safe and comfortable, but they also need to be entertained.") Of the ten steps, this is the one most about design, or at least the most about design of things other than roadways. For me, it evoked Steve Mouzon's wonderful theory of "walk appeal," holding that how far we will walk is all about what we encounter along the way. Stores and businesses with street-level windows help (meaning that most banks and drugstores don't), as does disguised or lined parking, vertical building lines, and architectural details. Jeff isn't so kind to parks, though, or green infrastructure designed

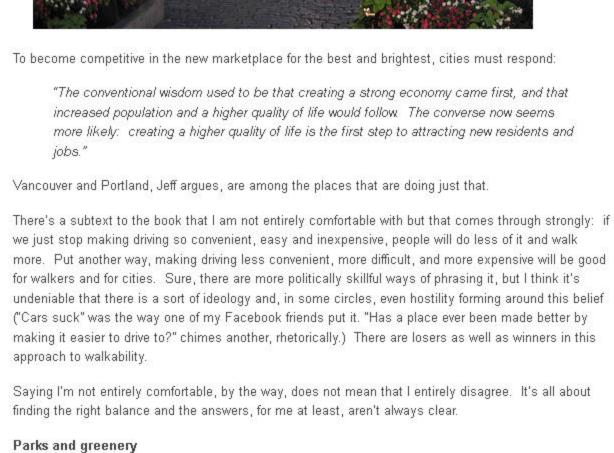
can't do everything." True enough. Jeff argues for focusing on downtowns first, and on short corridors that can connect walkable neighborhoods. I mentioned above that there really isn't as much about design in this very good book as one would expect from an author whose business is design. In that sense, it reminds me of my good friend David Dixon, with whom I have done more co-presentations at various conferences than I can count. David is an accomplished architect and planner; I am a lawyer. Yet, almost inevitably, in our presentations I talk about design that I believe is good for the environment, and David talks about assembling the political will to get it done.

Walkable City is like David's presentations. It's really a political text about why he believes we need to do these things, the objectives we should strive for (rather than the design solutions), and the obstacles that stand in the way, which he debunks one by one. There is not a single visual image in the book, and really only a handful of verbal descriptions of successful walkable places. This book is intended to

The book's opening chapter, before Jeff gets into the ten steps, is devoted to the rapidly increasing demand for walkable places and to an indictment of our car-oriented cities, which "have effectively become no-walking zones." A "public realm that is unsafe, uncomfortable, and just plain boring" will not work for creative young people, he says, because they value a pedestrian culture that, among other things, creates opportunities for chance encounters that turn into friendships. Indeed, as others

same time that baby boomers are retiring is dramatically strengthening the market for walkable places.

(including myself) have pointed out, the entry of the millennial generation into the housing market at the



I do disagree with some of the suggestions in the book about greenery and parks, where I think Jeff is

too dismissive. In a passage headlined "Boring Nature," he concedes that green spaces are "necessary" before adding "but they are also dull." "Verdant landscapes do not entertain."

To suggest that parks discourage walking is to ignore the experience of the Jardin du Luxembourg in Paris, Russell Square in London, and St. Stephen's Green in Dublin, to name three of my very favorite urban places. I don't even want to think about Washington without Rock Creek Park, and I'm sure a lot of San Franciscans and New Yorkers feel the same way about Golden Gate and Central Parks. In downtown DC, I will go out of my way to walk through one of our green squares while running an errand.

Do some parks do a poor job of it? Oh, yeah. Just read my essay on DC's National Mall for my

Beyond parks per se, I disagree strongly with Jeff's dislike of green infrastructure to reduce stormwater

"Current impulses to make our downtowns more sustainable by filling them with pervious surfaces, prairie grass, and the latest craze—"rain gardens"— threaten to erase one of the key characteristics that distinguishes cities from the suburbs that remain their

The way I see it, what these things "erase" is mostly mundane or ugly concrete. Moreover, they accomplish some important things besides just looking pretty. First, these techniques help prevent water pollution and combined sewer overflows, something Jeff rightly expresses concern about in his chapter on trees. Second, even the book he co-authored, The Smart Growth Manual, advocates permeable pavement to control stormwater, as do a growing number of urban scientists and thinkers.

I believe we need respite and calm in cities as much as we need liveliness.

thoughts about the ones that get it wrong.

principal competition."

Third, because these things can be done very

attractively and in ways highly compatible with city

pollution:

these things; over an appropriate beverage Jeff and I would probably come to a great deal of agreement on which kinds of green belong where. I definitely agree

The most commonly discussed form of congestion pricing is called "cordon pricing," under which drivers are charged for entering downtown at certain times of day. It works in London, and might even work in New York, cities whose downtowns are so strong that they can withstand being taxed in a way that their suburbs are not. But the last thing that still-recovering

downtowns need is to give people and businesses another reason not to go there. Besides, here in DC and I suspect in many other places, the suburban roadways are far more congested than those in the city. This needs some more thought and analysis before those of us who care about cities seize on it

change the way you see cities. You can find Walkable City at your favorite bookstore or access it from Jeff's website, which is pretty interesting in itself.

Kaid Benfield writes about community, development, and the environment on Switchboard and in other

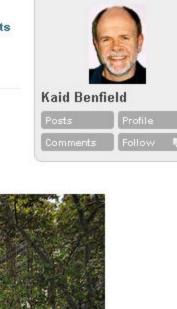
Communities Video Channels. Connect: 😉 🖭 Authored by: Kaid Benfield Director, Sustainable Communities, NRDC; co-founder, LEED for Neighborhood Development rating system; co-founder, Smart Growth America coalition; author, Once There Were Greenfields (NRDC 1999), Solving Sprawl (Island Press 2001),

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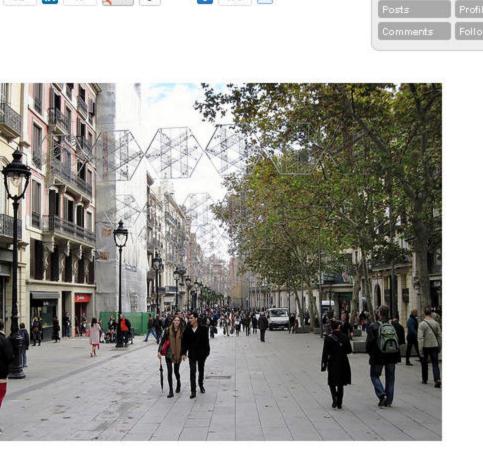
The Ten Steps To Walkable Cities Posted December 3, 2012 Like it? **1** 21











Keywords: walkability, walkable communities, Land Use, Placemaking

fabric, they can raise property values, even if you're not the kind of person who values nature intrinsically. I actually doubt we have much real disagreement on with the starting premise that cities should be cities and rural land and wilderness should be rural land and wilderness. That's one of the reasons I abhor the "new towns" that many otherwise progressive architects and planners are all-too-willing to plop down in the countryside when a big developer comes calling. For me, the test of any city greening is whether or not it supports (rather than displaces) urban density and function. (I disagree with those who espouse the oxymoronic "agrarian urbanism," or want to demolish buildings in disinvested cities to replace them with 50-acre farms. Smaller "farms" and gardens, though, can be great because they can support city life.) One of the points I would try to make over that beverage would be that different approaches work in different cities and cultures. Rightly sized and designed green infrastructure and parks are among the things that make cities possible in the 21st century. I was a little surprised not to see more in Walkable City about street connectivity, which Ewing and Cervero's exhaustive synthesis of transportation research found was the single most important determinant (among those analyzed) of how much walking takes place in a neighborhood. Connectivity shortens distances, making purposeful walking more attractive. Jeff does espouse small city blocks, which gets close to connectivity but isn't quite the same thing.

> Before closing, here's why I think congestion pricing can be complicated: many American cities need more, not less, congestion. Suburban sprawl and the flight of people and investment out of downtowns in the late 20th century made a mess of things. Some central cities, like Washington, have started to grow again, thank goodness. But even DC has a population 23 percent below the 1950 level. Others, like St. Louis, Pittsburgh and Buffalo, remain far below their once-thriving levels and have yet to rebound.

Congestion can be good

as a solution for everywhere.

I could say even more

My sense is that Jeff, like I have on occasion, pretty much poured at least a little bit about everything he knew on the subject into this one volume, making it rich with interesting detail. The bottom line is that Walkable City is very good indeed, a worthy addition to the canon of urban thinking. The subject matter is critical, and Jeff is a very good and entertaining writer who keeps his reader engaged. For those of us who think about cities for a living, this well-annotated treatise can help organize our thoughts and point us to helpful research and opinion. For those outside the field but in a position to do something, it summarizes some of the best thinking on what to do to tame the car culture and make cities more walkable. For those who are merely interested or who may be curious, it will

There is so much more in the book that I wish I had more time and space to relate. (I'd love to quibble about grammar and syntax, too, preferably over a second round of that beverage I mentioned earlier.)

national media. For more posts, see his blog's home page. Please also visit NRDC's Sustainable

Smart Growth In a Changing World (APA Planners Press 2007), Green Community (contributing author, APA Planners Press 2009); voted one of the "top urban thinkers" in ... See complete profile

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