



Kaid Benfield's Blog

Living smart and well in a "20-minute neighborhood"



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earthly ideas
by
Andy
Lubersbane

20 Minute Neighborhoods!

Let's face it - most communities in the developed world are designed for cars, not people.

Get outta my street!

But hauling around hundreds of pounds of metal, plastic, glass and rubber just to transport a few people is clearly inefficient - and unsustainable.

Even though I haul around slightly less and get better mileage?

Not to mention the thousands of acres of pavement required to make personal transportation possible.

Hence, designing communities where it's easy not to drive is one of the best ways of encouraging an efficient, sustainable society.

20 minute neighborhoods attempt to accomplish this goal by ensuring that all of the necessities of life are no more than a twenty minute walk away from home.

Workplaces, shops, entertainment and green spaces are all within walking distance.

Noooooo

And public transportation systems can connect any number of these neighborhoods together.

This kind of planning sets up communities where it's easy to live sustainably. Actually, the 20 minute lifestyle tends to make people healthier and happier, so many people prefer to live this way.

I'll admit, I prefer it most in the spring.

A planning concept that is gaining favor as a guide to creating smart, convenient places conducive to green living is the "20-minute neighborhood": a place where you can meet all of your daily needs within a 20-minute journey, preferably on foot. Portland's planners are building the city's new comprehensive plan - the first since 1980 - largely around the idea, and I think it's a great phrase to describe a goal that a lot of us can identify with.

Mark Larabee explained the concept in *The Oregonian*:

"Bureaucrats might say your happiness -- they would call it your 'quality of life' -- is in part related to the place you live and how effortless it may be to pedal to work, walk your kids to school, get involved with your neighbors or make your way to your local park or pub on a warm summer evening.

"And while you probably take all this for granted, city planners see the concept of the '20-minute neighborhood' -- one where you can walk to essential amenities and services in 20 minutes -- as a vital element of what makes a neighborhood healthy.

"The people who design your streets, transportation systems, parks and sewers hope to bring the concept of the 20-minute neighborhood to areas outside the city core. Imagine neighborhood magnets like Hawthorne, Mississippi and Alberta developed in outer Southeast Portland, where paved streets and sidewalks aren't a given."

Certainly, many Americans might envy such a lifestyle. [Researchers at Texas A&M report](#) that, as a nation, we waste an amazing \$87 billion each year on lost productivity and fuel while stuck in traffic. And several years ago, [my friend Barbara McCann and her research colleagues found](#) that suburban moms, on average, spend the equivalent of 17 full days behind the wheel each year, much of it ferrying their kids around from one place to another. Amazingly, that is more time than the average parent spends bathing, feeding, and clothing a child.



The phrase "20-minute living" has been credited to a development firm, Gerding Edlen, based in Portland, whose goal is to build projects that provide "all of the necessary and enjoyable things that make life great," including open spaces, grocery stores, workplaces, libraries, events, and



schools, within 20 minutes of the home. As [the firm's website notes](#), "twenty minutes on foot is ideal, but 20 minutes by transit, bike or even auto is a reasonable goal."

In the October issue of *Sunset*, [Allison Arieff features the concept](#), citing a number of Gerding Edlen projects, along with other examples of smart-growth neighborhoods in Davis, California, Denver, Los Altos, Tuscon, Victoria, BC, and even Missoula as places that enable a 20-minute lifestyle. You can follow a blog on the subject, [Livethe20.com](#), based in Portland's Hawthorne neighborhood. And the excellent webzine *WorldChanging* [has featured Ballard, Washington](#) (home of the "Undriver's License"), as a 20-minute city, with cycling routes, transit, parks, restaurants, food stores, shops, libraries and more within easy reach of residents.

Incidentally, I love, love, love Gerding Edlen's guiding "principles of place":

- Build community
- Create inviting spaces
- Minimize carbon footprint and energy dependence
- Connect people and buildings to nature
- Encourage transportation alternatives
- Craft the first 30 feet
- Inspire communities with art
- Make 20-minute living real
- Integrate schools and neighborhoods
- Preserve symbols that matter

Wow. Let's do it.

Kaid Benfield writes (almost) daily about community, development, and the environment. For more posts, see [his blog's home page](#).

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Calvin — Oct 28 2009 04:55 PM

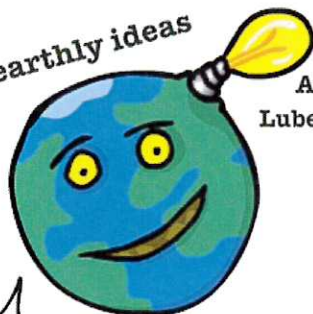
Mr. Benfield,

I'm an undergraduate student and am very interested in the topics you blog about! I was wondering if there was any chance I could email you with some questions about your career and how you got to where you are now, because I'm still trying to figure that all out. If you are willing to do so, please email me! Thank you for your time.

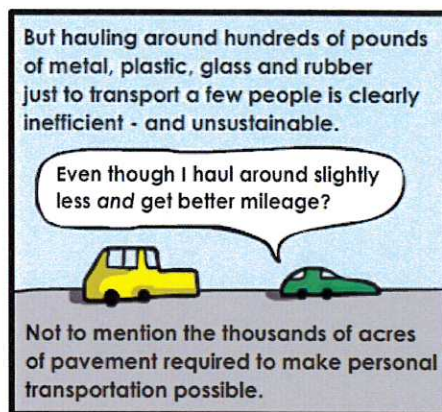
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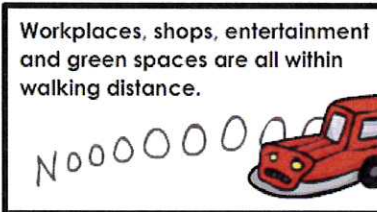
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