

# Sunday Homes

S.J. Mercury Nov. 16, 2014

The Bay Area's comprehensive guide to new homes

Bay Area News Group Advertising Se

## Walkability: Your health and where you call home

WALKABLE NEIGHBORHOODS DON'T JUST OFFER CONVENIENCE TO HOMEOWNERS. THEY'RE ALSO GREAT FOR THEIR HEALTH

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CTW FEATURES

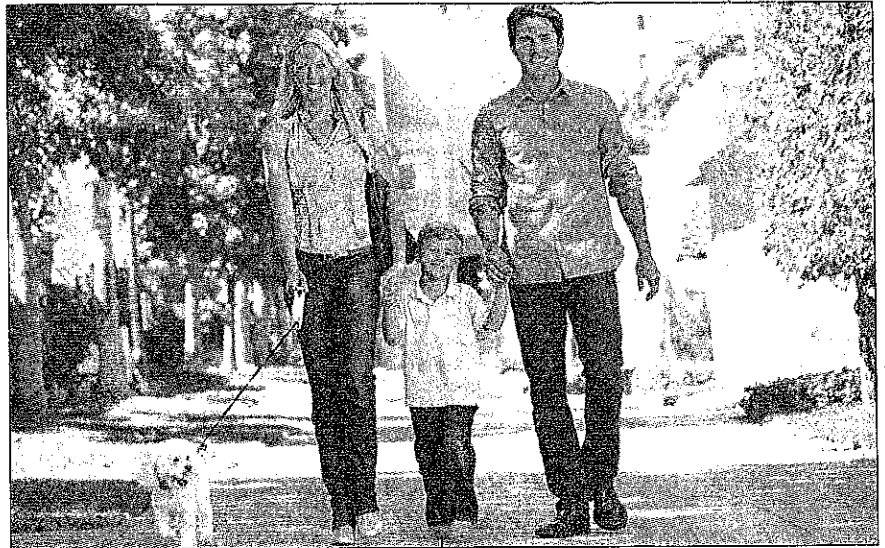
Want to take control of your health simply by living your everyday life? Try moving to a walkable community.

An increasing number of studies are showing that walkable communities boost physical activity on a daily basis. In fact, the American Diabetes Association even reported this year that people who live in neighborhoods that encourage walking experienced a substantially lower rate of obesity, being overweight and diabetes than those who lived in more neighborhoods that depended on the use of cars.

communities have been touted as a great investment. Studies repeatedly have shown that real estate values increase as neighborhoods became more walkable.

"As these communities become more popular, we see the danger of many people being priced out of them," says Tony Dang, deputy director of California Walks, a nonprofit that serves as a statewide voice for pedestrian safety and walkable communities.

Dang says organizations are working to ensure that residents of all socio-economic



brackets can enjoy walkable communities by focusing on rehabilitating existing neighborhoods, among other measures.

For the general public to enjoy walkable communities, individuals must widen their scope and understand of these, he notes.

The online resource Walkable Communities ([walkable.org](http://walkable.org)) offers a checklist of characteris-

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tics of these neighborhoods, which include:

- An intact town center with a pleasant main street

and a healthy set of stores and shops that are open at least eight hours per day

- A mix of residential densities, mixed income and mixed use, with higher densities near the town

center and in appropriate concentrations further out.

- Granny flats, design studios, and other affordable housing options.
- Public spaces to gather, play and socialize.

The best neighborhoods have welcoming public space within 1/8th mile (700 feet) of all homes.

- A universal design with a healthy respect for people of all abilities

and with appropriate ramps, medians, refuges crossings of driveways, sidewalks on all streets where needed, benches, shade, and other basic amenities to make walk-

ing feasible and enjoyable for everyone.

- Key streets are speed controlled with traffic moves on main streets and in neighborhoods at safe speeds.

The Journal of Transport & Health also noted that residents in compact communities experienced lower rates of obesity, diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease, and asthma compared to residents in more densely built neighborhoods.

"We're finally turning a corner as a nation in understanding how our collective housing affects public health," says Kevin Sloan, an architect in Dallas and an expert on metropolitan urbanism.

Moving beyond the new urbanism of the 1990s that inspired pedestrian-friendly communities with mixed uses and designated public spaces, walkable communities are successful in giving people a sense of place and reason to walk.

"The urbanism movement initially captured a sense of nostalgia and celebrated the feel of small-town America," Sloan notes. "What we are seeing now is that researchers are finding real health benefits in everyday lives."

Architects also are more aware of their role in helping to improve the nation's health system. Sloan says there is more discussion how to urban areas more walkable to promote health and social contact.

The most recent American Institute of Architects survey on housing trends notes that 63 percent of residential architects report growing interest in neighborhoods that are more walkable, offer more recreational activities integrated into the community and provide more opportunities for multigenerational living.

Residents of these neighborhoods are less dependent on their cars, thus producing less carbon. They're healthier because they walk more. They're more connected to their neighbors and to their overall community.

But as experts uncover more benefits of walkable communities, some industry leaders worry that these ideal neighborhoods may be priced too high for many people. To be sure, walkable