

Taking Steps . . .

towards a more



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A tale of two families

*The following is a hypothetical situation (although it **is** based on real Edmonton streets).*

Mr. and Mrs A. just moved to a relatively new neighbourhood. They have tried chatting over the back fence with their neighbours, Mr. and Mrs B, but it has been somewhat difficult, since the fence is two metres high, and, like many suburban lots, there is no gate between the two yards. Mrs B. would like to invite the As over for a get-together, but that isn't simple either, as outlined in the following sketch map.



If the As turn left to visit the Bs, they must pass 27 other homes and three *cul de sacs* to get to the B's front door. If they turn right, they have to pass 32 other homes and two *cul de sacs*.

Will the As and the Bs **ever** become

friends, or will the escalating price of **gasoline** keep them forever strangers?

It's the pedestrian's fault

The Project for Public Places regularly spotlights urban features that **do not** help create more walkable communities. This picture is from Queens Boulevard in Queens, New York.



Obviously, it is up to pedestrians to ensure their own safety at this particular crosswalk, because neither vehicle drivers nor the New York Department of Transportation appear to be planning significant changes.

Mom's taxi

A report by the Surface Transportation Policy Project, a non-profit group in Washington, D.C., tells us that the average [American] mother of school-age children spent 74 minutes a day driving in 2001, up from 67 minutes in 1995. Single mothers are even harder on their odometers. Even during the summer 'slow season' mothers and fathers, but mostly mothers, are always on the go, ferrying kids to practices, games and on other errands.



Meet Ed . . .
Click on him and he'll walk you to the particular article or website.

Please pass this newsletter on to a friend or colleague

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Another walkable Edmonton alternative

2004 celebration

downtown

HISTORY TOURS

Celebrate over 100 years of history with The Downtown Business Association and Out an' About Tours during the **2004 Celebration Downtown History Tours!** Take a walk back in time and uncover the compelling past of the Hotel Macdonald, The Union Bank Inn, Hudson's Bay Company, Jasper Avenue and much more!

Scheduled Tours are from
June 3 - September 12, 2004

Tours will start at City Hall (1 Sir Winston Churchill Square)

Monday	6:00PM
Thursday	6:00PM
Saturday	2:00PM
Sunday	10:00AM

Fee: \$10/Adult and \$6/Child (16 & under)

During Historic Edmonton Week (July 24 - August 1) an additional tour will be available Wednesday, July 28 at 1:00PM. Special adult rates (\$8/adult) will also be offered during Historic Edmonton Week ONLY!

For more information or to book a tour, please contact Cameron Malcolm of Out an' About Tours at **(780) 909-TOUR (8687)** or **cameron@outanabouttours.com**. Reservations requested.

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Marooned in their homes?

The biggest demographic trend facing Canada over the next few years is the ageing of our population. According to Statistics Canada projections, approximately 13% of Canadians were 65 years of age or older in 2004. This ratio is expected to change rapidly, and by 2025 the proportion will be about 22%.

A recent report by the U.S. Surface Transportation Policy Project  suggests that the U.S. (and by extension, probably Canada as well) is not well prepared to provide adequate transportation for an elderly population.

As people become older, many are unable to drive. Factors such as eyesight, health, mental abilities or cost force many older citizens to give up their cars. Many others may never have owned cars. However, because of inadequate public transportation, or because they live in sprawling low-density suburbs, many seniors may be stringently limited in their ability to take part in the normal life of their community. The U.S. study found that, compared to older drivers, older non-drivers made:

- ◆ 15% fewer trips for medical appointments;
- ◆ 59% fewer trips for shopping or to dine out; and

- ◆ 65% fewer trips for social, family and religious activities.

The study went on to point out that many seniors are willing and able to make use of alternative transportation such as walking and cycling, if suitable and accessible facilities exist:

- ◆ Over half of older Americans walk regularly, and nearly two-thirds walk a distance of nearly a kilometre at least once a month; and
- ◆ Four percent of American seniors cycle at least once per month.

The health benefits of regular exercise are well documented, and have the added side-benefit of helping cut down health care costs for this group.

Seniors living in more walkable communities and in those with better public transportation are much less likely to be stuck in their homes.

- ◆ 61% of older non-drivers living in spread-out communities stay at home on a given day, compared to 43% in denser areas;
- ◆ One in three non-driving seniors in more densely-

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developed communities walks each day, as compared to 1 in 14 in more spread-out areas.

Moving back to the city

Still on the topic of our ageing population, a recent article in *AARP Magazine* said that many 50-plus empty nesters in the United States are abandoning sprawling suburbs for pedestrian-friendly cities and towns. Many of these people are looking for planned communities with a town centre, where it is feasible to walk to shopping, restaurants or entertainment. The article can be found at [AARP](#).

Beaver Hills House Park

Beaver Hills House Park was a gift to the City of Edmonton from the Devonian Foundation in 1978. The original intent was to create a “naturalistic park” that would, at least in part, screen out the traffic and busyness of the adjacent streets. This was accomplished through the use of high berms and moderately dense mature plantings that created intimate areas with very short sightlines. A pond and small waterfall added to the natural ambience.



An article published by one of the park’s designers shortly after the park was opened indicated that there were already problems with unacceptable activities in the park, notably loitering, prostitution, and vandalism. Regular police patrols and 11:00 PM closing of the park were instituted to help reduce these problems.

By 1987, undesirable activities increased in the neighbourhood surrounding the park to the point where a group of local business people approached the City for assistance. In 1989, additional lighting was installed and

classical music was played to discourage “undesirable elements” from using the park. In 1990, various programs and performances were scheduled to attract more users to the park, in the hope of reducing the desirability of the park as a site for illicit activities. All of these endeavours were successful in attracting more users to the park during the early part of the day, particularly when special events were programmed. Unfortunately, most of the problem activities started in mid-afternoon and continued into the evening. Many people refused to go near the park other than during the noon hour, when office workers from nearby buildings flocked there to eat their lunch and enjoy the sun.

There was considerable polarization of opinion over what should be done to resolve the problems. While many opposed any change to this ‘oasis in the city’, the majority of those who were in the downtown area on a regular basis recognized that something had to be done to reclaim this public space for the populace as a whole. Eventually, a number of changes were made to eliminate the feelings of isolation and fear engendered by the park:



- ◆ Berms along Jasper Avenue were lowered, so people could easily see in and out of the park, and to create a space for performances, exhibits, and other programming;
- ◆ Some trees and shrubs were removed, relocated or pruned to improve sightlines and to deter access to secluded problem areas;
- ◆ Walkways were reoriented to improve sightlines towards the exits, making it easier and safer to move through

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the park; and

- ◆ Lighting was improved or changed to eliminate unsafe, poorly lit areas.

While the park is still not heavily used outside of normal office hours — largely a function of broader downtown use patterns — most of the inappropriate activities once associated with the park have been eliminated (i.e., relocated elsewhere) and safety is no longer a significant concern.

The broader topic of safety and public spaces has been the subject of considerable attention elsewhere. A general article addressing some of the more recent aspects of safety in public places can be found at [A](#).

International Walk to School week, October 4-8, 2004

Websites relating to walkability

There is a growing volume of good information on the Internet about walkability; our team members are finding new sites all the time. We have set up a mechanism to share these links, in the form of annotated bookmarks using a web tool called FURL.

Every time we add a new walkability or related website, people who wish to will receive an email notification with all the details (so you do need an active email address to participate.).

If you would like to try out this system, send an email to Rod Keith [A](#) and he will add your name. The service is free and easy, and you can always ask to have your name removed at any time. By the way, FURL is an incredibly useful free tool for anyone who does a lot of Internet research; you might like to check it out yourself. [A](#)

Walking, in many ways, is still viewed as an exotic and slightly odd habit. Try this experiment some time at a party or other gathering: Announce that you are walking home. I'll bet you, two-to-one odds, that someone will offer a ride, even if you live just three blocks away and it's a sunny 80 degrees outside. This is a generous gesture, of course, seen by most folks as similar to giving a glass of water to someone who says they're thirsty. Why walk if you could go in a car?

Jay Walljasper
UTNE Reader

If you would like to have your name added to our electronic mailing list, please click on the following icon:



If you do not have an email connection we can send you copies by mail. Please drop us a line at:

Walkable Edmonton, c/o Kate Gunn
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