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Walkable Urbanism

"The "one size fits all" suburban American dream is no longer enough for those who are looking to live in healthy, walkable communities. In the Option of Urbanism: Investing in a New American Dream, Brookings Institution fellow Chris Leinberger explains why there is pent-up demand for walkable urbanism, and how the real estate and financial communities need to adapt to meet this growing need." - [The Option of Urbanism](#)

My wife and I have lived here in Alexandria, Virginia, a suburb of D.C., since 1995. One of the things we like about the Washington area is the variety of one-stop places for book browsing, movie-going, eating and people watching. Among our favorite weekend spots are the revitalized Penn Quarter downtown and restaurant-rich Bethesda (both places score major points with us for having an independent movie theater next to a Barnes and Noble), as well as the smart-growth jewel that is [Clarendon](#) (VA).

One of the things associated with these areas is their walkability. Quite frankly I never gave that aspect much thought until the other day. According to a new study put out by the Brookings Institution, the Washington area is the most walkable of the 30 largest American metropolitan areas in the United States (per capita). In fact, D.C. is becoming the national model for “walkable urban growth.”

[Christopher B. Leinberger](#), a professor at the University of Michigan, author of [*The Option of Urbanism, Investing in a New American Dream*](#) and currently a visiting fellow at the Brookings Institution, conducted the [study](#). He counted the number of regional-serving walkable urban places. These are locations “anchored by regionally important employment, cultural and civic institutions, retail and urban entertainment as well as residential.”

The survey found New York City has the most walkable urban metro areas with 21. Washington (20), boosted by a strong economy, smart planning in places like Arlington (VA) and a healthy Metro system, ranks first per capita. Boston, San Francisco, Denver and Portland round out the Top Five.

So who is fueling (oops) this new lifestyle?

In his book, Leinberger asserts a new American dream is emerging. Singles who watched *Seinfeld*, *Sex in the City* and *Friends* and desire the hip, urban lifestyle portrayed in those shows, are driving (oops) this type of development. Trading in a carport for convenience, empty-nesters and retiring middle-age baby boomers who grew up enjoying the suburban bliss portrayed in *Leave It to Beaver*, are also choosing the new way of life. Leinberger notes that “people more than fifty-

five years old are three times more likely than people in their mid-twenties and early thirties to choose a townhouse in the city as the best living option.”

Leinberger concludes his book by stating the moral case for more walking and less driving. We're behind the green movement, but don't always take Metro to our favorite places.

The good news is we now own a hybrid. Like building more walkable places, that's a smart move.

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