

- In 1980, there were 2 walkable places in the Washington DC metro area. Today, there are 34. Of those, fewer than half are in DC, the majority are in the surrounding suburbs.
- A 2008 survey found that 77% of “Generation Y’ers” want to live where they are “close to each other, to services, to places to meet, and to work, and they would rather walk than drive.”
- NJ’s extensive rail transit network means it is well poised to take advantage of the rise of walkable urbanism, as over 80% of walkable urban places are centered around rail transit.

New Jersey is an anomaly in that it is both highly urbanized—it is the most densely developed state in the nation—but also lacks a major city of its own. Instead, the state serves largely as a suburb for the major cities, New York and Philadelphia, that bookend it. Indeed, New Jersey’s largest city, Jersey City, could be counted as a suburb under the Census’ classification system. However, the distinction between cities and suburbs as defining characteristics of the built environment is giving way to a new dichotomy, walkable urbanism versus drivable sub-urbanism. New Jersey is well poised to take advantage of of this change.

Walkable urbanism places mix homes, shops, restaurants and services within walking distance along with work and other cultural and entertainment available by rail transit. The pent up demand for it today is the result of a number of factors, but is broadly a story of demographics. Generation Y, and their parents in the baby boom generation make up over half of the country’s population and both are in transition., Baby Boomers are now empty nesters and soon to become retirees, which means they are more likely to downsize their housing as they age. For Generation Y’ers, those who are just graduating from school and starting out in life, studies show they greatly prefer the characteristics of urban living—proximity to friends and events, nightlife, not needing a car—to the drivable suburbs where many of them grew up. Gen Yers are delaying marriage and having children later, leading to a boom of childless households. These demographic trends favor the rapid rise of single and couples as the predominant household in the future which is having a profound effect on the built environment for decades to come.

To see the rise of walkable urbanism in action, one must look no further than the Washington DC metro region. 30 years ago, just as the region’s metro system was taking shape, there were two regional-serving walkable places in the DC metro area, Georgetown and Old Town Alexandria. Today, there are 34, with another 10 emerging. These are places like Ballston, Silver Spring and Crystal City, which have transformed from auto-oriented suburbs to walkable communities. Nearly all of these places are centered around rail transit, and a majority of them are outside of center city. Perhaps the most remarkable transition has been in the Ballston-Rosslyn Corridor in Arlington, an inner suburban county of 208,000 mainly middle income households.. There, thanks to a conscious policy of concentrated growth around Metrorail stations, what was once a fading, auto-oriented suburb has boomed to a point where the walkable urban part of the county, representing 10% of the county’s land, now accounts for over 50 percent of its tax revenue. Moreover, the influx of singles and childless couples, who pay school taxes but have no children, have helped make Arlington’s public schools among the best in the county. And while residential densities have doubled along the corridor since 1985, absolute traffic counts have actually gone down, as more people are able to get around without a car. The single family housing

within walking distance of the great walkable urban places in Arlington have seen their quality of life vastly improve, as shown by the 80-100% price per square foot premiums in house values over single family housing in Arlington that is driving distance to these urban amenities...they have the best of two worlds; suburban splendor and walking convenience to great urbanism.

Like Arlington, New Jersey has the right mix of assets to benefit from the rising demand for walkable urbanism: an extensive transit system, proximity to a major city, a knowledge based economy. But unlike Arlington, New Jersey has yet to put in place a conscious strategy to take advantage of these trends. Most importantly, this means providing a supportive development climate around rail transit stations. Today, too many walkable urban projects are derailed by lack of zoning, lengthy entitlements and NIMBY opposition. The major NIMBY opposition are the very households who will benefit the most from increased walkable urbanism and at no cost to themselves. There are people all across New Jersey who want to live in walkable urban places, and plenty of developers who want to provide it for them. Now it's up to the planners, neighbors, regulators, policy makers and others to let them do it.