



## Walkable communities expert says Greensboro needs to think smaller for the future

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**GREENSBORO** — Chris Leinberger says it's time for cities like Greensboro to give the people what they want — communities that allow people to walk between their homes, their jobs and services.

So the land-use expert and professor is here to tell the public and local real estate experts how to put that special combination together.

To get that right combination for urban growth, developers will need to satisfy younger millennials and older baby boomers, both of whom say in a recent survey that they put a high priority on sidewalks and places to take walks in their neighborhoods.

The city of Greensboro and the Greensboro Regional Realtors Association are paying Leinberger, a Washington consultant, to hold two talks, one before the public Wednesday at 5:30 p.m. and another invitation-only event Thursday at a Realtors association meeting.

Wednesday's event was held at the Greensboro History Museum at 130 Summit Ave.

Called "Placemaking and Management: Addressing Market Demand for Walkable Urbanism in the Knowledge Economy," Leinberger's talk will be a call to action for a type of development that city and community officials have been advocating recently.

He'll be talking just a few weeks after the city and Realtors jointly released the results of a survey that showed many people in Greensboro want to walk more and drive less.

Leinberger said areas with denser development that have more homes, services and workplaces connected by sidewalks, bikepaths and short roads can help a community save on infrastructure spending and create larger tax bases in smaller areas.

"Walking distance is about a half mile," he said. "And it's been that way for about 6,000 years. That ain't gonna change: 306 acres is the average size of the 50 walkable areas in metropolitan Washington — three times the size of a regional mall including surface parking lot."

But public policy makers and developers have to make a conscious effort to build more urban apartments and combine restaurants, retail and offices in places that connect easily. The days of suburban sprawl, with far-flung housing developments and office parks, consume too much land, create pollution from cars and trucks driving long distances and cost billions in road building and maintenance, he said.



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But like many cities, Greensboro has more people who want to live downtown and in nearby neighborhoods than available houses and apartments. When many downtowns were built in the early 20th century, people didn't live downtown, he said. But that is changing. It's just that developers haven't been able to keep up with building apartments.

And cities have written zoning policies and built roads that actively discourage concentrated development, he said.

That's changing. The biggest cities in the United States have the jump on much smaller cities like Greensboro, which fit in the "third tier" of cities with populations from 100,000 to 1 million people, he said.

"If 50 percent of you, as the research shows, want walkable urban places, at best I'm going to guess you have 5 percent of your supply in that condition."

There's pent-up demand. And it doesn't have to all go downtown. Walkable communities can be built on the edges of cities. They just need homes that are concentrated on smaller lots with plenty of options for neighborhood transportation, sidewalks and services.

Welden Village in Kernersville is an example of a community that will contain hundreds of houses on smaller lots, built like such older neighborhoods as Fisher Park in Greensboro.

Those dense communities that discourage sprawling subdivisions and shopping centers could be the new foundation of the economy.

But it takes a special kind of developer to do the job.

And Leinberger says he'll be telling the Realtors on Thursday that they'll have to make a conscious effort to encourage alternative building methods.

"If you're successful at building driveable (communities) and you apply those same rules to walkable urban (communities) you'll fail," he said. "It's as different as night and day. You need to change your business model."