



COMMUNITY REPORT CARD AND FEEDBACK

Asheville, North Carolina
October 22, 2013

Introduction

Thank you for submitting an application to the Walk Friendly Communities program on behalf of Asheville, North Carolina! A Walk Friendly Community is a city or town that has shown a commitment to improving walkability and pedestrian safety through comprehensive programs, plans and policies.

Each application was evaluated by at least three reviewers to provide a fair assessment of your community and provide technical feedback on how to improve the walkability of your community.

After thorough consideration of your application, we are designating Asheville as a Silver Walk Friendly Community. In reviewing your application there were several areas we were particularly impressed with, including:

- The Asheville Police Department's monthly pedestrian decoy operations and the six-month crash reduction areas that are hopefully benefitting from the targeted analysis, planning, and evaluation.
- Asheville's sidewalk design standards and ordinances that promote dense, mixed-use development are high quality and demonstrate a commitment on the part of the city to providing safe pedestrian accommodations.
- The city's avenues for gathering input and collaborating with residents, specifically the Bicycle and Pedestrian Task Force and Asheville's neighborhood coordinator.

Asheville has exhibited a desire to become a community that supports active transportation. The application to the Walk Friendly Communities program is an endorsement of that desire and it is our hope that the feedback and information we provide can help your community improve in this regard. We also hope that, by identifying Asheville as a Silver Walk Friendly Community and highlighting some of these impressive programs on our Web site, other communities can follow your example and build their own successful programs.

We have noted several areas in which your community can improve its policies, programs, and standards. This report card provides detailed feedback on how your community can take its programs and initiatives to the next level; take the time to review the feedback and contact us with any questions.

Primary Recommendations

This section identifies and provides suggestions for the most vital areas of improving Asheville's overall walkability. Additional details are provided in the following sections. **We recommend that you read these areas thoroughly and develop clear goals, benchmarks, funding sources, and an implementation schedule for reaching these goals.**

- Sidewalks are the backbone of a Walk Friendly Community. Asheville needs to increase the speed at which it is **constructing new sidewalks**. The city also needs to increase the number of bridges that have pedestrian provisions on at least one side.
- Asheville could expand **staff training opportunities** by offering free webinars for city officials, planning and engineering staff, and school staff.
- The traffic signals could use some updating, in particular the number of intersections with **Accessible Pedestrian Signals**.
- Considering the high fatality rate, high speeds may be an issue in the city, creating a hazardous environment for pedestrians. **Traffic calming strategies** need to be implemented more aggressively.
- An **Open Streets event** during which a selected route will be closed to vehicle traffic and opened up for jogging, walking, and cycling would be a great way to promote active living and encourage more walking.

Feedback by Section

This remainder of this report card will provide detailed feedback and suggestions for each section in the community assessment tool. Feedback will include research to support the importance of this question as well as tools, guides, and case studies of successful implementations in other communities.

Each section received an overall score as defined below:

- **Walk Friendly:** The responses in this section indicate that your community is particularly strong in this area with great efforts being made towards improving walkability. Even so, there are always areas within this section where improvements and growth could be made.
- **On the Right Track:** This score indicates that your community does not exhibit the characteristics to be truly walk friendly in this section, but that there are still good existing programs or new programs that could be expanded. Please review our suggestions on how you could improve the walkability in this area.
- **Needs Attention:** This score indicates that your community does not yet demonstrate strong programs, policies, and results, characteristic of a Walk Friendly Community based on the responses in this section. Please review our suggestions carefully on how you can create positive change in your community with both short- and long-term objectives.

Community Profile

On the Right Track

- It is great to see dedicated staff time and a task force dedicated to pedestrian and bicycle issues. Should funding permit, establishing a full-time pedestrian coordinator would be a very beneficial step for a mid-size city.
- Signing the [International Charter for Walking](#) would be a great way for city leadership to demonstrate its commitment to enhancing walkability and pedestrian safety. In Gold-level San Francisco, the Mayor signed a [Pedestrian Safety Executive Directive](#) to express support for pedestrian safety—that directive laid out short- and long-term goals for pedestrian safety, and launched a comprehensive effort to improve conditions for pedestrians throughout the city.

Status of Walking

Needs Attention

- Increasing the amount walking and reducing driving often takes substantial political will and necessitates a public that is receptive to the idea. Studies have been done about the economic benefits of walking and biking, not to mention the transportation, air quality, and health benefits. By using arguments that resonate with the community, people can become more receptive to the idea of biking and walking. Many online [resources](#) can be helpful in making the case for walking in the "right" way.
- The walking mode share in Asheville has gradually increased, hovering around the national average, but the city could improve on its decreasing transit mode share. Asheville should continue to fund and support walking initiatives to increase volumes.
- While crashes seem to have remained constant, the fatality rate is troubling and seems to be rising. For example, in 2012, almost half of all pedestrian involved crashes resulted in a fatality. This suggests that crashes are occurring at high speeds. The city needs to support and implement countermeasures to decrease vehicle speeds and discourage dangerous driving practices. Include engineering treatments supporting bicycling and walking at locations with high pedestrian/vehicle conflicts.

Planning

On the Right Track

- It is good to see a dedicated pedestrian plan with detailed information about facilities and funding, but it looks like the plan is due for an update, especially since the performance measures only span 2005-2007. The updated plan should draw on public input, baseline data, and other aspects and should include SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time-bound) goals. A target mode share would provide a specific goal for the Asheville to attain, while a crash reduction goal can provide extra impetus in implementing crash countermeasures. This [resource](#) can provide some examples, while this [one](#) can help guide the plan development process.
- One of the main reasons the Pedestrian Master Plan of Seattle, the only Platinum-level Walk Friendly Community, is such a successful document is the clear establishment of goals and measurable [performance indicators](#). With the objective of becoming the country's most walkable city, Seattle established baseline measurements, performance

targets, and data collection processes to improve walkability. These indicators fit into the four main goals of the plan: Safety, Equity, Vibrancy, and Health and contain such examples as reaching ten new schools a year with outreach and increasing pedestrian volumes in selected count locations.

- Fort Collins, a Bronze-level Walk Friendly Community, also has a comprehensive [Pedestrian Plan](#) that sets reachable targets.
- Asheville has good Complete Streets project examples. The next step is for Asheville to adopt the draft Complete Streets policy to show that the city is truly prioritizing pedestrian considerations in every project.
- There are some excellent models for Asheville to follow for Complete Streets:
 - Charlotte, designated as a Bronze-level Walk Friendly Community, adopted its [Urban Street Design Guidelines](#) in 2006, which seek to implement elements of Complete Streets throughout the city. These guidelines provide mobility for motorists, while also ensuring the comfort and safety for pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit users. In addition to supporting transportation objectives, these guidelines support better linkages between land uses, urban design, and transportation to create a unified system encouraging all modes of transportation in Charlotte.
 - Gold-level San Francisco's [Better Streets Plan](#) is a set of implementation strategies and goals to provide and maintain a better streetscape and pedestrian environment. The plan "seeks to balance the needs of all street users, with a particular focus on the pedestrian environment and how streets can be used as public space." The Better Streets Plan carries out the [Better Streets Policy](#) to plan streets for pedestrian-oriented and multi-modal designs.
- It is good to see that Asheville has a neighborhood coordinator to help with communication between the city and residents. Asheville should continue to ensure that there is strong outreach in the planning process to minority and low-income groups. We would be interested in hearing more detail about how the city uses surveys and social media for outreach.
- Arlington County, Virginia, a Gold-level Walk Friendly Community, in 2007 began holding "Walking Town Meetings" in an effort to solicit more specific public input. Through local civic associations, community members took Arlington County Board members and staff on a walking tour of the neighborhood to highlight issues of concern, ideas for improvements, and to showcase the community. Following the meeting, planning staff documented the issues that were presented as information and possible alternatives for consideration by the County Board. Asheville could institute a program like this that incorporates more active public input.
- It is clear that the sidewalk policies support the creation of a community with pedestrian facilities on both sides of nearly every street, though more information on sidewalk funding would be helpful. Supporting the development of pedestrian infrastructure through dedicated funding is paramount to really supporting pedestrians in Asheville.
- Asheville could examine systems for sharing this cost in order to ensure that sidewalks form a connected network. In Cary, North Carolina, a Bronze-level Walk Friendly Community, residents can sign a petition to be placed on the city's sidewalk priority list, which helps the transportation agency make difficult decisions about where to install and improve sidewalks. See the policy [here](#).
- A connectivity policy is extremely important in terms of encouraging pedestrian access and pedestrian travel. In addition, street connectivity, grid networks, and short block

lengths are helpful in creating direct routes to destinations. The block length limit in the Urban Village Districts is an important step, but this zoning district only covers a small proportion of the city. Asheville needs to contemplate this type of limit in other districts, especially areas that will be considered for redevelopment. Lincoln, Nebraska, an honorable mention Walk Friendly Community, has a [connectivity policy](#) for the entire city, which mandates that the block lengths not exceed 1,320 feet in length, and if they exceed 1,000 feet, pedestrian easements are required.

- Since it is routine policy to build trails, Asheville could amend zoning regulations to ensure that trails are included in those areas where crucial trail connections are required. Offering incentives to developers would certify that trails continue to be an important facility for pedestrians in the community.
- Flagstaff, Arizona, a Bronze-level Walk Friendly Community, is home to a popular and extensive trail system called the [Flagstaff Urban Trail System](#). It connects many areas of the city and currently has over 50 miles of trails. Another 80 miles are planned! Asheville could consider some of the tools on Flagstaff's Web site to enhance people's understanding of the trails system in the city.
- A strong public transit system is linked with more walking, as transit riders are also pedestrians at some point during the trip. Real-time arrival information and reduced headways during peak hours could encourage more people to use the bus system.
- Efforts could be made to improve accessibility around bus stops in Asheville. [Accessibility audits](#) could be useful in accommodating disabled populations at stops. Since individuals with disabilities rely on transit service, it is critical to provide accessible facilities in and around transit stops. The [Pedestrian Safety Guide for Transit Agencies](#) can help identify areas where accessibility can be improved.
- While the parking initiatives in Asheville are great, it might be beneficial to consider encouraging employers to offer parking cash-out incentives. Seattle has a great parking cash-out program, in which employees with employer-provided parking receive the option of giving up their parking space in exchange for a monthly cash amount. As a result, the employer pays for fewer parking spaces, which can be then be used as public parking. They also have a variable price parking program by which employees are charged by the day, instead of by the month, and are informed about the relative cost and quality of alternatives. More information can be found [here](#).
- There are some good policies here to promote high-density, mixed-use development. We especially liked that certain districts regulate building mass/placement and that Asheville's density bonuses focus on affordability and sustainability.
- If there is interest in creating a unified document for streetscape design, Gold-level Chicago provides a good example with their [Streetscape Design Guidelines](#), which ensure that pedestrian-scale lighting, street trees, and street furniture are a part of Chicago's urban design amenities.

Education & Encouragement

On the Right Track

- The Safe Routes to School programs are great ways to encourage walking and will contribute to a culture of walking in Asheville. Efforts should be taken to increase the number of school with ongoing programs and increase program/event frequency.

Information about school programs can be found at the [National Center for Safe Routes to School](#).

- Austin, Texas, a Bronze-level Walk Friendly Community, has a [Safe Routes to School program](#) that benefits from, and works in tandem with, the Public Works department's Child Safety Program. These programs not only provide pedestrian safety education to children, but also to adults. The Child Safety Program employs four safety trainers and targets drivers, parents, teachers, and students in a comprehensive pedestrian safety education program. Austin also encourages people to use alternative modes of transportation through a Walk, Bike, & Roll program. Asheville could consider establishing these types of programs to encourage children to walk (and bike) to school.
- The Safe Routes to School program in Fort Collins is a model program for other communities. They have 20+ schools participating in full Safe Routes activities and 20 more schools conducting special walk events. The city's SRTS program has conducted comprehensive walkability audits at several schools in the local public school district, and it has developed Safe Routes maps for all schools in the district, available [online](#).
- Ongoing education for professional staff underscores the priority a community places upon the importance of walking, walkability, and pedestrian safety. Webinars can be used to bridge the gap between in-person trainings and professional development activities for planning and engineering staff. The PBIC offers many free [webinars](#). Asheville should take some extra steps to educate law enforcement, health professionals, and others with regard to pedestrian accommodation and safety. This [case study](#) also highlights how the police can benefit from extra training.
- If possible, Asheville could consider creating some pedestrian safety public service announcements (PSA). The city could partner with local institutions and schools to encourage children to participate, possibly providing a prize to the best PSA.
- The Strive Not to Drive campaign is a great place to start, but Asheville should provide more education and encouragement programs. Gold-level Arlington County, Virginia, has education and encouragement programs that are incredibly important in fostering community support for walkability. The community runs a number of innovative programs that engage community members:
 - [Street Smart](#) is a public awareness and enforcement campaign in its tenth year that uses print, outdoor, online, and broadcast media channels throughout the metropolitan Washington area to reach a diverse audience.
 - The [Car Free Diet](#) program is an innovative development aimed at raising awareness of the health, environmental, financial, and commuting benefits of going car-free or car-lite through web, video, blogs, social media, transit advertising, a Car-Free Diet Calculator, and media outreach.
 - The [Neighborhood 25](#) program is a campaign that began in 2010 as a response to the difference in fatal crashes that occur at 20 mi/h and 30 mi/h with "Keep Kids Alive – Drive 25" signs placed throughout the neighborhoods in conjunction with police placement of speed feedback signs.
- It is great that wayfinding signage is provided at a pedestrian scale. We also thought Asheville has some great walking maps!
- In Flagstaff, the city hosted a series of 16 themed walks along city trails. The walks were organized by a variety of local community partners with themes including geology, history, flora, or astronomy. By organizing walking tours, people can experience the history and natural beauty of a place, while getting some exercise. This could be an easy step for Asheville in terms of encouraging people to walk.

- Consider a Car Free Event, or Ciclovía, during which a selected route will be closed to vehicle traffic and opened up for jogging, walking, and cycling. The event focuses community attention on alternative modes, and can provide numerous other benefits. More information available at this [link](#) or the [Open Streets Project Web site](#). The case studies from [Chicago](#) and [Clearwater, Florida](#), can also provide more guidance.

Engineering

On the Right Track

- Sidewalks are the backbone of a good pedestrian system and encourage walking. It is good to see that you have great sidewalk policies and design standards in place, but Asheville's sidewalk coverage is quite low compared to other Walk Friendly Communities. Asheville should work to amend this situation by filling crucial gaps and installing sidewalks as part of any road repaving or new road construction.
- Good funding, inventory, and project prioritization for sidewalk and curb ramp construction/repairs.
- Bridges provide crucial access points for pedestrians over barriers that can be dangerous to cross on foot (freeways, railroad tracks). It would be encouraging to see more than 66% of bridges with facilities on more than at least one side—best practices for these types of facilities are further described [here](#).
- Pedestrian [signalization](#) is an important component of a walkable environment. It is good to see LPIs and right turn on red restrictions used in areas with a high pedestrian volume. Very impressive that 90% of intersections have countdown signals. The next step is to make sure more intersections get accessible pedestrian signals with audible walk indications.
- Asheville should consider conducting a crosswalk inventory and establishing a policy for crosswalk maintenance. The city should also consider using pedestrian hybrid beacons and rectangular rapid flash beacons at locations with particularly high pedestrian volumes.
- An advance stop/yield line can be placed 20 to 50 ft. ahead of the crosswalk at uncontrolled locations. This treatment can greatly reduce the likelihood of a multiple-threat crash, as this encourages drivers to stop back far enough so a pedestrian can see if a second motor vehicle is not stopping and take evasive action. Asheville could consider this treatment. Additionally, Hoboken, New Jersey, a Gold-level Walk Friendly Community, has improved pedestrian intersection design at low-cost by "[daylighting](#)" intersections. With the use of vertical delineators, they are able to incorporate bulb-outs at key intersections to improve sight distance for all road users. This flexible solution is significant, as it allows for pedestrian improvements in a climate of limited funding availability.
- Good draft policy about medians, hopefully it will be adopted.

Enforcement

Walk Friendly

- Excellent staff commitment! Having a dedicated traffic safety officer shows a commitment to enforcing laws to protect pedestrians. It is also great to see that bicycle police are active in Asheville.
- Asheville has good targeted enforcement at high pedestrian areas and locations with the highest number of crashes involving a pedestrian. Hopefully city departments can figure out an efficient method for tracking citations related to pedestrian right-of-way violations—this is important data that will help put your sting operations in context.
- We were particularly impressed with Asheville’s district-specific crash analyses and enforcement plans that result in an evaluation at the end of a six-month period.
- It seems like the police department and other city departments collaborate regularly to review problem areas and identify possible solutions. Consider formalizing this dialogue into a focus group that includes representatives from at least the engineering, planning, transit, and enforcement departments.
- Overall, pedestrian enforcement is a challenging issue and does not often get the attention it deserves. Asheville appears to be making great steps towards making the city safer for pedestrians. It’s a big issue that can take a lot of time and resources, keep up the good work!

Evaluation

Walk Friendly

- It is great to see that Asheville has an annual manual count program. Permanent count stations should also be considered to provide annual data. Gold-level Arlington County provides a good model where they perform seasonal manual counts in addition to 18 [automated counters](#). They are also developing an integrated database to store, analyze and share results of the two sets of data.
- The [Pedestrian Intersection Safety Index](#) (ISI) is a free tool that you can use to measure your community’s walkability and pedestrian safety. You can overlay the results with an inventory of facilities to target locations for improvement.
- It is great to see that planners and city officials do conduct evaluation on road projects. This is particularly helpful in terms of understanding the effectiveness of treatments.

More Information

If you have questions or comments regarding this feedback, your community’s initiatives and programs, or the application process in general, we’d like to hear from you. Please contact:

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You can also send general inquiries to info@walkfriendly.org