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APPLE WALKS TALL

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New Yorkers, strut your stuff - the metro area leads the nation in having the most "walkable urban places."

That's one finding of a new report released yesterday by the Brookings Institution, which ranked 30 of the biggest US metropolitan areas according to the number of "places" where most daily needs can be met within walking distance from your home or by transit.

But when using a per-capita measure, New York ranks only 10th. The Washington, DC, metro area snared the top spot with 20 walker-friendly places - almost four for every 1 million people.

The much-larger-populated New York metro area - which includes northern New Jersey, Long Island and Stamford, Conn. - has 21 walkable places, but got bumped to 10th place because that translates into 1.1 places per million people.

"The New York metro area has the absolute largest number of walkable urban places with 21 - but not on a per-capita basis - and most of the 21 are clustered in Manhattan and Brooklyn," said report author Christopher Leinberger.

It's mainly Gen-Xers who are leading a new trend toward walkable urbanism after the last two generations of Americans focused on suburbs and driving, said Leinberger, a real-estate developer and visiting fellow at Brookings.

"How the American dream plays out on the ground is changing," he said. "Rather than building only 'Leave it to Beaver' neighborhoods, we are building walkable, Seinfeld-like places."

The study looked only at "regional-serving" walkable urban places - not a bedroom community, but an area that has jobs, cultural, medical or cultural institutions that attract people who don't live there.

By that measure, among the walkable places in the Big Apple are Morningside Heights, SoHo, Park Slope and Museum Mile on the Upper East Side.

Vanessa Gonzalez, 19, a Barnard College student who lives in Morningside Heights, agreed "it's so easy to get where you want to go."

"Everything is pretty much right at your doorstep," she said, speaking at Broadway and 115th Street where there was a pizzeria, retail businesses and a grocery store nearby.

"It's much better than living in the suburbs where you have to drive everywhere."

Leinberger says there's a caveat to his report - it looked at places without defining their exact size or street-by-street geography. That means the whole of Midtown Manhattan is given the same weight as a lifestyle center outside Washington.

"I can't imagine that DC would be better than Manhattan," said Sheila Foley, who works at Temple Israel on Lexington Avenue at 75th Street.

She said her boss moved here from Los Angeles in August and "was amazed that he lost six pounds in six weeks" by walking.

Nedra Biegel, heading from a diner at Madison Avenue and 80th Street, said she once lived in the suburbs. "You can't walk there. It's boring. You drive everywhere. You watch the grass grow."