

The Arizona Republic

Getting footloose: Phoenix is catching up with trend

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Walk Score, a new Web site popular with urbanists and environmentalists (www.walkscore.com), rates places for their walkability - basically the ease of meeting daily needs on foot.

The popularity of Walk Score is another indicator that how the American Dream lays out on the ground has been fundamentally changing over the past 10 to 15 years.

The Ozzie-and-Harriett, drivable-suburban vision of the American dream is being supplemented by the *Seinfeld* vision of "walkable urbanism." Led by late-marrying young adults and empty-nester baby boomers, many households are looking for the excitement and options a walkable-urban place can bring. With almost nine of 10 new households over the next 20 years being singles or couples, this trend promises to continue.

A recent Brookings Institution survey of the largest 30 metro areas in the country identifies the 157 walkable-urban places that play a regionally significant role. It also ranks the top 30 metros in per-capita number of walkable-urban places. At the moment, the Phoenix metro area is near the bottom of the list.

Certainly the many already-revived downtowns - like downtown Denver, Washington, D.C., Portland, Seattle and San Diego - are the most visible signs of the walkable-urban trend.

A major benefit of walkable-urban development is that it keeps and attracts young adults to the metro area, many of whom willingly trade car commutes and high gas prices for lively walkable places to live and work. Walkable urban places attract the well-educated, the so-called creative class; even the nascent revival in downtown Detroit has seen 83 percent of new residents arriving with a college education. Walkable urbanism increases the economic-development potential of the metro area.

Downtown Phoenix is the most obvious, though not the only, location of this trend in the Valley. It is following national patterns of downtown redevelopment, starting with entertainment and rental housing. The more than \$4 billion of committed new development in downtown between 2006 and 2010 is wisely being spent on 21st-century job-generating higher education and development, and perhaps most importantly, the light-rail system. The Brookings survey showed that rail transit is essential infrastructure for walkable urbanism and will spark more walkable places in the metro area.

The next phase of downtown Phoenix development is satisfying the pent-up demand for walkable-urban for-sale housing. Since ownership housing makes up two-thirds of all real estate, it will be the major driver of downtown's growth in the future.

The Phoenix metro will no doubt see its ranking in the Brookings survey rise while downtown will see its Walk Score numbers soar over the next few years. *Seinfeld* is coming to Phoenix.

The writer will deliver the keynote address at the 14th annual DREAMR Awards, sponsored by the Downtown Phoenix Partnership, at noon today at the Hyatt Regency Phoenix. He is an urban- land-use strategist, visiting fellow at the Brookings Institution and a professor the University of Michigan.