



# **The Historic City of Port Wentworth Downtown Redevelopment Project Proposal**



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## Introducing the City of Port Wentworth

Port Wentworth was named for Lady Wentworth of England. It is steeped in tradition, environment and resources. Founded in 1733 and incorporated in 1957, its history arises out of the native Indian tribes and first settlers of the Trust Colony of Georgia. From this background came plantations that extended out from the Savannah River and provided the foundation for the future development of the industrial complex that is now the city and its environs.

Local industry includes lumber (pulp and paper), railroad, ship building, sugar refinery, banking and brick kilns that produce what is known today as “Savannah Gray Brick”. It was in this area that Eli Whitney revolutionized the South by inventing the cotton gin in 1793.

The city, located in Eastern Georgia at 32° 9’ 52” North, 81° 10’ 48” West, is 11.22 square miles with a total population of 3,276 (according to a 2000 census). This Chatham County town is conveniently located near neighboring counties (Effingham and Bryan). Port Wentworth is minutes from the Savannah / Hilton Head International Airport, Tybee Island beach, Historic Savannah District and the Georgia Ports Authority.

Port Wentworth is a quaint, southern town that offers a view of Georgia’s past and present waiting to be discovered through this city’s rich history and its bright future.

### 1. Project Introduction

The Historic City of Port Wentworth Project is a downtown re-development initiative within the Historic District of the City of Port Wentworth, Georgia.

Most of the vacant parcels of land in the City of Port Wentworth Historic District would be acquired for the purpose of constructing period infill development, designed to blend seamlessly with the town’s existing architecture set between the late 1800’s and the early 1900’s.

The scope of the project includes mixed use development such as retail/commercial, office/professional, and in-town residential, master planned to offer modern amenities and technology within the context of a historic sense of place.

The Historic City of Port Wentworth Project is an in-town concept of urban living, dining, and cultural experience that includes shopping, attractions and ambience designed to provide something special for local residents and visitors from near or far.



Figure. Potential Look of Downtown Center

## Purpose

The purpose of this proposal is to lay out a road map for the future of City of Port Wentworth’s historic downtown. Over the next 15 years, the City of Port Wentworth is forecasted to double in population according to DCA projections. This level of growth presents both challenges and opportunities for all aspects of the community. This document develops a downtown redevelopment proposal for addressing the challenges and opportunities and ensuring it improves the quality of life for the City of Port Wentworth visitors, current residents, and potential residents. This strategy includes a conceptual plan and design, estimated construction costs, and a feasibility of market demand for mixed use development.

Since the current downtown is burdened with the constant truck traffic that goes right through the City of Port Wentworth’s downtown area, plaguing the current downtown site with noise pollution, air pollution, unsafe pedestrian ways, and the absence of local businesses/restaurants, the city should consider moving the historic downtown center to this new proposed 10-acre site that is located next to the fire and police department.

The proposed 10-acre site is a potential solution to the problems faced by the current site. The new site will help to alleviate these problems by providing a newly refreshed downtown area that will provide mixed-use development that will have affordable housing, offices, and business venues for any local businesses interested in taking up shop in the newly proposed site.

## Scope

The scope of this proposal is to define the city’s vision to move the current center and location of downtown to the proposed 10-acre location site.

## Study Area



Figure 1. Proposed 10-acre Site Plan for Downtown Relocation

## **2. The Plan for Land Use**

The Land Use plan will include the future development map, a plan that describes the future character and design of the community.

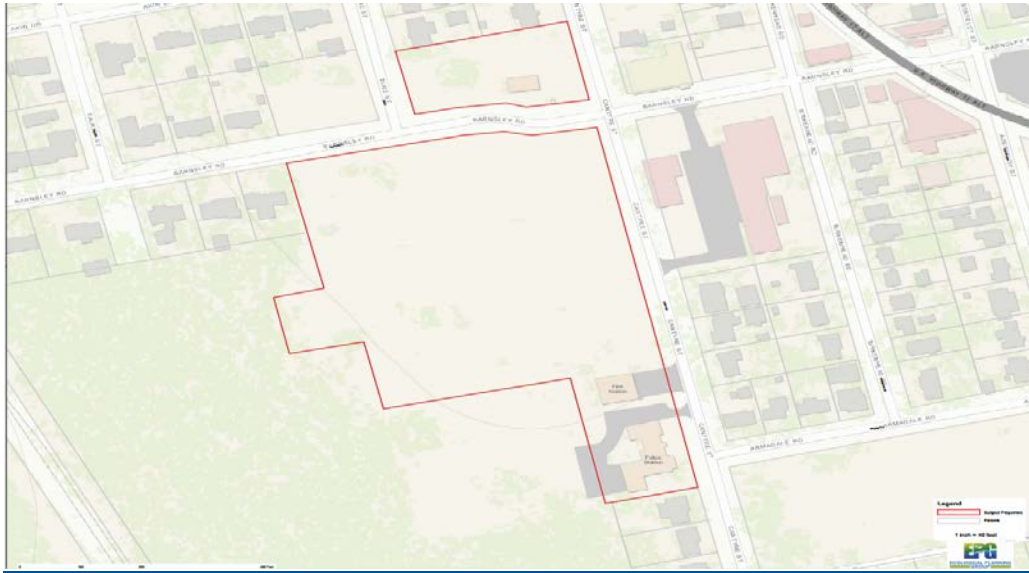


Figure 2. Proposed 10-acre Site Plan for Downtown Relocation

### **Land Use Issues- (Current Downtown Site)**

- ❖ Truck Traffic (National Truck Route leads through center of downtown)
- ❖ Noise pollution from truck traffic
- ❖ Air pollution from truck traffic
- ❖ Absence of pedestrian friendly pathways
- ❖ Absence of local businesses and restaurants

### **Land Use Opportunities- (Proposed Downtown Site)**

- ❖ Elimination of truck traffic
- ❖ Elimination of noise pollution from truck traffic
- ❖ Inclusion of pedestrian friendly pathways
- ❖ Inclusion of mixed-use development:
  - Venues for local businesses and restaurants
  - Offices (Live/Work units)
  - Affordable Housing Units

### **3. Community Character & Design**

The character and design for the proposed site will include period infill developed structures that are unique and custom site-specific designs that will be made to blend seamlessly with the town's existing and regional architecture composed of the Savannah low-country style set between the late 1800's and the early 1900's. Investing in well designed and detailed community buildings establishes a standard for quality, often resulting in accelerated sales pace. Furthermore, the design will create continuity by utilizing both planning and architecture which will ensure a consistency of vision.

#### **Downtown Character**

The development strategy is to include a relatively high-density mix of retail, office, services, and employment to serve the downtown area of Port Wentworth, but also strive to become state-wide tourist attraction to support growth of local businesses. Traditional architectural styles that are matching to the history of the region should be used. Residential development should reinforce traditional town center through a combination of rehabilitation to historic buildings in the downtown area and compatible new infill development targeted to a broad range of income levels; including apartments, lofts, condominiums. Design should be very pedestrian-oriented, with strong, walkable connections between different uses. Road edges should be clearly defined by locating buildings at the roadside with parking in the rear and on the street. Enhance the pedestrian-friendly environment by adding sidewalks and creating other trail/bike routes linking to neighboring communities and major destinations; such as libraries, neighborhood centers, health facilities, commercial clusters, parks, and schools.



Figure 3. A downtown design concept

## Design Guidelines Overview

The following guidelines include recommendations for site and architectural improvements. They have been prepared for the “Historic Town Center” portion of the City of Port Wentworth.

- ❖ The purpose of the guidelines include:
  - ❖ Preserve and complement historic character
  - ❖ Promote unique and creative design solutions
  - ❖ Promote coordinated design decisions between the communities
  - ❖ Coordinate improvements between private property and public spaces

## General Site Design Guidelines

- ❖ Bring buildings close to the sidewalk.
- ❖ Locate buildings parallel to the street.
- ❖ Move parking to sides and rears of buildings.
- ❖ Screen parking lots from the public view.
- ❖ Promote shared parking and drives between buildings.

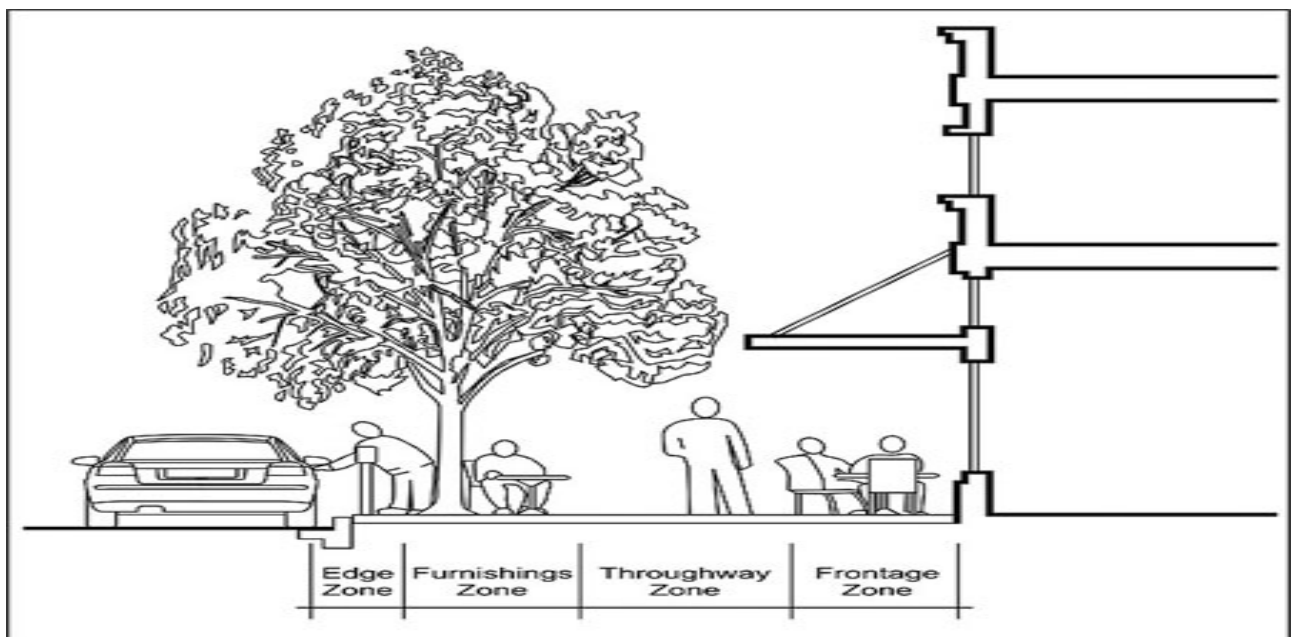


Figure 4. A potential site design concept

## General Building Design Guidelines

- ❖ Encourage 2-3 Story buildings; utilize parapet walls, and gables for height.
- ❖ Design all visible sides of the building.
- ❖ Utilize concrete siding, brick, and native stone as primary materials on visible sides of buildings.
- ❖ Encourage varied roof forms- incorporate gables to reflect local character.
- ❖ Avoid blank building walls.
- ❖ Create variations in roof and facade lines to promote visual interest.
- ❖ Divide larger buildings into segments that resemble smaller buildings.
- ❖ Require franchises to meet guidelines and local architectural character..
- ❖ Restore – Do not mask original architectural details.
- ❖ Create “open”, transparent storefronts.

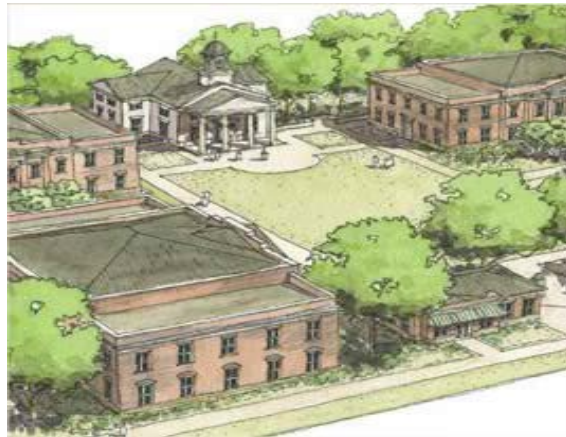


Figure 5. Potential building designs



## Potential Capital Investments

- ❖ City Hall (Revitalize existing building or build new structure on proposed site)
- ❖ Library
- ❖ Pedestrian Friendly sidewalks and pathways



Figure 6. Proposed 10-acre Site Plan for Downtown Relocation



Figure 7. Potential Density & Pedestrian Friendly Design

#### 4. Market Feasibility of Proposed Development

The addition of mixed-use and commercial areas is important for the redevelopment of downtown. The plan calls for a strong, thriving downtown and provides for the gradual expansion of downtown onto presently vacant or underutilized properties.

#### Market Feasibility Goals & Objectives

The main goal of the market feasibility is to provide support for the downtown redevelopment project by providing strengths and weaknesses of the proposed project location including opportunities and recourses that may be required to strengthen the historic downtown for the City of Port Wentworth. The city's downtown can be strengthened by building upon attributes of the existing area to create a unique character that has safe walkable streets, human-scale architecture, public spaces and common designs features to establish a sense of place for the downtown center. A strong sense of place makes the downtown an attractive location for shopping, working, visiting, and living, thereby, increasing the likelihood for an economically viable commercial business district.

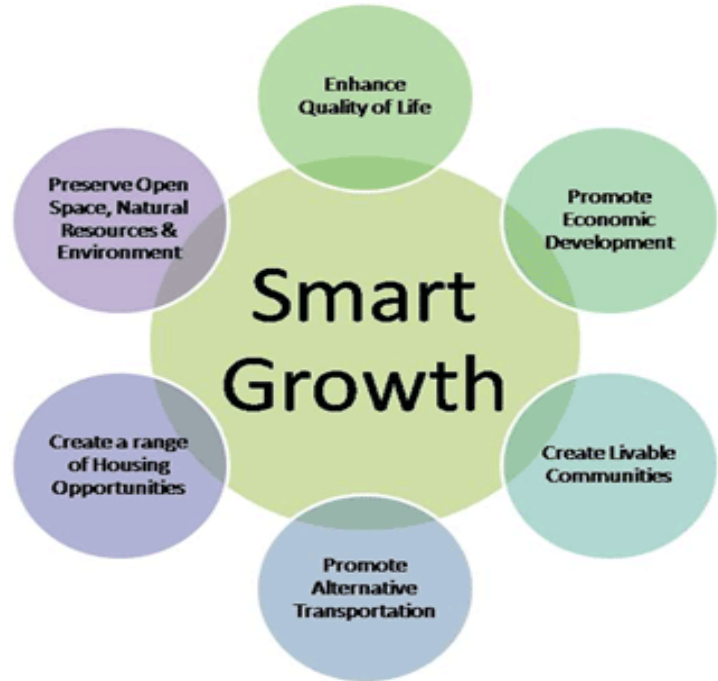


Figure 8. Potential Goals & Objective for growth

The following is a list of objectives to achieve this goal:

- ❖ Create the downtown center as one place, with distinct design districts that take advantage of the unique character areas within the area.
- ❖ Preserve and complement the historic Savannah low country character.
- ❖ Improve the mix of uses within the downtown area.
- ❖ Provide more aesthetically pleasing visual and physical access to the river near the city
- ❖ Design for “walkable” streets, while maintaining functionality for all traffic types.
- ❖ Provide inter-connectivity within the city
- ❖ Coordinate public streetscape improvements with private improvements
- ❖ Create gateway features at the entranceways into the downtown center.

- ❖ Encourage private property owners to make improvements that meet high standard of design and maintenance
- ❖ Make streetscape improvements to enhance the aesthetic character of the area.



Figure 9. Potential Design for growth

### Economic Development

The City of Port Wentworth economy comprises a small, but important part of the regional Savannah economy. In order to avoid just being a bedroom community of Savannah and Garden City, Port Wentworth needs to provide more local jobs. An economic development strategy for the City should include a discussion of the City's strengths and weaknesses. Fortunately, the City has much strength that can help to support economic development, as outlined below. Central to these strengths is the potential to expand the local tourism industry, a tactic which demands the preservation and enhancement of the city's historic downtown character. Another critical aspect of this plan is the fostering of local economic development leadership and the expansion or creation of a Downtown Development Authority. A local champion must come forward for this plan to be a success.

## 5. Strengths and Weaknesses



Figure 10. Port Wentworth Area Map

### Strengths of Port Wentworth economy include:

- ❖ Historic district, including space to expand the downtown commercial district.
- ❖ The Georgia Port Authority
- ❖ Savannah National Wildlife Refuge
- ❖ Houlihan Boat Landing
- ❖ Strong demand for new housing and growth.
- ❖ Trending toward higher quality housing.
- ❖ Sewer system.
- ❖ Proximity to:
  - ❖ South Carolina
  - ❖ Savannah
  - ❖ Historic Downtown Savannah
  - ❖ Savannah-Bus Station
  - ❖ Savannah/Hilton Head International Airport

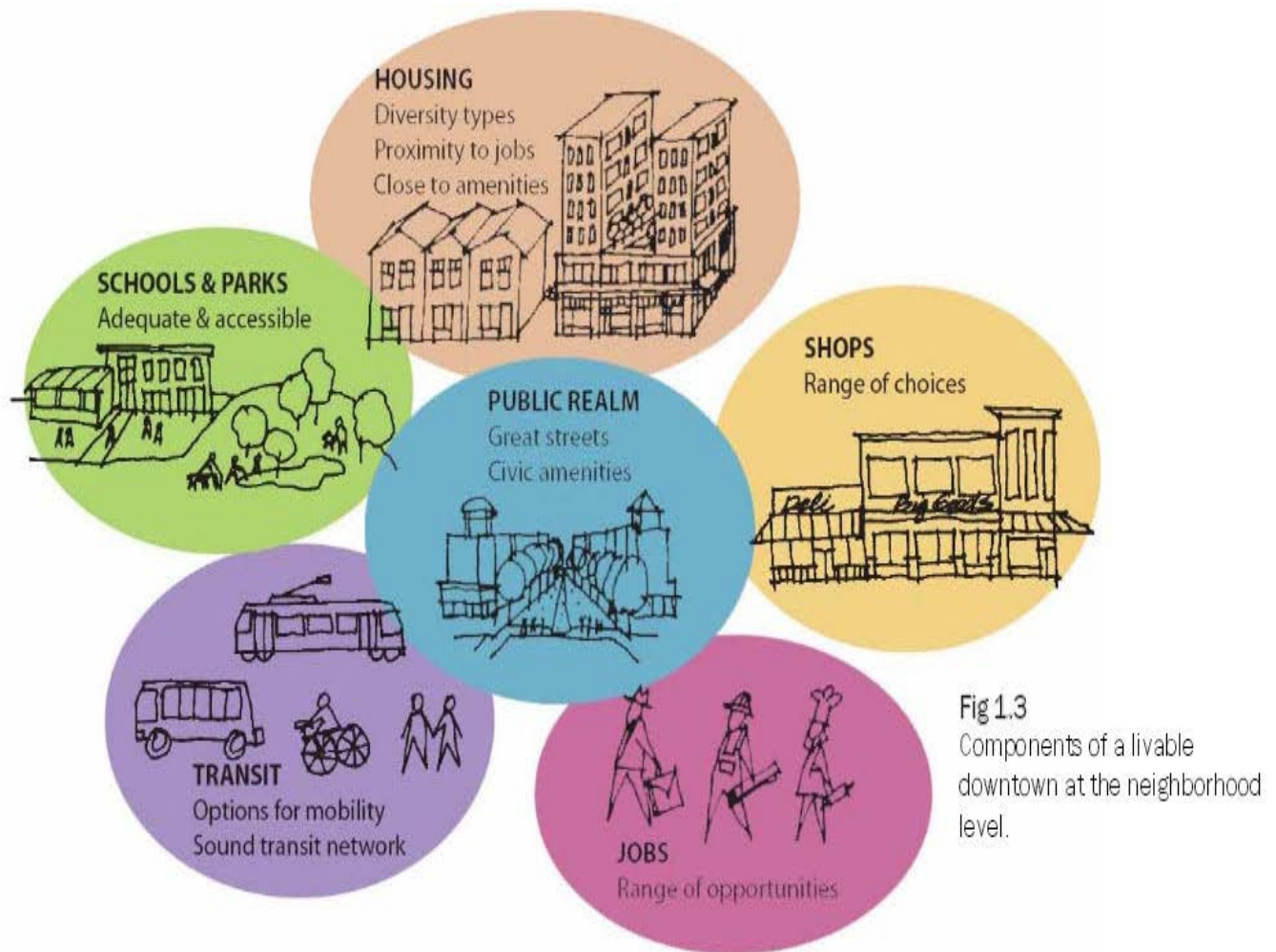


Figure 11. Port Wentworth's Strengths & Weaknesses

**Weaknesses of Port Wentworth's economy include:**

- Heavy truck traffic
- Limited cultural facilities.
- Few schools or education facilities.
- Few health care facilities or pharmacy.
- No DDA.
- No fiber optics.
- Some of the weaknesses downtown include: vacant lots, no welcome center or public bathrooms, no sit down restaurant, weak design guidelines, limited promotions and few annual events.

## 6. Market Demand for Mixed Use

Based on the National Community Preference Survey results of October 2013, there is growing demand for mixed use developments. The 2013 Community Preference Survey echoes many of the major findings from the last Community Preference poll in 2011. There are few major changes in attitudes as they relate to neighborhoods and where people want to live. The economy continues to drive the overall issue agenda. But there are signs of change on the margins, as younger and better-educated Americans show marginally more affinity for compact, mixed use developments over more conventional suburban communities. The following National Community Preference Survey results show that the city of Port Wentworth can greatly benefit if they incorporate mixed-use development to the downtown area.

### Community Choice

## Americans Split on Preference Between Walkable, Mixed-Use Community and Conventional Suburban Community

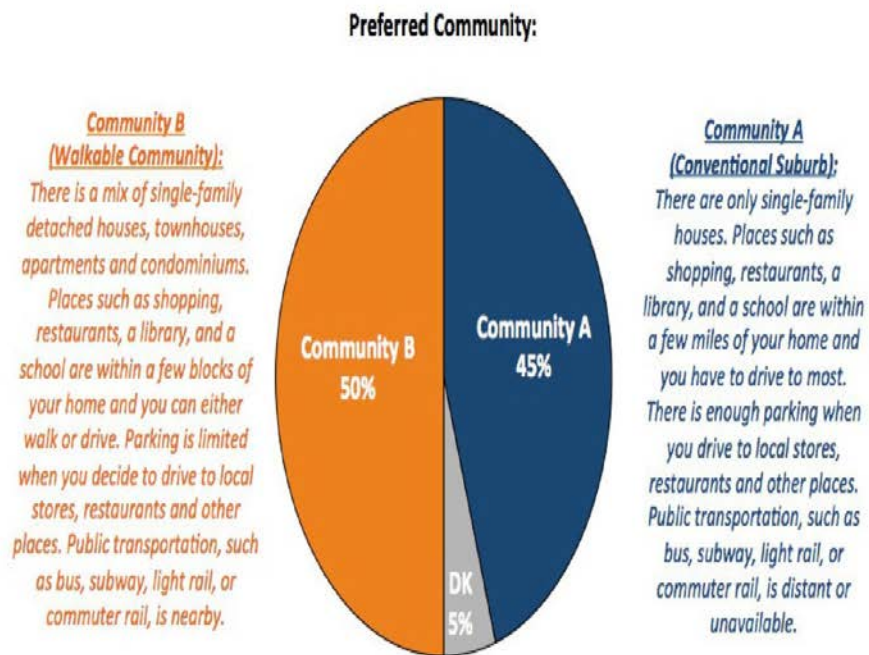


Figure 12. Realtor.org 2013 Community Preference Survey

## Community Choice (Explained by Realtor.org Community Preference Survey)

There is a split between those who prefer a walkable community with a mix of housing, close by commerce, limited parking and public transportation as opposed to a more conventional single-family houses only community, where driving is required and public transport is unavailable. Half prefer the walkable community and 45 percent prefer the conventional suburb model.

- ❖ Having places such as shopping, restaurants, a library and a school that you can either walk or drive to be the main attraction of the walkable community.
- ❖ Single-family homes only (48 percent) and short driving distance to schools and commerce (31 percent) are the top reasons for picking the conventional suburban community.
- ❖ The groups that most prefer the walkable community are post-graduates (59 percent), African Americans (56 percent), college educated men (56 percent) and college graduates under the age of 45 (55 percent).
- ❖ The groups that most prefer the conventional suburban community are small town and rural residents (57 percent), married women (54 percent) and those who are married with kids (54 percent).
- ❖ There is a wider divide among those who have moved in the last three years or are planning to move in the next three years. Recent movers prefer the walkable community by 20 points (58 to 38 percent), almost identical to the walkable community preference expressed by those who plan to move in the next three years (+18 points, 57 to 39 percent).



Figure 13. Potential Walkable Community Preference Concept

## What's Important in Deciding Where to Live

There are few changes from 2011 in how Americans categorize what is important to them in deciding where to live.

- ❖ Privacy from neighbors' remains at the top (86 percent important), along with sidewalks and places to take walks (80 percent important) and high quality public schools (74 percent important).
- ❖ Second tier priorities center on the shared desire for both walking and driving: being within an easy walk of other places and things in the community (69 percent important); easy access to the highway (68 percent important) and being within a short commute to work (65 percent important).
- ❖ Americans place more importance on community diversity than in 2011. All three "diverse" communities scored higher than two years ago: living in a community with a mix of people from various racial and ethnic backgrounds (+11 points from 42 percent total important in 2011 to 53 percent this year), living in a community with a mix of people from various income levels (+6 points, 42 percent to 48 percent), and living in a community with people at all stages of life (+6points, 60 percent to 66 percent).
- ❖ People place more importance on living in a community that is "at the center of it all" than in 2011 (+10 points, from 34 percent to 44 percent).



# Education, Marital Status and Race Drive Community Preference

## Community B (Walkable Community):

There is a mix of single-family detached houses, townhouses, apartments and condominiums. Places such as shopping, restaurants, a library, and a school are within a few blocks of your home and you can either walk or drive. Parking is limited when you decide to drive to local stores, restaurants and other places. Public transportation, such as bus, subway, light rail, or commuter rail, is nearby.

- Total net (+5 Community B, 50 to 45 percent)
- Post grads (+21)
- Recent movers (+20)
- Prospective movers (+18)
- Unmarried women (+18)
- Unmarried with kids (+18)
- Single (+17)
- City dwellers (+16)
- College men (+15)
- African Americans (+15)
- Democrats (+13)
- Ages 30 to 39 (+13)
- Young college (+13)

## Community A (Conventional Suburb):

There are only single-family houses. Places such as shopping, restaurants, a library, and a school are within a few miles of your home and you have to drive to most. There is enough parking when you drive to local stores, restaurants and other places. Public transportation, such as bus, subway, light rail, or commuter rail, is distant or unavailable.

- Total net (-5 Community A, 45 to 50 percent)
- Rural/small town (+21)
- Republicans (+12)
- Homeowners (+10)
- Married women (+11)
- Married with kids (+10)
- Moms (+5)
- Midwest (+3)
- Married no kids (+4)
- \$50K-\$100K (+3)
- Married men (+2)
- Post high school education (+1)
- Whites (-1)

Please read the two descriptions below and answer the following questions. Assume that the quality of the schools, crime rates, and cost of house are exactly the same in the two communities:



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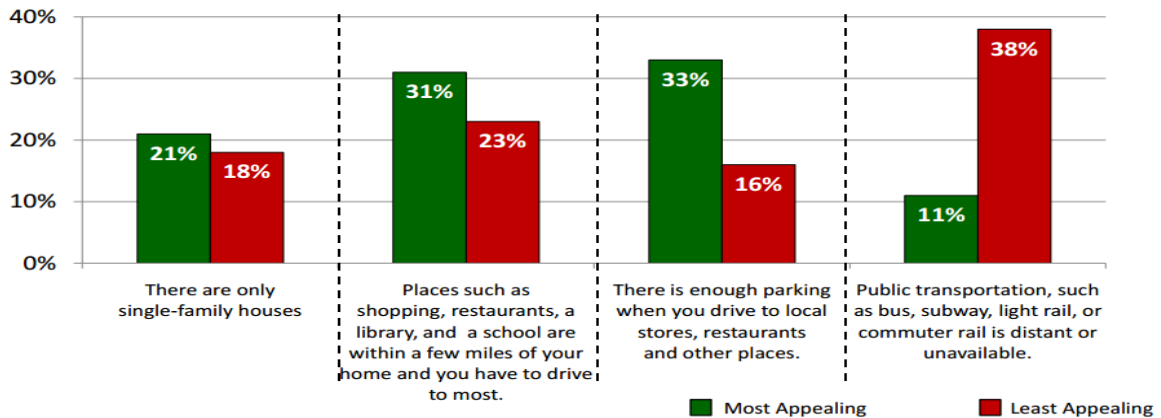


Figure 14. Realtor.org Community Preference Survey

# Parking and Ease of Driving Has Some Appeal to Those Who Prefer Walkable Community

*Lack of public transportation least appealing*

What "Walkable" Americans Like/Dislike About Conventional Suburban Communities:



(IF COMMUNITY B) Looking at the community you did NOT select, choose the ONE most appealing characteristic of that community you would like to have from that list.

(IF COMMUNITY B) Looking at the community you did NOT select, choose the ONE LEAST appealing characteristic of that community.

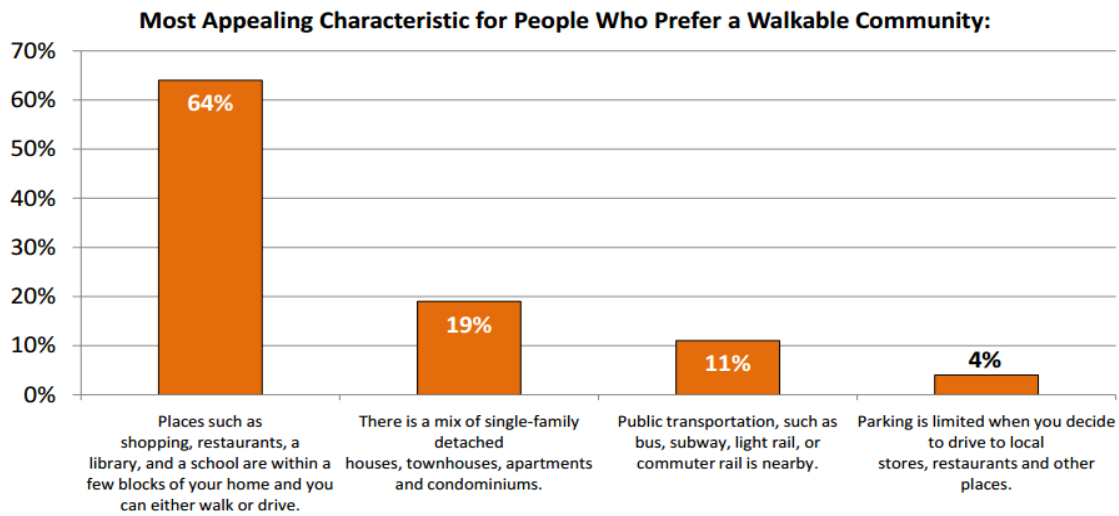


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Figure 15. Realtor.org Community Preference Survey

## Proximity of Commerce and Public Amenities Most Appealing to Those Who Prefer Mixed Use Community



(IF COMMUNITY B) Look at the community you selected and choose the ONE most appealing characteristic of that community for you.

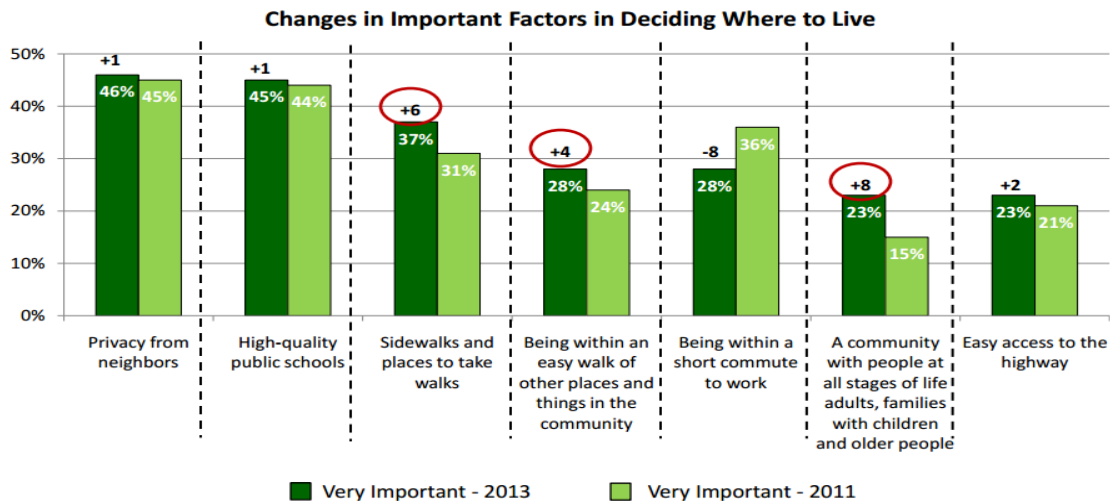


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Figure 16. Realtor.org 2013 Community Preference Survey

## Walkability and Age-Diversity Gaining in Importance



Q.47 In deciding where to live, indicate how important having each of the following would be to you: very important, somewhat important, not very important, or not at all important.



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Figure 17. Realtor.org 2013 Community Preference Survey

