


Winter 2016

The Landscape: Walkable Tigard

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Recommended Citation

Morehead, E. (2016). The Landscape: Walkable Tigard. Metroscope, p. 4

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Walkable Tigard

by Elizabeth Morehead

In 2014, the Tigard City Council adopted a strategic plan with a vision to become the “most walkable community in the Pacific Northwest where people of all ages and abilities enjoy healthy and interconnected lives.” For a city that was developed around the automobile, it’s an ambitious goal, but one the city is taking seriously.

Bordered by I5 to the east, the town of 50,000 is bisected by two major highways. Highway 217 runs north to south, cutting off a corner of the city. The small section to the northeast of 217 is home to one of the region’s largest shopping centers, Washington Square Mall. Suburban style big box stores line Highway 99, the other major thoroughfare to bisect the small city. Visitors may entirely miss the short Main Street, which while historic and picturesque, is overshadowed by its larger neighbor. Like much of the city, the Triangle, a collection of office parks in the city’s northeastern corner, is designed for cars. Surrounded by parking lots, and connected with tree lined boulevards, the office buildings are largely inaccessible for walkers.

During the past fifteen months, however, Tigard has taken steps to meet its goal, including changes to the physical landscape and social network. The city is building new sidewalks and paved trails, focusing on connecting existing infrastructure. Unable to change historic development patterns, the city is working to improve what is already there. Landscaped areas surrounding the parking lots of Lowes and Wal-Mart now include pedestrian trails. Trails will eventually border Red Rock Creek which is now largely hidden from view.

The city recognizes that beyond infrastructure, walkers need destinations. With that in mind, Tigard has opened the Dartmouth Overlook in the Tigard Triangle. This small pocket park affords an impressive view west to the Chehalem Mountains. Walkers can also visit the Well and Good Coffee Shop. The non-profit coffee shop, which opened in 2014, provides a place for the community to gather.

While infrastructure is important it's not always enough to change people’s habits. Tigard Walks was started by a city employee to encourage community members to explore their city by foot and to meet each other.

Tigard’s move toward walkability is part of a larger trend of placemaking in smaller cities and towns across the Portland metropolitan region. The housing crisis in Portland is creating a sense of opportunity. As housing prices in Portland continue to rise, longtime residents and newcomers are considering neighboring cities that have a sense of vitality and walkability of Portland.

Oregon City recently completed a major downtown renovation. Its Blue Collar Creative initiative won the State of Oregon’s Excellence in Downtown Revitalization Innovation Award for its recruitment of artists, entrepreneurs and creative professionals to the city’s historic downtown. Bolstered by the Orange Line, Milwaukie developed a land use plan to promote its downtown as an employment center and a walkable commercial hub.

It remains to be seen whether these types of placemaking efforts will result in attracting newcomers; there is little doubt, however, that they are building community and civic pride. **M**



Dartmouth Overlook



New sidewalk infrastructure



Well and Good Coffee Shop



Red Rock Creek

