

2017 Keynote Presentation

Walkability: The Hidden Green

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ABSTRACT

Are we talking about the right things, when we talk about green? Most of the thinking about sustainable development is focused on how we make our buildings, not where. But the location of our buildings and the design of our neighborhoods have a much greater impact on our carbon footprint than anything else we do. Trading all of your incandescent light bulbs for energy savers conserves as much carbon per year as living in a walkable neighborhood does each week. So why is so much of our conversation on sustainability about the former and not the latter? It's time to re-center the green discussion beyond the building, to the block, the neighborhood, and the metropolis.

Simply put, the single greatest thing we can do to reduce a community's carbon footprint is to get more people to walk. But how is that achieved? The General Theory of Walkability insists that, in order for people to walk, the walk must be useful, safe, comfortable and interesting. Useful means that most of our daily needs can be satisfied close at hand. Safe means that streets don't encourage drivers to speed near people walking. Comfortable means that public places have proper spatial definition: that they are properly shaped by buildings near the sidewalk edge. And Interesting means that sidewalks are lined by active, legible, and unique building facades. Comprehensively, these four categories present a mandate for city planners, urban designers, and architects, a mandate that is rarely questioned yet even more rarely followed.

BIOGRAPHY

Jeff Speck is a city planner and urban designer who advocates internationally for more walkable cities. As Director of Design at the National Endowment for the Arts from 2003 through 2007, he presided over the Mayors' Institute on City Design and created the Governors' Institute on Community Design. Prior to his federal appointment, Mr. Speck spent ten years as Director of Town Planning at DPZ & Co., the principal firm behind the New Urbanism movement. Since 2007, he has led Speck & Associates, a boutique planning firm that specializes in making American downtowns thrive.

With Andres Duany and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, Mr. Speck is the co-author of The Smart-Growth Manual and the "modern classic" Suburban Nation, which the Wall Street Journal calls "the urbanist's bible." His latest book, Walkable City—which the Christian Science Monitor calls "timely and important, a delightful, insightful, irreverent work"—was the best selling city-planning book of 2013-15.