

INTRODUCTION:

The built environment can be described as “a material, spatial and cultural product of human labor that combines physical elements and energy in forms for living, working and playing. It has been defined as the human-made space in which people live, work, and recreate on a day-to-day basis.” (www.wikipedia.com). Many health organizations have admonished Americans for not getting enough exercise and many health-related issues can directly be attributed to this problem. Walking is one of the easiest forms of exercise because it involves no extra equipment or cost, can be performed by any age-level, can easily be adjusted for all fitness levels, is considered by most to be enjoyable and can be a functional means of transportation.

The built environment, which includes all the physical parts of where we live and work (e.g., homes, buildings, streets, open spaces, and infrastructure) can help facilitate walking. The built environment influences a person’s level of physical activity. For example, inaccessible or nonexistent sidewalks and bicycle or walking paths contribute to sedentary habits. Additionally, the lack of easy access across major thoroughfares, benches or public parks for taking a rest, and clean air can all hinder the walkability of an area. “These habits lead to poor health outcomes such as obesity, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and some types of cancer. Today, approximately two thirds of Americans are overweight.” (Center for Disease Control). Lack of exercise is a significant contributing factor. Therefore, how conducive the areas in which a person lives or works are to facilitating walking has a direct bearing on the amount of exercise a person will engage in on a regular basis. Finally, the greater the barriers an environment has for ease of walking, the more planned a regular exercise routine must be. For example, if a person can’t walk easily from point A to point B (two places he/she intended to be anyway, from work to the post office, for example) then getting the daily recommended amount of physical activity has to be a scheduled activity elsewhere. In other words, walking often allows you to kill two birds with one stone.

METHODS:

According to Drive Less Save More, a walkable neighborhood is one that is designed with streets for all types of transportation. You can walk to shops and schools as well as parks and public spaces. The Walk Score, which is a rating system of 1-100, is a reflection of how easy it is to get around without a car. “However, it does not take into account how pretty the area is

for walking.” Happy to see this line included, as this is a good motivator for a lot of people (including myself)! I live in an exceptionally rural area. Errol, New Hampshire is in Coos (pronounced KŌ-oss) county in northern New Hampshire near the Maine border. We have a population of 291 (2010 census). As sidewalks are non-existent (as they are in most outer city and rural places in NH) and our town consists of a general store, an outdoor sporting goods store, two gas stations, two restaurants, a town hall and post office, I knew the scoring criteria used by The Walk Score would result in a low score. I was not wrong. Here is the link to the route from my cabin to the main highway (five miles outside of town).

<https://www.walkscore.com/score/rr-26-errol-nh-03579>.

I chose this route for two reasons. First, while I currently commute 30 and 40 miles to work (in Bethel, ME) and where I go to school at the New Hampshire Culinary Institute (in Errol, NH) respectively, I did not want to go such great distances away from where I live and jade the score. Second, I wanted to highlight where I recreate because this is also where I live. Of note is the fact that Errol is sandwiched between two ski resorts and a third is under renovation and will soon be the largest ski resort on the East Coast (<https://thebalsamsresort.com/>). While town sidewalks may be noticeably absent, the area contains many opportunities for outdoor recreation and year-round enjoyment of all descriptions.

RESULTS:

As the link indicates, my route received a score of 3, with no walkability to any business, institution or public building from my home. However, I will mention that Drive Less Save More did indicate that Walk Score did not take into consideration the beauty (and I will add clean air quality) of the location. This is where Errol, NH truly shines! Coupled with the myriad choices of outdoor recreational activities, I feel quite fortunate to live here. If I had to drive to enjoy most of these outdoor activities, then they wouldn't necessarily factor into the equation for the purposes of this lab, but as you will see from my descriptions and photos, my house abuts both the New Hampshire Wildlife Reserve and Federal Conservation lands. Both areas include miles of off-road trails suitable for cross-country skiing and snowshoeing in the winter and walking and hiking in the summer and fall. Additionally, my cabin is less than 35 feet from the shore of Lake Umbagog, the second largest lake in NH. In the winter when the lake is frozen, I can walk directly across it for one mile to get to my car parked at the marina. I also walk the $\frac{3}{4}$ mile drive in the summer and fall months from where I park my car down to my cabin, giving me plenty of purposeful opportunities for walking.

I have two modes of getting from my cabin to the main highway (Route 26). I can either cross the mile across the lake (the shortest route) either by boat, snowmobile or foot (winter only) or I can take the nine miles of dirt roads through the wildlife preserve and conservation areas to get to the hardtop. During non-mud seasons (late spring, summer and up to mid-fall), I can

also ride a dirt bike along the nine miles of dirt road to get to my car (should I park it at the end of the dirt roads).

Once I get to the hardtop, this is where the walkability (or at least my comfort level) ends. There are no sidewalks leading into the center of Errol, nor are their sufficiently wide shoulders along the five mile stretch leading into the center of Errol to comfortably and safely walk or bicycle the distance, for my comfort level at least. I will say there are a number of cyclists who bicycle this route (and greater portions, as Route 26 goes through Grafton Notch State Park), but there are too many logging trucks who use this route for me to feel I can walk or bicycle safely (I am no daredevil and probably need to feel a greater sense of personal safety than most). Please enjoy the photos following the conclusion.

CONCLUSION:

Overall, my route from my cabin to my car is highly walkable, regardless of where I decide to park (as long as I have the necessary time for pedestrian travel). However, I do need to note that this walkability would only be for someone steady on their feet as this route includes dirt roads and trails that are uneven and include small barriers (tree roots, rocks, etc). Therefore, barriers (from cabin to hardtop) would include unstable terrain and the time required to go the distance if traveling by land, and (from hardtop to the center of town) lack of sidewalks and wide shoulders for the entire five-mile distance. Facilitators of this route include the stunning beauty of the terrain, clean air and miles of trails readily available for non-purposeful transportation (meaning pedestrian routes that don't lead to locations of business, etc.) The populations that might specifically be influenced by my route would be those who love the outdoors, the pristine air quality, the beauty of the lake and wildlife. Included, would be those who are steady on their feet, enthusiastic about mountain terrain, enjoy natural scenes and are up for potentially physically challenging modes of pedestrian and bicycling modes of transportation.



This is the view of Lake Umbagog from the front of my house. Our little cabin was built in 1950, before the Shoreline Protection Act so we are quite close to the water...35 ft. to be exact.



This is the northern-most entrance to the lake. Our cabin is a mile across (to the left of this sign). Umbagog is the second largest lake in New Hampshire (it is actually the largest lake, but the state border between ME and NH runs through the middle of the lake, so only the NH portion can be included in official size calculations).



These are two of the trails through the New Hampshire Wildlife Conservation Area (left) and the Federal Wildlife Preserve (right) that abut our property. Miles of trails are available for cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, (winter) and walking and hiking in the summer and fall, in addition to a variety of water sports: sitting and standing kayaking, canoeing, swimming, sailing, etc.



This is a shot of the lake from the back of the sled that is attached to the snowmobile. A couple of inches of snow fell during the night before this trip across the lake (to cast our vote in the NH Primary)!