

April 2011

Walking Charlotte

Anna Vordermark, Contributor, A Healthier Charlotte

Charlotte doesn't exactly come to mind as a walking-friendly kind of town, as I can attest. I've had well-meaning friends pull their cars over and offer to help me when I'm seen on foot in another part of the city and NOT walking my dogs or wearing working gear. It just doesn't make sense that I may be walking to an adjacent shopping center without moving my car!

An article in April's [Charlotte Magazine](#) caught my eye this week and introduced me to a great website to help navigate walkable Charlotte: www.WalkScore.com. This site scores U.S. neighborhoods on their [walkability](#), based on factors like population density, pedestrian design, and access to amenities. Neighborhoods are then ranked on a scale from "walker's paradise" (where daily errands don't require a car) down to "car-dependent" (where most errands require an engine and wheels or several hours of uninterrupted walking time).

I plugged in the info for my neighborhood, where I walk daily for my exercise and the enjoyment of two Brittany Spaniels, and got a measly 17 out of 100 for a walkability score. My walks through our neighborhood are pleasant enough, but they don't help me *accomplish* anything other than burning a few calories. Fourth Ward is Charlotte's most walkable neighborhood, with a score of 89 out of 100. If you live in Fourth Ward, WalkScore.com thinks you can do most of your daily errands (including your commute) without a car and therefore gives your neighborhood a higher score.

As a city overall, Charlotte scores 39 out of 100, making it a "car-dependent" U.S. city. Realtors are using the [Professional](#) version of WalkScore when helping people move to new cities; if amenities-within-walking-distance are important to you as a home buyer, there's a good chance your realtor can give you doorstep-to-doorstep data from WalkScore.com. It's important to note that WalkScore.com doesn't score access to public transportation – this is strictly about motion of the left-right-left variety.

WalkScore.com also let me look at my workplace, my commute, and pretty much any U.S. address I wanted to check out. My childhood home in York, South Carolina, scored 3 out of 100, so I've come up in the world since crossing The Border! The website lists "amenities" near each address, such as restaurants, banks, coffee, and schools. I was surprised to see the number of destinations near my home that are in the 1.5 mile range. With an [average walking speed](#) of 17-20 minutes per mile, these are destinations that would take me 15 minutes longer to reach (each way) versus driving. When heading out to these places I automatically reach for my car keys, but WalkScore.com has got me thinking about the benefits of another 20 minutes of walking a couple of times a week, including:

- Knocking out another chapter or two of the Audio Book on my iPod (courtesy of [CharMeck Library!](#))
- [Burning](#) about 120 calories, or one scoop of low-fat ice cream

- Unwinding with some [walking meditation](#) to boost energy, focus, and creativity
- Saving some gas! Charlotte's [average](#) is \$3.764 as I write this, so walking is sounding really great right about now

A Healthier Charlotte reported on the sad state of Charlotte's physical environment [last week](#), so I know that walking along hot, smoggy, crowded streets doesn't sound like much fun... but what if more of us got out of our cars and homes (spending less on electricity!) and explored a little? WalkScore.com showed me a couple of places I want to mosey over to this weekend, possibly to enjoy a cold beverage on a sunny patio. Possibly two. After all, I'll be walking.

Check out the site and leave a comment here if you discover something walkable about your neighborhood.

###