

The First Walking Route Is In! As Part of “Creating a Walkable Community in Rehoboth”

By Julia Sweet

The idea to create a walkable community in beautiful, rural Rehoboth was inspired by the national project created in 1990's, “The Campaign to Make America Walkable” and the larger national government initiative, “Healthy People 2010”.

Many people in the town of Rehoboth enjoy walking as their primary form of recreation and exercise and, for some; it has an additional benefit – the perfect opportunity to socialize with neighbors and friends. Rehoboth is not alone- walking is the number one form of exercise in the United States. Seeing people out for a walk is a reassuring vision. “The number of people who are walking is an important measure of the quality of life of a community.” Judging by the number of people you may see out strolling, power walking or jogging on any given day, life must be generally good here!

So what exactly is a “Walkable Community”? By definition, it is a “pedestrian-friendly” community where: the community and the neighborhoods are safer, friendlier, and healthier, pedestrians are given priority in neighborhoods; and specific streets comprise a designated “walking zone” or “walking route”.

Are we “pedestrian friendly”? Here in town, when informally polled, many walkers expressed concern over the speed of drivers. It has been shown that drivers everywhere “typically do not slow down for anything including children walking along the street”. A ten-mile per hour increase in speed, from 20 to 30 M.P.H., increases the risk of death for a pedestrian in a collision nine-fold. If a car going 20 M.P.H hits a pedestrian, there is a 95 percent chance of survival. Those survival odds decrease to 45 percent if the same car is traveling at 30 M.P.H. (This is probably good information to share with your young, newly licensed drivers.) While carious explanations are put forth, the fact remains – people are driving too fast for the conditions and the results in endangering and discouraging pedestrians.

While there have been no adjustments to the existing posted speed limit signs, enforcement and a police presence will be increased along the walking zone. You will also notice the new signs which read: “Community Walking Route 3.5 Miles-Speed Enforced”

How was the route chosen? Several months ago, the Rehoboth Reporter ran an article explaining the walkable community concept and goal. Townspeople were asked to submit their walking routes for consideration by the Police Department's Safety Officers. Sgt. Richard Shailor and Ptmm. James Casey reviewed the submissions and made a determination based on a variety of safety and feasibility factors (road width, travel volume, ability to walk off the road, etc.) One enthusiastic citizen petitioned neighbors and, as a result, we had many written requests for that particular street.

The results were presented to the Selectmen and (then current) State Representative Philip Travis for their support. Chief Norman Miranda generously purchased the signs. Peter Richmond and staff from the Rehoboth Highway Department took the unexpected initiative of clearing the brush from the roadside and then the signs were installed.

The Route:

The Shad Factory Parking Lot on Water Street (off road parking is available at the Daniel Savoie Conservation Area on Brook Street) to Reed Street to Lake Street to Winter Street to School Street to Brook Street and back to Water Street. This should take you roughly one –hour, depending on your pace. (A 3 to 4 M.P.H. pace is considered “health walking”; 4 to 5 M.P.H is considered “power walking”).)

It is important to note, that walking on the route is done at your own risk- there can be no assurances of safety. Use your own judgment and discretion.

Where do we go from here? It is well researched that residents are more likely to walk regularly if they can leave their front stoop and immediately start their route. Participation diminishes if they need to first drive to a pathway or park. Therefore, our goal is to put additional routes in other sections of Rehoboth.

Members of the community are urged to let us know if they would like their walking route to be considered for a designated route. If someone would like to organize a “Rehoboth Walking Club” for the purposes of camaraderie, motivation, and safety or help out with the “Community Waling Day” being planned for the fall, please contact Julia Sweet at 508-3369-0123.

Florescent walking vests (that increase the walker’s visibility to 1,000 feet) and Nordic Walking Poles (Trekking Poles) can be signed out from the Rehoboth Council on Aging. Booklets with Walking Tips and Route Maps are also available at the COA.

Health Facts About Walking:

“If everyone in the United States were to walk briskly thirty minutes a day, we could cut the incidence of many chronic diseases 30-40%.”

Journal of the American Medical Association (Feb. 11, 1998) showed that walking briskly for a half hour just six times a month cut the risk of premature death in men and women by 44%.

In about two weeks after walking, blood pressure declines after two more weeks (unless you increase fat intake) cholesterol declines.

Walking Tips:

- *Wear sturdy walking shoes and layers of loose-fitting clothing
- *Walk on hard-packed, smooth surfaces
- *Carry a fully charged cell phone
- *Make sure you can still hear traffic if you choose to listen to music through a headset or MP3 player
- *Face the traffic and stay off the road, wear a reflective vest and carry flashlights at dusk
- *Walk with a partner it is safer and much more fun!
- *Make sure you know your route, tell someone where you are going and when you plan to return
- *If you want to walk more intensely, increase the frequency of your stride not her length.
- *In warm/hot weather, walk during the coolest part of the day; in hot weather drink 4 to 8 ounces of water for every ten minutes of exercise, and do not exercise if the humidity and /or temperature are high. Stop if you experience pain, shortness of breath, dizziness or lightheadedness call 9-1-1 immediately.