

5 ELEMENTS OF A WALKABLE URBAN CENTER



PEOPLE

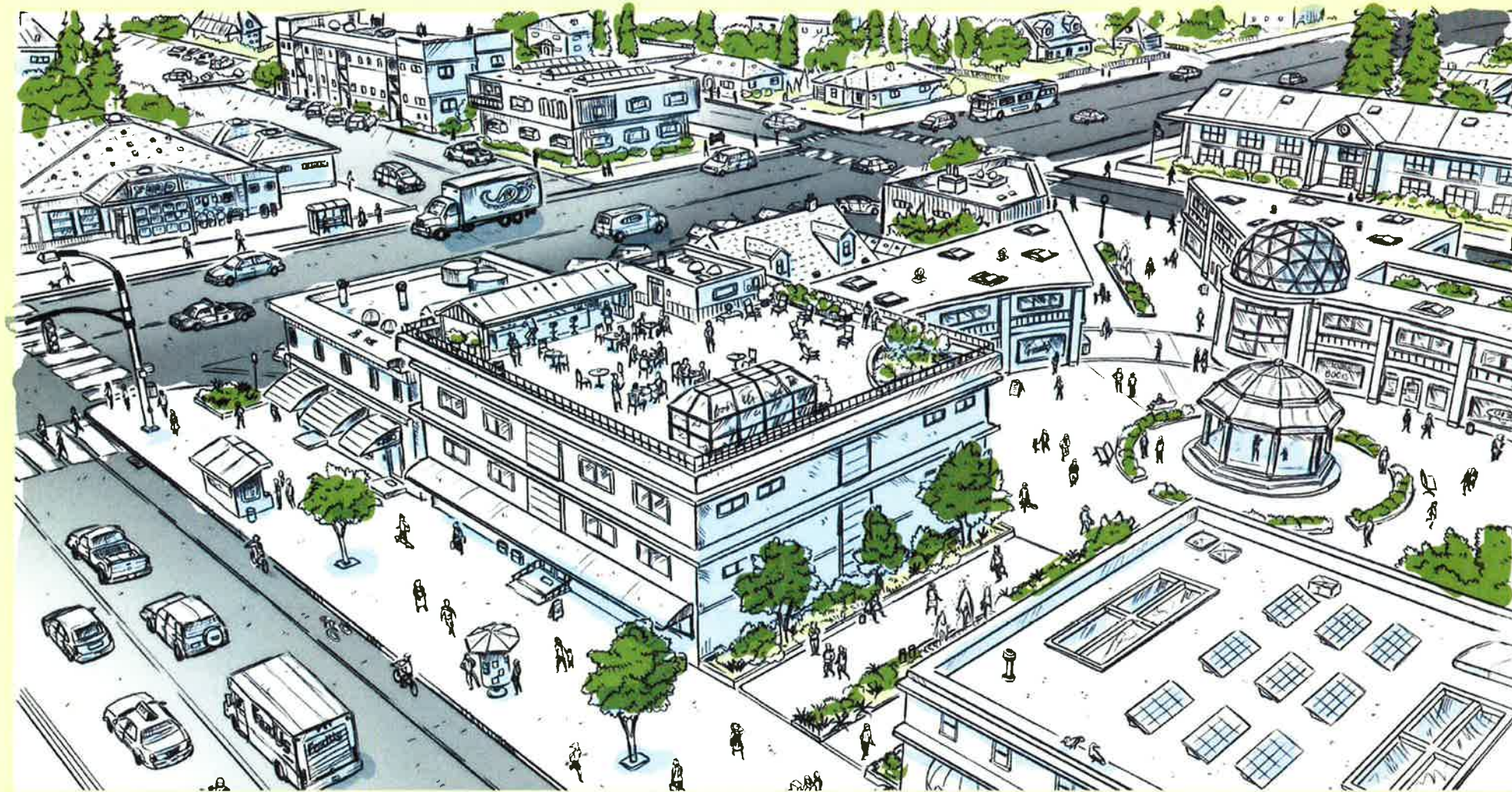
People living, working, shopping, and recreating in compact centers are an indicator of walkable urban places. People add vibrancy and liveliness to city streets, generating walk-up customers for local businesses and growing the market for more walkable urban development. It takes a concentration of people in a compact area to support the kind of activities that define a walkable urban center.

PUBLIC AMENITIES

Public investment in well-designed streets and sidewalks, parks and plazas, public buildings and civic institutions are key to the viability of walkable centers. The most urban of these walkable centers feature a prominent role for public transportation and station areas that enhance the public realm.

PARKING POLICY

Parking is a necessary part of walkable centers, but effective policies guide the price, supply, and design so that parking does not undermine an area's walkability. Free parking is minimized, parking supply requirements emphasize "maximum amounts" instead of "minimum amounts", and design standards locate parking behind buildings or within structures.



Why are we so interested in Walkable Urban Centers?

Walkable urban centers offer people a lifestyle option that is different than that offered elsewhere in our cities, suburbs, and rural communities. Walkable urban centers provide people with the opportunity to live, work, shop, and play without having to rely on driving to meet every daily need. Walkable urban centers attract 21st century jobs, and nurture innovation and social exchange. They are fertile ground for local businesses, artists, and other entrepreneurs. The array of housing choices offered

in these places meet the needs of many people in different stages of life, from the Millennial Generation to retired Boomers. Walkable urban centers are inherently more energy efficient than any other community development pattern, which is good for the environment and for household budgets. They offer an array of viable, active travel choices for people of all abilities and incomes, travel choices that reinforce healthy lifestyles and enable independence for those who don't drive.

Despite their benefits, walkable urban centers are not easy to create. Obstacles include high land prices and construction costs, difficult financing and fees, and cumbersome regulatory processes. Alignment of rent structures and other market forces is more difficult than it is for typical neighborhood and suburban development. Studies indicate, though, that there is pent-up demand for walkable urban lifestyle choices in the Thurston region, which is why cities continue to work to overcome these obstacles and increase this opportunity for area residents and businesses.

PROXIMITY

Walkable centers need a diversity of destinations and activities that are within walking distance of each other to support the needs of people who live and work there. This includes grocery stores and pharmacies, retail and services, entertainment venues and restaurants, parks and recreational opportunities, in addition to housing. Larger centers with a diversity of destinations and activities in close proximity allow more people to live a "car-lite lifestyle", offering a range of viable travel choices.

PHYSICAL FORM

Both public and private realms in successful walkable centers have physical forms that make walking a pleasant, safe, and convenient alternative to driving. Carefully designed sidewalks, transit stations, parks and streets are built on well-connected grids of short city blocks. Distinctive architectural details like windows, doors, awnings, and step-backs characterize buildings – most of which are multi-story with ground-floor uses oriented around retail or services. The public and private realms come together in walkable centers to create places that are welcoming to pedestrians and supportive of business and the local economy.