

News Release



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF
REALTORS®

The Voice for Real Estate®

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**Smart Growth
America**

Better Choices For Our Communities

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HOMEBUYERS FAVOR SHORTER COMMUTES, WALKABLE NEIGHBORHOODS

WASHINGTON, D.C. (Oct. 20, 2004) — The prospect of lengthening commutes is leading more Americans to seek walkable neighborhoods in close-in suburbs and cities, according to the 2004 American Community Survey sponsored by the National Association of Realtors® and Smart Growth America.

A commute time of 45 minutes or less is the top priority in deciding where to live for 79 percent of Americans. Other top priorities include easy access to highways, important to 75 percent, and having sidewalks and places to walk, important to 72 percent. Having a large house on more than one acre of land was important to 57 percent of Americans.

Among people planning to buy a home in the next three years, 87 percent place a high importance on a shorter commute as their top priority. Asked to choose between two communities, six in ten prospective homebuyers chose a neighborhood that offered a shorter commute, sidewalks and amenities like shops, restaurants, libraries, schools and public transportation within walking distance over a sprawling community with larger lots, limited options for walking and a longer commute. Those who are in the market to buy a home are also more likely to say they want to be in or near a city as opposed to living in a farther out suburb or rural area.

Minorities are even more likely than other Americans to choose a walkable neighborhood that has a shorter commute, with 59 percent of women, 57 percent of Hispanics and 78 percent of African-Americans selecting those communities over communities with bigger lots and longer commutes. After hearing detailed descriptions of two communities, Americans favored the attributes of walkable, smart growth communities over sprawling communities with longer commutes 55 percent to 45 percent.

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“Realtors® don’t just sell homes, we sell communities and neighborhoods,” said NAR President Walt McDonald, broker-owner of Walt McDonald Real Estate in Riverside, Calif. “This survey shows that most Americans prefer to live in walkable communities with a shorter commutes, sidewalks and amenities close by, a trend Realtors® have seen first-hand. Smart growth communities are the wave of the future, especially since they’re heavily favored by prospective buyers and minorities, who represent a growing share of the homebuying market.”

“As communities around the country grow, they’re faced with the choice of where, and what, to build next,” said Don Chen, executive director of Smart Growth America. “In too many places, the choices are being made for them by a system of out-moded regulations that makes it hard to build great, affordable neighborhoods in the places where people need the housing, and easier to do it in distant locations. The survey makes clear that this will change if we are to meet this growing demand.”

Americans place a high value on limiting their commute times and are more likely to see improved public transportation and changing patterns of housing development as the solutions to longer commutes than increasing road capacities. Half of all Americans chose improving public transportation as the best option to solving long-term traffic problems. The survey found that approximately one third believe that developing communities where people do not have to drive long distances is the best answer while less than two in ten believe the answer is to build new roads.

Americans also want government and business to be investing in existing communities before putting resources into newer communities farther out from cities and older suburbs. Nearly nine in ten want their states to fund improvements in existing communities over incentives for new development in the countryside.

With costs being equal, a smart growth community was described for purposes of this survey as a mix of apartments, condos, townhouses and single-family detached houses on various sized lots with sidewalks and places to shop, eat, read and go to school within walking distance. It was also described as community where public transportation is nearby and a one-way commute is less than 45 minutes. A sprawling community was described as one in which there are only single-family detached houses on one-acre lots, there are no sidewalks and places to shop, eat, read and go to school are within a few miles by car. Public transportation such as train, bus or light rail is distant or unavailable and a one-way commute is 45 minutes or more.

The survey was conducted by Belden Russonello & Stewart among 1,130 Americans from August 26 through September 6, 2004. The margin of error for the survey is plus or minus 3 percentage points.

The National Association of Realtors®, “The Voice for Real Estate,” is America’s largest trade association, representing 1 million members involved in all aspects of the residential and commercial real estate industries.

Smart Growth America is a diverse coalition of nearly 100 non-profit organizations with a stake in how metropolitan expansion affects our environment, quality of life and economic sustainability. Coalition partners include national, state and local groups working on behalf of the environment, historic preservation, housing affordability, social equity, land conservation, neighborhood redevelopment, farmland protection, business, labor, public health and town planning and design.

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