

BMTS Article Digest

April – May 2025

BMTS Pedestrian & Bicycle Advisory Committee Members:

The following is a compilation of articles that may be of interest to BMTS Pedestrian & Bicycle Advisory Committee members. This and past digests can also be accessed from the Pedestrian & Bicycle Advisory Committee page at <http://bmtsonline.com/about/committees>.



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[City life](#)

Why walkable places are good for children

Despite arguments that sprawl is pro-family, children benefit from mixed-use, urban neighborhoods.

Children in the new urban Mueller district in Austin, Texas. Photo by Veronica Castro de Barrera.



Are walkable places bad for children and families? Joel Kotkin wrote a book [based on this thesis](#), and the argument recently was made on *The Federalist* website. Professor Michael Lewyn then debunked this theory in a [Planetizen](#) post. Planners and urbanists will likely encounter the issue in land-use meetings and should be familiar with the arguments on both sides.

The Federalist makes the pro-family case for sprawl: “It’s frankly absurd that conservatives—who are pro-family—would entertain the idea of cramming kids into tiny apartments with no yards. How exactly are parents supposed to raise multiple children in a 600-square-foot box? Where are kids supposed to play? On a rooftop patio shared with strangers?”

This argument may be cartoonish, yet it could resonate because young adults tend to move to the suburbs when they start having children. Lewyn, Director of the Institute on Land Use and Sustainable Development at Touro Law Center in Central Islip, New York, calls out the false dichotomy of *Federalist* authors Jonathan and Paige Bronitsky. “Either you live in conventional suburbia, or you live in ‘tiny apartments.’ Obviously, there are plenty of walkable urban (or almost-urban) places that aren’t 600-square-foot boxes,” Lewyn says.

Lewyn offers a counterexample to the idea that urban places mean few children: Boro Park, a neighborhood in Brooklyn with 60,000 people per square mile that is home to many Orthodox Jews—is denser than almost any neighborhood in America. “And yet Boro Park has the New York City’s [highest birth rate](#), and in the neighborhood’s major zip code (11219) 33 percent of residents are under 16,” Lewyn explains. “By contrast, in the zip code where I grew up (30327 in Atlanta), which is dominated by houses on two-acre lots, only 20 percent of residents are under 18. And in suburban Suffolk County, New York, where I work, only 17 percent are under 18. Even though Boro Park is hardly typical, it does appear that some urban neighborhoods are capable of generating high birth rates.”

Demographics are the most effective argument that sprawl is pro-children. While the Baby Boom, which ended in the mid-1960s, coincided with suburban growth for 20 years after World War II, declining birth rates have accompanied suburbanization for the last 60 years. As Lewyn writes:

“In 1960, [the U.S. had 23 births per 1000 people](#). Over the next two decades, central cities declined rapidly and so did birth rates—to 15 per 1000 in 1980. Since then, birth rates have continued to decline at a slower pace, to their current level of 12 per 1000. In other words, *birth rates have plummeted as suburbia has grown*.” (The emphasis is mine).

The Federalist argues that to combat declining birth rates, we should promote more single-family houses. “In other words, the authors seem to believe that if you wipe out alternatives to single-family houses, people will a) start moving into single-family homes and b) start making babies,” Lewyn says.

“But this of course makes no sense. Let us imagine that a city bans everything that is not a single-family house: no more condos, no more apartments. This means that everyone who is not currently living in a single-family house will compete for those houses, thus increasing demand for single-family houses. Thus, single-family houses will become more expensive, and more families will be priced out of those houses. In other words, [exclusionary zoning](#) reduces, rather than increases, homeownership.”

If sprawl does not raise birth rates, some dense urban neighborhoods have high birth rates, and generations of fertile American families lived in walkable neighborhoods before World War II, why do young families move to drive-only suburbs? Part of it has to do with an undersupply of walkable neighborhoods.

The National Association of Realtors conducts a regular survey of consumer preference, finding that 56 percent of Americans prefer houses with small yards where it is easy to walk places, versus 44 percent preferring houses with large



Rockville Town Square in Rockville, Maryland.

yards where you need to drive to places (2023). But the supply of walkable neighborhoods, accounting for less than 10 percent of land in every metro region, is far below that of drive-only sprawl.

Add to that many of walkable neighborhoods have below-average schools. The lack of walkable neighborhoods, especially those with good schools, drives the prices up for young families—who might otherwise prefer a community where their children could walk to school, the playground, or the corner store (see “[the popsicle test](#).”)

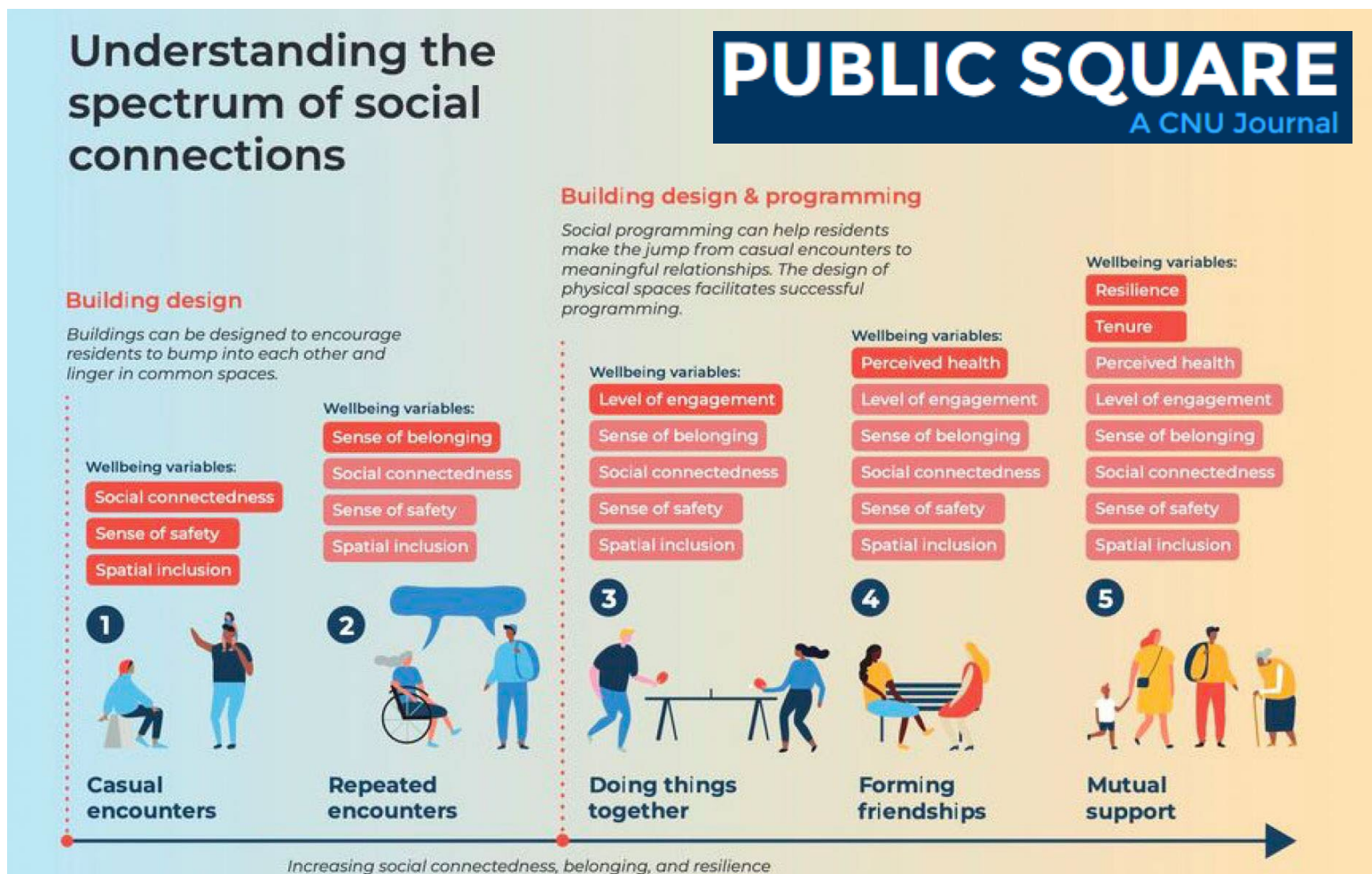
We should build more housing in walkable neighborhoods with decent schools for the sake of children and families for many reasons:

- Children increasingly suffer from chronic diseases, especially those related to obesity. While there are many causes for overweight children, walkable neighborhoods provide mobility choices (walking, cycling), that [promote physical activity](#) in everyday life, benefiting people of all ages (including parents and children.)
- Children living on mixed-use blocks (which are generally more urban and walkable) are 1.74 times more likely to have good conduct grades than children living on entirely residential blocks, according to the *American Journal of Community Psychology*. These better outcomes may be linked to more neighborhood social interaction.
- Walking to school [has plummeted](#) over the last three generations. That’s because we stopped building walkable mixed-use neighborhoods with schools. Walking to school is healthy because it provides exercise twice a day and gives children independence. It’s a great way to start and end the school day. If children can walk to school, they can also ride their bikes. Cycling to school reduces the risk of obesity, according to the [Journal of Physical Activity and Health](#).
- What is the most significant danger to children? Automobiles, by far, according to the CDC. Automobile collisions result in double the fatalities of any other cause for people under 21 years. Living in a walkable neighborhood not only provides mobility choices for those who don’t drive but also reduces the risk of [automobile-related deaths](#) because cars tend to move slower in walkable places.
- Sadly, children have become more socially isolated and lonely in recent years. While there are multiple causes, walkable neighborhoods can be part of the solution. Compared with car-dependent areas, people living in walkable areas are 24-47 percent more likely to have a strong sense of community, as reported in Todd Litman’s [Planning for Quality of Life](#). Those who walk, instead of being driven, are twice as likely to have [friendly interactions](#) on their trip. Also, residents of walkable neighborhoods have [higher levels of social capital](#). As a parent (of grown children now), I have always wanted my kids to experience a strong sense of community.

- It's good for children to live in neighborhoods with multiple generations, and a place that helps grandparents may indirectly benefit the kids. Elders who live on blocks with active front-entry features, like stoops, porches, and balconies, are 2.7 times less likely to have poor physical and mental functioning, according to a University of Miami study.

Cities and towns have many housing options. Single-family homes make up the majority of housing in many walkable places. Although the lots tend to be smaller than in conventional suburbs, the compensation is a more accessible neighborhood, with play spaces that can be reached on foot or bicycle. Missing middle housing like cottage courts, duplexes, and townhouses are suitable options for families.

Given our current built environment, parents may find that a drive-only suburb is the only practical and/or economically preferred option. But when walkable neighborhoods are available and affordable, they offer many rewards for families. With a massive oversupply of conventional, single-family housing, it won't help families to build more of the same. Instead, developing housing in walkable neighborhoods gives families with children a time-tested, healthier option.



GOT A MINUTE

How community design impacts social life

ROBERT STEUTEVILLE APR. 11, 2025

The social aspect of community development is important. It's been said before, but we are, at heart, social creatures. When technology drives us apart, as it has in many ways over the last 100 years, we suffer.

Social scientists have consistently measured happiness in America since the 1970s, and over that time, we have become [unhappier](#), [dramatically and steadily](#). When you think it can't get any worse, you read about a widespread recent rise in [depression and anxiety](#). This may be good news in the counseling business but bad news for everyone else (I jest—counselors care even as their services are in high demand).

I find it interesting that this doesn't get more attention. If the economy goes down, even briefly, this dominates the news every day. Happiness drops for a half-century, and we get the occasional news article. Would you rather be unhappy and filthy rich, or blissfully happy and working class? Granted, it is probably hard to be blissful most of the time and poor. But once the basic needs of my family are met, I rate happiness much higher than economics.

We are happier when we have connections to other people. We used to live in communities with dense, interlocking connections with families, friends, and neighbors. Extended families tended to stay together. We shopped at local stores and knew the proprietors. People went outside more in public places, experiencing the world directly—not through a screen.

I lived through many of these changes, and I don't want to sound like a curmudgeon; this is just the world we live in. It doesn't mean that we have to

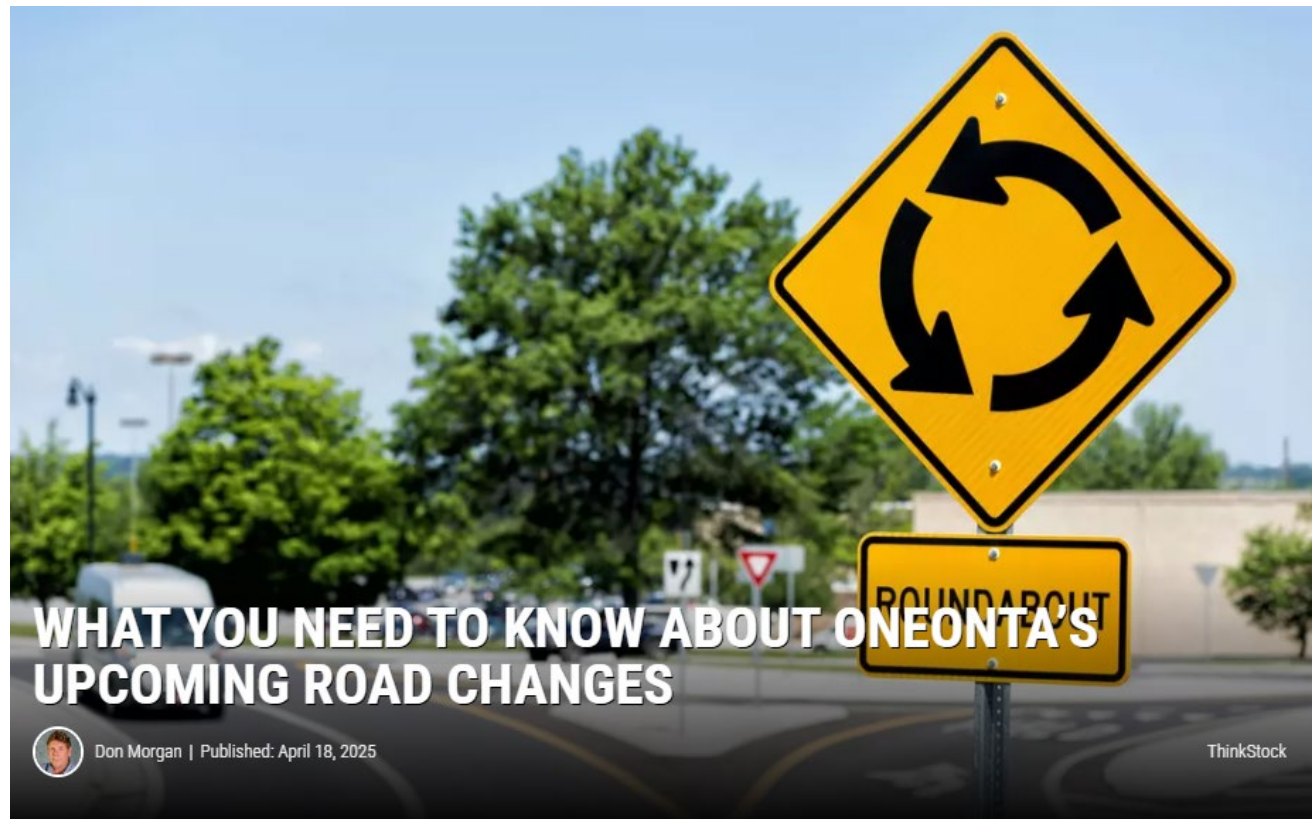
accept it. There are many reasons for unraveling social connections, but how we design communities is part of the problem. We need to understand this better because how we build communities can [strengthen social ties](#), and boost satisfaction. There's a transportation component: When we walk, we are more likely to have a [friendly interaction](#) with another person.

Diana Lind, author of the *New Urban Order* Substack, describes what she calls a “prosocial” approach to community development: “Prosocial housing policy could mean zoning that enables communities to better foster human connection, whether through accessory dwelling units, building types that offer shared amenities and spaces, or more walkable neighborhoods.”

The last phrase, “walkable neighborhoods,” is key because the issue is more than just housing. It's how everything comes together, including schools that allow children to walk, where they may experience a friendly encounter along the way. I raised my children in a historic neighborhood, where they walked to three schools, K-12. They met friends each day and had a personal relationship with the crossing guard at the elementary school, who always had a friendly word. When he retired and later died, they mourned.

We need to understand and emphasize the social implications of community design. It shouldn't be primarily about density, parking, setbacks, and FAR. No one, at the end of their lives, thinks about parking ratios and FAR. But they may wish they had gotten to know more people in their communities.

I don't know who made the graphic at the top of this article—I found it on LinkedIn with no source—but it is a starting point for understanding the built environment and social ties. My criticism is that it focuses on individual buildings when I think it is more about how buildings relate to one another. It is true, though, that the built environment enables or prevents the little interactions (so-called “weak ties”) crucial to a good mental outlook. And community design, coupled with institutions and programming, may help neighbors to form more meaningful relationships over time.



On Thursday, April 17, 2025, New York State Governor Kathy Hochul announced a \$4 million project to enhance safety and improve traffic flow in the City of Oneonta.

A roundabout will replace the current intersection of James F. Lettis Highway and Main Street, which will reduce vehicle congestion, mobility, and idling, plus make it easier for pedestrians and motorists to reach area destinations, according to the announcement.

The City of Oneonta is a true gem of the I-88 corridor, with a robust, walkable downtown, thriving businesses and thousands of college students making this Mohawk Valley community their home every year. We want to make sure that everyone in Oneonta reaches their destinations as safely as possible, and that's just what this new roundabout and other community enhancements will provide. - **New York State Governor Kathy Hochul**

In addition to the new roundabout, the project will include new sidewalks, lighting, signage, new drainage systems, and landscaping.

The Governor's Office notes that roundabouts maximize safety, minimize congestion, are more sustainable, and efficient than traditional intersections. Roundabouts eliminate the need for traffic signals.

According to Governor Hochul's Office, the project begins this month (April), starting with tree removal and other site preparation activities. Early to mid-July is when major construction will begin on the northern end of the intersection and the interior of the roundabout.

During construction, ramps to and from the Lettis Highway will be open to traffic traveling eastbound on Main Street, according to the announcement. All other vehicular and pedestrian access will be closed.

Work will begin on the southern end of the intersection and the ramps to and from Lettis Highway in mid-September, with the ramp onto Lettis Highway southbound closed. Traffic traveling eastbound on Main Street will also be detoured around the intersection.

Throughout construction, detours for vehicles and pedestrians will be posted. A free, 24-hour shuttle service will be provided during periods when access to the work zone will be restricted, with pickup and drop-off locations, including two on Main Street and two on Lettis Highway.

For more information, visit the Governor Hochul [website](#).

Department of Transportation holds annual ‘Trash Blitz’ statewide initiative

This event fills Hundreds of trash bags throughout the Southern Tier every year.



By Daniel Curren

Published: Apr. 22, 2025 at 3:35 PM EDT | Updated: 17 hours ago

BINAHMTON, NY (WBNG) -- The New York State Department of Transportation spent Earth Day conducting its annual “Trash Blitz,” cleaning up roadways around the state.

D.O.T. Region Nine Director Andrew Styles said dozens of workers picked up trash surrounding the entrance ramp to State Street and **the 434 Greenway near Macarthur Park** in Binghamton.

“This is a way for our employees to show that they support the communities they work in by doing a beautification effort,” said Styles. “But it goes further than that. Not only is litter an unwanted nuisance and eyesore on our highways, but it also imposes a safety threat.”

D.O.T. Public Information Specialist Daniel Scharfenberger said trash on the side of the road can block drainage structures, resulting in flooded roadways. They say this is not only bad for the environment but also delays other repairs to local roads.

“Every minute we spend here picking up trash, that’s a minute that can be used to fix potholes,” said Scharfenberger. “That’s a minute that can be used to fix the guide rail. That’s a minute that could be used for something to protect our infrastructure. That’s what we’re here for.”

Styles urged drivers not to leave trash on the side of the roads for the environment’s and residents’ safety.

“I encourage all drivers [and] all people to collect their trash and not throw it out of their vehicle,” exclaimed Styles. “Collect it and dispose of it in a proper receptacle.”

Workers across the Southern Tier collect around 500 bags of trash yearly in this event, and thousands more are filled throughout the state.

Child Hit by Car in Endicott Sent to Wilson Hospital

by: [Spencer Gustafson](#)

Posted: May 15, 2025 / 12:16 PM EDT

Updated: May 15, 2025 / 12:16 PM EDT

ENDICOTT, N.Y. (WIVT/WBGH) – A 10-year-old was transported to Wilson Memorial Hospital due to injuries suffered after being hit by a car while riding their bike on Wednesday night.

On May 14, at 6:40 p.m., Endicott Police responded to the intersection of Watson Boulevard and Taylor Avenue in Endicott for a reported accident. Police say the 10-year-old rode through a stop sign on their bicycle on Taylor Avenue and was hit by a car. EPD says the child was not wearing a helmet.

The New York State Police Collision Reconstruction Unit closed down the intersection from the time of the accident until 10:15 p.m. to assist in the investigation.

Getthere Transportation Expands Services for Southern Tier Residents

By [Sara Kinneary](#)

Published: May 15, 2025 at 1:19 PM EDT | Updated: 20 hours ago

SOUTHERN TIER, N.Y. (WBNG) -- Through Getthere's Transportation to Employment Program, or TEP, workers in Broome, Tioga, Chenango, Delaware and Otsego Counties now have expanded transportation services to help them reach work.

The program offers features to assist newly hired workers struggling to reach their workplaces. Some of the features include short-term transportation assistance, including bus passes, cab rides, and gas cards, intended to help individuals access work sites in the immediate future.

"TEP helps break down barriers to employment, which is gratifying to be part of," said Transportation to Employment Coordinator Stan Varghese. "We've helped hundreds of individuals achieve long-term employment so far, and I look forward to helping many more as the program continues on."

For more information about Getthere, employers and community members can call 855-373-4040 or visit the Rural Health Network of SCNY website at [this link](#).