

Article for The Bristol Herald Courier Agriculture Page
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“A Walkable Economy”

The other day I was walking with my family on Abingdon’s new pedestrian trail. Completed only recently, the trail runs from the old train depot to the head of the Virginia Creeper Trail, generally following alongside the train tracks. It’s a pleasant walk, taking you behind the Martha Washington, under Cummings St., around to the backside of the Starving Artist. There were no shops along this path. Yet, because it seemed to tie some of Abingdon’s most notable features together, I came away thinking about a community and its economy. A walkable economy.

What is a “walkable economy” and what would it look like? Well of course it would be pedestrian oriented. This means more than sidewalks and safe crossings. It means that you can get to places that you want to go, that you need to go, on foot. The doctor’s office, the pharmacist, the hardware store, the bank, the grocery, the bookstore, the theater, the farmers market. Getting around in this walkable economy should be pleasant, even energizing.

In a typical drive, picking up the kids, running errands, stopping for a bite to eat, you’re sedentary, but it’s certainly not relaxing. You start, stop, start, stop and wait. There are plenty of fumes. For the most part, you see only what’s ahead of you, or behind you, but very little of what surrounds you.

Walking along State Street in Bristol, or Abingdon’s Main Street, is a very different experience. You can’t help but look around. You don’t stop because of red lights, or traffic jams, but because you want to. You might like to see what’s playing at the Paramount or check out the paintings at the New Light Gallery, or stop for soup and a sandwich at Janie B’s café.

In the summer months, your walk might include a stop at the farmers market, for some fresh produce and wonderful local meats.

Neither Bristol nor Abingdon has everything you need within the walkable parts of town. Far from it. And certainly the vast majority of commerce happens away from downtown, where cars are a virtual necessity. But it doesn’t have to be that way. All over the country and the world, from small towns to large cities, people are re-creating vibrant, diverse business districts, integrated with the community’s farms, art’s and culture, manageable for the most part on foot. A more walkable economy. If that sounds good to you, then help make it happen here. Forget the big box store, park your car and look around. And start walking.

