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Millennials, silent generation drive interest in walkable communities

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WASHINGTON - The millennial generation is no longer the primary force propelling interest in walkable communities. According to a new report from the National Association of Realtors, members of the silent or greatest generation - those born before 1944 - also prefer smaller homes in neighborhoods with easy walks to shops and restaurants.

The 2017 National Community and Transportation Preference Survey, which polled adults across the U.S. about what they are looking for in a community, found that 62 percent of millennials and 55 percent of the silent generation prefer walkable communities and short commutes, even if it means living in an apartment or townhouse.

Gen Xers and baby boomers still show a strong preference toward suburban living, with 55 percent of both groups saying they have no problem with a longer commute and driving to amenities if it means living in a single-family, detached home.

"Realtors® understand that when people buy a home, they are not just looking at the house; they are looking at the neighborhood and the community," said NAR President Elizabeth Mendenhall, a sixth-generation Realtor from Columbia, Missouri, and CEO of RE/ MAX Boone Realty.

"While the idea of the 'perfect neighborhood' is different for every homeowner, more Americans are expressing a desire to live in communities with access to public transit, shorter commutes and greater walkability," she said. "Realtors work tirelessly at improving their communities through smart growth initiatives that help transform public spaces into these walkable community centers."

According to the survey, the majority of Americans - 53 percent (up from 48 percent in 2015) - would prefer to live in communities containing houses with small yards but within easy walking distance of the community's amenities, as opposed to living in communities with houses that have large yards, but residents have to drive to all amenities.

Regardless of their generation, however, responders with school-age children in the home show a greater preference for conventional suburban communities. Sixty percent of all responders with children in school said they prefer larger homes and yards that require driving; that number jumps to 63 percent for millennials who have children in school.

The survey also found that a majority of Americans - 88 percent - are very or somewhat satisfied with the quality of life in their communities, and 51 percent of those people believe that the walkability of their neighborhood contributes to that quality of life.

The report found that women - particularly young women - prioritize walkability and public transit more than older or younger men. Fifty-four percent of young women said that having sidewalks and places to take walks is a very important factor in deciding where to live, and 39 percent said the same about having public transit nearby. However, when it comes to a short commute to work, youth was a greater indicator of preference than gender - 49 percent of young women and 48 percent of young men said being within a short commute to work was a very important factor in deciding where to live.

While 60 percent of the adults surveyed live in detached, single-family homes, 21 percent of those respondents said they would rather live in an attached home and have greater walkability. Sixty percent

of those surveyed also said that they would be willing to pay a little - or a lot - more to live within walking distance of parks, shops and restaurants.

When selecting a new home, respondents indicated they would like choices when it comes to their community's transportation options. Eighty-six percent of survey participants said sidewalks are a positive factor when purchasing a home, and 80 percent place importance on being within easy walking distance of places.

When it comes to respondents' thoughts on transportation priorities for the government, 73 percent indicated that maintaining and repairing roads and bridges should be a high priority, with expanding roads to help alleviate or reduce congestion as the next highest priority, at 54 percent.

The survey of 3,000 adult Americans living in the 50 largest metropolitan areas was conducted by American Strategies and Meyers Research in September 2017.

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