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Dallas a model for 'walkable' urban centers, land-use expert says

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Dallas is a model city for future walkable urban centers, land use strategist Christopher B. Leinberger said Friday at the annual meeting of the DowntownDallas business group.

“No one is doing it as aggressively as you are,” he said, rattling off areas such as downtown, the Cedars and the Trinity River corridor that are seeing revitalization or slated for redevelopment.

Mr. Leinberger said he envisions the Dallas area eventually having 20 to 30 separate walkable districts, up from three today.

Mr. Leinberger’s mantra is “walkable urbanism” — or places designed for people to walk easily and safely from home to work to recreation.

His latest book, *The Option of Urbanism: Investing in a New American Dream*, was published last year. He also is a visiting fellow at the Brookings Institution in Washington, D.C.

Dallas already has some of the key drivers — a mass transit system— in place to create walkable urban centers, Leinberger said.

Next, the city must focus on adding housing, including affordable housing, and then retail and offices will follow, he said.

Walkable cities date back to ancient times. Think Pompeii. They were built in this country up until World War II, when the automobile and freeways changed how we develop cities, Mr. Leinberger said. That’s when “drivable suburban” was born, he said.

The pendulum began to swing back in the 1990s as younger people and older empty nesters wanted to live closer to where they work and play, Mr. Leinberger said.

Demographic trends combined with pent-up demand support a continuation of that trend, he said. For instance, the number of U.S. households without children is projected to rise to 88 percent (of new households) in the next 20 years, from 67 percent today and 50 percent in the 1950s, Mr. Leinberger said.

Today, walkable urbanism is occurring in traditional downtowns and adjacent areas, suburban town centers, suburban redevelopment areas and vacant land, Leinberger said.

Places such as Washington, D.C., have become walkable urban models based on neighborhoods developed around a mass transit system.