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Walkable Washington

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WALKABLE WASHINGTON

Transformation towards walkability is taking place all over the state of Washington. From urban, suburban and small town initiatives, the program showcases the effects of a renewed focus on creating great places for people to walk. The case studies are exceptional projects and programs showcasing how cities, counties, school districts, and community organizations throughout the state are making it safer, easier, and more inviting for people to walk.

WHO WE ARE & WHAT WE DO

We promote walkable communities and empower people throughout Washington to connect to the world by foot.

CASE STUDY

WALK TACOMA PROJECT TACOMA, WA

DESCRIPTION AND PURPOSE: Walk Tacoma is a series of educational walks led by guides in downtown Tacoma with varying historical themes. The Walk Tacoma program started in 2009 as a result of a stigma that it was unsafe to walk in downtown Tacoma. The program aimed to change residents' perception and help people get comfortable with walking in the area, especially with downtown's recent revitalization. Since the Walk Tacoma series started, the program has grown significantly. In 2009, five walking maps were created for self-guided walking tours of up to 1.5 miles with a focus on historical information such as background about the local brewery. In 2010, guided walks started for the existing five themes with about 10-15 people participating on each walk.

In 2015, Walk Tacoma grew to host nine walks a year with different themes including focus on the waterfront, architecture, museums, military history, public art, and even a scavenger hunt. Areas of the city covered included the Brewery District, Hilltop, Wright Park, North Waterfront, South Waterfront, and the Museum district. Walks even cover new infrastructure and ask participants what's needed for pedestrian improvements, sometimes in the form of informal walk audits. In total, 1283 people participated in the 2015 walks, with an average of about 140 people attending each walk. Walks are held at lunchtimes and evenings on the first and third Wednesdays each month, and these days are now promoted in campaigns as "Walking Wednesday".

For more information

314 1st Avenue South, Seattle, WA 98104
info@feetfirst.org
206.652.2310
www.feetfirst.org



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Walk Tacoma's annual kickoff and largest event is hosted by three local experts, complete with sound systems carried by walkers throughout the group. The kickoff event for 2016 will be held on April 6th, on National Walking Day, with the theme on Tacoma's historic schools.

PROGRAM TIME-FRAME: From its beginning in 2009, guided walks created from walking maps have grown in number and more people participate each year. In 2009, five walking maps were created for self-guided 1.5 mile walking tours. In 2010, local expert-guided tours based on these five walking maps were started with Tacoma's Historic school as the theme. In 2015, there were nine guided walks with different themes in different locations throughout the city.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT: Walk Tacoma is organized through Downtown on the Go (DOTG), a non-profit organization with collaboration from Pierce County Transit, the City of Tacoma, and the Chamber of Commerce. DOTG's goal is to reduce the number of people driving alone in downtown Tacoma. Through walking, biking, and transit promotions, they bring people to the streets and increase the vibrancy and livability of downtown Tacoma. The Walk Tacoma program is promoted through the "Walking Wednesdays" slogan and social media helps promote upcoming walks. A Facebook event is created for each walk to engage participants in the conversation about walking before and after the event. Additionally, promotional materials such as posters and magnets help to spread the word.

Local residents now know that these walks are held on Wednesdays. Downtown on the Go also works with local businesses to create walks for their staff members on Wednesdays.

Campaigns where people can earn prizes through walking have also been held, such as the Walk Around the World Campaign in 2015, where residents would log walking trips and attend a Walk Tacoma event to earn a t-shirt. A total of 301 people participated in this popular event. Additionally, participants can evaluate the walks through surveys and make suggestions for new themes or improvements to the walks

COST AND FUNDING: The cost of the walks is covered through Downtown on the Go's budget. The total Walk Tacoma budget for 2015 was \$35,000 including staff time totaling about 580 hours, which did not include time spent in planning the events. Much support from the community is provided through in-kind donations and sponsorship. Just over \$5000 was provided by in-kind donations from local businesses in the form of printing of promotional materials, and light snacks for post-walks. Around 30,000 maps at \$1 per piece were donated by Multicare Health System, a Health Maintenance Organization. Sponsorship from the walks totaled \$7500 in 2015.

CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS: The stigma that it was unsafe to walk in Downtown Tacoma was overcome by implementing the Walk Tacoma program, which now has attracted a growing number of participants and resulted in more walks being held with different themes.

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Smaller challenges are related to the logistics of the large size of a walking group, and how to engineer the sound. Initially, guides used a megaphone, but the sound system has since expanded into the use of a wireless microphone with one speaker and multiple speakers throughout the crowd. There also exists the challenge of keeping a large number of people safe during a walk, as well as finding a safe and adequate space for walk leaders to talk. Walk Tacoma ensures walk safety by using safety flags, and staff and volunteers cross streets with each group.

INNOVATIONS: Holding the walks on “Walking Wednesdays” and on the first and third Wednesday of each month creates consistency on a regular schedule, and this schedule is now well-known in the community. Local leaders and historians provide education on the history and development of the various themes and areas covered on each walk. Walk Tacoma also connects businesses to a walk event and plan the walk so that the businesses may, for example, go to a restaurant after a walk.

BENEFITS AND RESULTS: Walk Tacoma through Downtown on the Go tracks walk participation and occasionally sends surveys to participants after the end of a walk series to identify how the walks can be improved. Survey results are helpful in planning what themes and areas to cover for next year, and also gather

information on why people participate in the walks. The educational portion of the walks helps people learn about and connect with community. Residents who have lived in Tacoma for many years learn about and walk to areas that they’ve never been to, and learn about the area in a unique way.

Residents who participated in the Walk Around the World Campaign stated that they wanted to be part of a community effort as the foremost reason for participation. Walk Tacoma encourages participants to walk outside of the walk events for transportation and for exercise. Pierce Trips has a logging calendar on its website (piercetrips.com) that helps people track any type of alternative mode trips, and results have shown that since the walks have been implemented, residents have made an effort to use alternative transportation.

PROGRAM CONTACT:

Meagan Kula, Events Manager
Downtown on the Go
meagank@downtownonthego.org
253-682-1734

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:

Walk Tacoma
<http://www.downtownonthego.com/go/walking>

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