

# Esperance – A Walkable Neighborhood?

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**Abstract:** A decade of rezoning and development in the Edmonds and Esperance areas make clear the developers' intent: Make wealthy downtown Edmonds charmingly walkable, and move unpleasant realities (e.g., high-density affordable housing) to the periphery.

Walkability is an excellent goal – why not for everyone? Can everyone have affordable walkability? Of course, only wealthy or very healthy people will be walking to the beach, but everyone should be able to walk through a pleasant community to a local oasis of wet and green and art.

**Background:** Worldwide, habitable beachfront is precious. With global warming, Edmonds has the chance to be a Mediterranean resort community (ignoring the concomitant jelly-fish blooms in Puget Sound).

Edmonds is rightly proud of its walkable downtown. For most people, walking means no more than 8 blocks (1/2 mi) each way, total 1 mi round-trip. True, the Edmonds Walkers go 3-4 mi each day, but that is deliberate exercise, not commuting and certainly not carrying groceries home. So more realistically, we are talking waterfront to 7th, and Daley to Walnut. Checking Zillow, price for a modest detached 3 bed home in the area is about \$1,000,000. A condo can be less; a fancy house is more like \$2,000,000 and up. A great view adds \$1,000,000.

State, county, and city are urgently looking for places to stash low-income families who perform the service chores needed by high-income families. In attempt to avoid ghettos of low-income, planners advocate “inclusion zoning”, with low-income (therefore high-density) housing intermingled with other housing.

## **Apparent current strategy**

Edmonds' response is provided in:

- a) <https://www.edmondshousingstrategy.org/>
- b) <https://www.edmondshousingstrategy.org/documents/>
- c) [https://www.edmondshousingstrategy.org/s/Draft-Edmonds-Housing-Strategy-May16\\_2018.pdf](https://www.edmondshousingstrategy.org/s/Draft-Edmonds-Housing-Strategy-May16_2018.pdf)

In the plans, downtown is kept artistically charming – low buildings, pedestrian-friendly roadways, no affordable housing. Per report "c", the workers who service those high priced homes can't afford to live there. They may commute 10 mi or more each way. Which is bad for parking, congestion, and the environment.

The plan is therefore to leave the rest of Edmonds as square miles of suburbia slashed with high-speed commute corridors lined with industrial development. Then establish high-density high-rises on those corridors, at the city boundaries. [While this pattern might be considered “spot zoning”, that hasn't been tested in court yet.]

### **The Problem**

In the plan neither the middle income suburbanites nor the low-income high-risers be in walking distance of anything communal or wet or green or artistic. Are they just second class citizens in a dystopic upstairs/downstairs world?

### **An alternative:**

Christopher Alexander's "A Pattern Language" ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christopher\\_Alexander](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christopher_Alexander)-) does designs at different scales. States, counties, cities, neighborhoods, small shops with apartments above, very simple apartment layouts for elders, etc. He based it on the way many European villages evolved -- before cars distorted the meaning of community

Bringing that approach to Edmonds and Esperance, we leave the current high-speed-industrial corridors in their current form. But elsewhere we deliberately work to a walkable, green world. Sure, walking to the beach is still for healthy or rich folk, but everyone in this area should be able to walk to a green park with water features, and find basics at a small/quaint shop. Maybe a co-op, combined with on-demand deliveries from the major retail stores. Plus community rooms for meeting, reading, music groups, art classes, etc.

Basically, a My Sister's Place with a co-op bakery and a small park, replicated on an 8 block grid. Each such small pocket of growth can have affordable housing above the shops. The shops are NOT 7/11 or a burger joint. We are talking quaint, maybe Tudor facade, real wood, etc. No need to convert 228th into yet another high-speed industrial corridor. Make it a string of small villages instead.

I'd have to see an architect's treatment, but I'm thinking we'd need 1-2 house lots per grid node. That doesn't happen without county grants and the informed goodwill of the neighbors.

Anyone?