CREATE WALKABLE COMMUNITIES

The pedestrian connection to the water can be improved physically, with better street, path, and trail connections, and with access points to the water that are open to the public.
In a walkable community, trips by bicycle or on foot are viable transportation alternatives to the car. Walkable communities locate a mix of uses, such as homes, shops, and schools, close to each other. They provide sidewalks, crosswalks, and bike lanes that create safe passage for walkers and bikers, and they offer convenient, well-designed parking that encourages people to park and walk to their destination. Walkable communities offer more transportation choices, higher levels of social interaction, greater opportunities for physical activity, and reduced emissions from automobile travel.

For waterfront communities, improving the connection between pedestrians and the water can increase interest in walking and biking and help to decrease the pressures of seasonal traffic. The pedestrian connection to the water can be improved physically, with better street, path, and trail connections, and with access points to the water that are open to the public. The connection also can be approached visually, by designing the built environment in ways that preserve the view of the water and encourage residents and visitors to access the waterfront on foot. Orienting the built environment to the water can improve public access to it and encourage a better appreciation of this precious asset.

Ensuring physical access from streets or sidewalks to the waterfront can be a challenge, however. Many coastal and waterfront communities have a shortage of public-access facilities, such as public walkways and boat launches. In some communities, traditional public access sites have been converted to private uses. It can be difficult to acquire new access points because of the prohibitive costs of both land and maintenance.

The public also may be unsure of how to access the water if adequate signage is not provided. Additional challenges arise when people headed to the water to swim, stroll, fish, or surf inadvertently degrade sensitive natural areas near the water. Pedestrian access to the water must not only be connected to the built environment, but also accommodated in ways that protect natural resources.

A number of tools can help. Communities can inventory where the public access points are, flag the gaps, and put all this information on a map. Then, with maps and inventories at hand, visioning exercises can help residents and visitors articulate how they expect to access the water and what they expect to do there. In Grand Marais, Minnesota, the city used a community visioning process to define redevelopment options for a derelict gas station located between the waterfront and downtown. The community decided to create a waterfront park on the site. Today, Harbor Park better connects downtown Grand Marais to its waterfront; visitors and residents walking its paths enjoy unobstructed views of and access to Lake Superior. The park has become a community centerpiece, regularly hosting festivals and other community gatherings.

Once a vision is developed, it should be incorporated into pedestrian master plans, mixed-use zoning, and capital improvement plans that codify and fund improved access. Localities then can provide incentives or adopt regulations guiding plans for water access in future development. Along the Amelia River waterfront area of Fernandina Beach, Florida, the city established a “floating” overlay district that allows property owners to double their density if they grant the city an easement to build a public boardwalk along...
**Ogunquit, Maine**

In Ogunquit, Maine, the Marginal Way is a public walkway along the Atlantic shore, located a block from Ogunquit’s downtown. The Marginal Way is a remnant of a pre-colonial coastal trail, which a coastal property owner donated to the town in the 1920s. The town, working with several contiguous property owners, acquired easements in the 1940s to extend the trail another 2,000 feet. Signs direct pedestrians from downtown to the entrance of the Marginal Way, which extends along the coastline for nearly two miles, including access paths, ending at Perkins Cove, a small working harbor near Ogunquit with a variety of shops and restaurants. The town holds full title to most of the land area of the trail and is responsible for its management.
### Key Action Options

**Mix land uses and design buildings to foster pedestrian activity and visual access to the water**

- Adopt policies and codes that allow for a mix of uses compatible with waterfront development
- Adopt building codes that establish appropriate building heights around water resources and ensure visibility of special points of interest or viewing areas
- Connect buildings, streets, and paths to the waterfront
- Create central parking facilities to serve as park-once locations within walking or shuttling distance of waterfronts or central business districts

**Foster a safe and supportive infrastructure for walking, biking, and other non-motorized means of travel**

- Establish a pedestrian master plan that supports investment in good sidewalks, narrow streets, crosswalks, bike lanes, on-street parking, street art, and appropriately scaled green infrastructure
- Ensure pedestrian safety through street design standards and speed control measures
- Provide maps for pedestrians, bikers, and “blue trail” users (with tours and points of interest), informational signage, and guides to boating storage facilities, racks, and access points
- Provide well-maintained pedestrian walkways and bicycle paths
- Assess and consider impacts from expected sea level rise or lower lake levels

**Expand and manage physical access to the water**

- Inventory existing access sites compared to current and projected demand for access
- Prioritize access needs by identifying what types of access are needed and their most appropriate location
- Identify potential funding sources that will support the acquisition of properties for new access and the construction of any physical infrastructure needed
- Provide attractive and safe pathways between parking areas, public transportation, and waterfronts, ensuring that the connections are well-lit with adequate signage

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and maintenance. For an Ogunquit resident or tourist, the Marginal Way complements an already walkable community. The vibrant, mixed-use downtown has wide sidewalks and shade trees, and visitors are encouraged to park in a municipal lot next to the downtown and explore the area on foot or via the Ogunquit Trolley, which provides service along the coast during the summer months.22 23
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