Analyzing Westmount’s Walkability Audit: Cities, Citizens and Universities in Action

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Research Aims:

Westmount wants more people walking! To promote sustainability and public participation, Westmount’s sustainability and volunteer coordinators organized a neighbourhood walkability audit in the summer of 2010. Residents volunteered to complete paper surveys of intersections and city blocks near their homes, identifying factors that discouraged walking (potholes, dark places, etc.) or encouraged it (clear sidewalks, attractive gardens, etc.). Nearly 400 completed surveys of city blocks, public staircases, lanes, and park paths were given to CURA for analysis.

Research questions:

- What are the primary concerns residents identified in the places where they walk?
- Are these concerns clustered in any way?
- How can these concerns be addressed or prevented?

Key results to date:

CURA created a detailed index of the completed surveys in order to summarize and understand residents’ concerns. The key findings were as follows:

- Concerns about maintenance (e.g., poor pavement quality, need for tree trimming) were by far the most frequent (Figure 1);
- Concerns about vehicle speed and behaviour (e.g., cars driving too quickly or failing to come to a complete stop at stop signs) were also frequent;
- By comparison, there were fewer concerns about cyclist behaviour, and relatively few respondents identified a need for bike lanes or facilities;
- There were moderate concerns about intersection design, from the point of view of safety (e.g., visibility, crosswalk placement) and comfort (e.g., need for shade trees or benches);
- A moderate number of respondents identified aspects of Westmount’s walking environment that work well, particularly attractive private gardens, public parks, and streets that feel safe;
- There were relatively few concerns about pedestrian crossings (e.g., insufficient time to cross, need for a pedestrian signal) and seasonal or weather-related hazards (e.g., ice/water build-up).

Next steps:

A report on the most urgent issues has already been provided to Westmount’s Public Works department. Further analysis will involve creating maps to examine whether (and where) the concerns are clustered and discuss strategies to address them.