

Tips on Leading a Walk Audit

Walk audits (or walkabouts) are facilitated walks for an interdisciplinary group of community stakeholders, often led by a design expert, with the following potential goals:

- **Education.** Guides people to *experience* and assess the physical activity and healthy eating “friendliness” of an area, not just look at it theoretically.
- **Inspiration.** Helps leaders and policy makers to explore what could be possible.
- **Practical planning.** Outstanding way to get everyone--professionals and not--actively involved in project or policy development, valuing each person’s input.

Participants. Anyone who can influence or is affected by the built environment: Planners, public works, engineers, architects and landscape architects, public health and safety, school officials; elected and appointed officials (city/county council, planning commission, school board); parents, children, elderly, people with disabilities,

Distance. Typically 0.5 to 2.0 miles; for a 30 to 90 minute walk, allowing time to stop for observation, discussion. A one-hour, roughly 1.5 mile walk can work very well.

Route. Should be determined ahead of time, and ideally pre-scouted by the facilitator. It should include a mix of supportive and challenging settings for healthy eating and active living, ideally with several safe (out of traffic) places for the group to stop and talk.

- Good e.g.: Park, trail, walk- & bike-friendly downtown, traffic calming (curb extensions, islands, raised crossings), community garden, farmer’s market.
- Bad e.g.: Wide roads, no crosswalks, speeding traffic; malls & sprawling subdivisions, fast food strip development.
- Surprises: Goat trails, bikes parked at trees or parking meters (or other evidence of user demand), overlooked gems (small neighborhood park or green grocer).

There are four major elements of the walk:

- **Introductions:** Should be brief. Needs to connect the group and understand the mix of perspectives.
- **Education/set-up.** This could be as much as an hour-long PowerPoint presentation on healthy community design. Or could be a 10 minute discussion of elements that participants offer as examples of what supports community health. But either way, start the walk by first thinking about what leads to healthier behaviors:
 - o A varied mix of land uses (live, work, shop, play, learn, pray close together).
 - o Good connections for pedestrian, bicycle, and transit use (sidewalks, trails, etc.)
 - o Functional, inviting site designs (buildings at the sidewalks, trees, benches, etc.)
 - o Safety and access for users of all ages, abilities, incomes (lights, traffic calming)
 - o Accessible, appealing, and affordable healthy food options.
- **The Walk.** Consider having participants use a 1 to 10 scoring system for considering the environment, 10 being the most health supporting, 1 the least. At occasional stops, have participants state their scores, and give examples of why it is what it is (“too much traffic, only a 4;” or “great trees & benches & lots of people, 8”). No right or wrong answers, just a device to help all to observe and share.
- **Discussion/planning.** Immediately following a walk is an ideal time to develop specific conceptual plans, project details, and ordinance recommendations.