

Tips on Leading a Walk Audit

Walk audits (or walkabouts) are facilitated walks for an interdisciplinary group of community stakeholders, often led by 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, everyone.

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).

Four major elements of the walk.

- **Introductions**, brief, 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 in 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.

A Select List of Resources for More Livable Communities.

- Active Living by Design program, Chapel Hill, NC; www.activelivingbydesign.org,
www.activelivingresearch.org. *Model programs & extensive on-line bibliography.*
- AmericaWalks, Boston, MA; www.americawalks.org
A coalition of ~50 local and regional pedestrian advocacy groups nationwide.
- Bikes Belong Coalition, Ltd., Brookline, MA; www.bikesbelong.org.
Coalition of bicycle industry supporters of more livable community efforts.
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa. *A site with tons of current data on health and physical activity, and promotional resources.*
- Complete Streets, Washington DC; www.completestreets.org. *National campaign to have all roads accommodate pedestrians, bicyclists, & transit as well as cars.*
- League of American Bicyclists, Washington, DC.; www.bikeleague.org.
National advocacy group advancing the Bike Friendly Communities program.
- Local Government Commission, Sacramento, CA; www.lgc.org
Huge library of practical planning and transportation guides, e.g. "Real Towns."
- National Center for Bicycling and Walking, Bethesda, MD; www.bikewalk.org. *Organizes the Pro Walk/Pro Bike conference every two years, great advocacy resources..*
- Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center, Chapel Hill, NC.; www.pedbikeinfo.org.. *Technical support for communities; walk- & bike-ability checklists, bike/ped facility design guides.*
- Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, Washington, DC.; www.railtrails.org. *Great help for trails advocates, including research supporting trails' benefits.*
- Rivers and Trails Conservation Assistance, a program of the National Park Service.;
www.nrc.nps.gov/rtca. *Provides technical support on trails and greenways.*
- Safe Routes to School programs; www.saferoutesinfo.org; www.saferoutespartnership.org.
Information on organizing events & national registry, and launching SRTS programs..
- Surface Transportation Policy Project, Washington, D.C. 202-466-2636, www.transact.org.
Publishes Mean Streets (loaded with pedestrian data).
- Victoria Transportation Policy Institute, Victoria, BC; www.vtpi.org. *Invaluable transport data.*
- The Walkable & Livable Communities Institute, www.walklive.org. *Training Institute of Dan Burden, walkability guru, "building leaders to rebuild the world's communities."*
- Books by Mark Fenton:
THE COMPLETE GUIDE TO WALKING FOR HEALTH, WEIGHT LOSS, AND FITNESS (Lyons Press, 2001). *A comprehensive guide with a detailed one-year walking program.*
PEDOMETER WALKING (Lyons Press, 2006). *Perfect beginners guide to using a pedometer.*
WALKING THROUGH PREGNANCY & BEYOND (Lyons Press, 2006) *by Mark & Lisa Fenton.*