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. Can include a mix of supportive and challenging (good & bad, below) settings for healthy eating and active living, with 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, giant parking lots, no bike racks, 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:
  - A varied mix of land uses (live, work, shop, play, learn, pray in close together).
  - Good connections for pedestrian, bicycle, and transit use (sidewalks, trails, etc.)
  - Functional, inviting site designs (buildings at the sidewalks, trees, benches, etc.)
  - Safety and access for users of all ages, abilities, incomes (lights, traffic calming)
  - 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.


AmericaWalks, Washington, DC; www.americawalks.org
The nation’s leading pedestrian advocacy and education organization.

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.

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, and great monthly on-line newsletter.

Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center, Chapel Hill, NC.; www.pedbikeinfo.org.. Technical support for communities; walk- & bike-ability checklists, bike/ped facility design guides.


Safe Routes to School programs; www.saferoutesinfo.org; www.saferoutespartnership.org. Information on organizing events & national registry, and launching SRTS programs.

Victoria Transportation Policy Institute, Victoria, BC; www.vtpi.org. Invaluable position papers and research on transportation demand management and land use.

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.