



Tips on Leading the Obesity Summit Walk Audit

Note: These instructions were provided to Obesity Summit walk audit leaders and are based on tips and instructions provided by Mark Fenton. We have also added breakout discussion questions, in case these are helpful to your community conversations. If you use the tips to help develop walk audit instructions for your own community stakeholders, please credit Mark Fenton as the original source of this information. Thanks to everyone who participated in the walk audit sessions at the summit, and best wishes on promoting community health through “sticky design” in your own communities!

Walk audits (or walkabouts) are facilitated walks for an interdisciplinary group of community stakeholders 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 stakeholders, leaders, policy makers explore what could be *possible*, especially in their own communities.
- **Practical planning.** Outstanding way to get everyone--professionals and not--actively involved in *project and policy development*, valuing each person’s input.

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

Distance. Most of the selected routes for the Obesity Summit are 1.5 miles over 75-90 minutes, although there is one challenging 2.0 mile route, as well as a couple of shorter (0.75 mile, 0.50 mile) routes. Mark recommends routes of 0.5 to 2.0 miles, and a 30 to 90 minute walk, allowing time to stop for observation and discussion. A one-hour, 1.5 mile walk can work well.

Route. The Obesity Summit routes were pre-scouted and determined ahead of time. Maps of each route were provided. We attempted to select routes with a variety of community features (business/retail, residential, schools, churches, bus stop, park/recreation, etc.) We also attempted for each route to include a mix of supportive and challenging settings for active living and access to healthy foods, ideally with safe (out of traffic) places for the group to stop and talk.

- Supportive examples: Sidewalks, park, trail, walk- & bike-friendly downtown, traffic calming (curb extensions, islands, raised crossings), neighborhood garden/farmer’s market, advertising of healthy food options.
- Challenging examples: No crosswalks, speeding traffic, no/poor-condition sidewalks; giant parking lots, limited access to recreation areas, strip development; limited access or safety concerns for children or persons with mobility limitations; communications/messaging promoting unhealthy options.
- Surprises: “Goat” trails, evidence of user demand for more walkability/bikeability (e.g., bikes parked at trees or parking meters), overlooked gems (small neighborhood green space or unexpected messaging promoting healthy living).

Four Major Elements of the Walk Audit

1. **Education/set-up.** In the plenary session, Mark provided a brief introduction of what supports community health and healthier behaviors, particularly increased physical activity and access to healthy foods. Use questions and discussion prompts to remind participants of these four key elements of “community health through sticky design” throughout the walk.
 - **A varied mix of land uses** (live, work, shop, play, learn, pray in close proximity).
 - **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).
 - *While implied within the above elements, summit participants were encouraged to specifically consider: Accessible, appealing, and affordable healthy food options.*
2. **Introductions.** Brief, to connect the group and understand the mix of perspectives. Discuss the three rules.
 - 1) **Be safe.** For example, don't just follow the person in front of you across the street; check the signal. Use good judgment, look out for yourself and one another. When we stop to talk, step out of the way so others walking past aren't forced into the roadway.
 - 2) **Look through the eyes of all users.** Think of a much younger or older person in this setting; someone in a wheelchair, on crutches, or pushing a stroller; someone who is blind or visually impaired. Consider how it works for all potential users of the setting. Be especially aware of the traffic and how local folks are interacting with the environment. Do you even see pedestrians, cyclists, and transit users? Where do they walk or ride or cross the street? How does traffic respond?
 - 3) **Rate the environment.** Have participants use a 1 to 10 scoring system for considering the environment, 10 being the most health supporting, 1 the least. Consider all aspects: physical activity, nutrition, and healthy messaging. Quality sidewalks in good repair may raise the score, while it's lowered by overgrown bushes forcing you into the street. Lots of fast food outlets or convenience stores may be a negative, a farmers market a positive. Be prepared to share your score at any time, and share what factors are making it higher or lower.
3. **The Walk.** 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 out walking, 8”). No right or wrong answers, just a device to help all to observe and share.
4. **Discussion/planning.** Immediately following a walk, participants may take a brief break or look at the posters, then reconvene with their groups in the breakout action sessions to discuss their observations and how they will take back what they learned to their own communities. Two or three walking groups may be combined into a breakout session group. Suggested discussion questions are on the last page.

Typical Questions about Facilitating a Walk Audit

What if the weather is challenging—rainy, snow on the ground, etc.? I encourage folks to dress and mentally prepare for any typical conditions for that time of year. For example, snow is common in much of the country, and people still have to get to work, kids to school, etc. So why not get out and see what they are up against--un-cleared sidewalks? Snow piled in crosswalks? Bike parking that is out in the open, un-covered and un-protected? Transit stops without shelters? These are real-world conditions we should be forced to confront. Obviously horrific weather (hail, dangerous lightning) would keep us inside, but that's all. Just in case I often prepare a "virtual" walk audit, going out ahead of time and taking photos of our planned route which we can show and discuss as we would a real-live walk.

What if our meeting or event is occurring in an area that is very unappealing or unfriendly to walking? Regarding location, I am similarly hesitant to use that as a reason not to go for a walk audit. No matter how unsavory, someone actually works in the location where you'll be meeting, and no doubt they should still be able to get 30 or more minutes of physical activity a day, and to have access to healthy food choices. If there is no place reasonable to walk and no healthy food available within walking distance, then we're seeing a very real world example of the environment that many US residents face every day. Thus, if the meeting setting is not very conducive to walking, all the more reason to venture out and ask the question: How do we stop building stuff like this, and make places that are likely to be more supportive of routine physical activity?

Obesity Summit Breakout Action Session Overview

- **Community Design to Support Healthy Behaviors**
 - [Healthy Kansans 2020*](#): Promote community design to support healthy behaviors
 - **Nutrition and Access to Healthy Foods**
 - [Healthy Kansans 2020*](#): Increase access to healthy foods
 - **Safe and Active Transport To School**
 - [Healthy Kansans 2020*](#): Promote and support active transport policies and programs, including walk to school, walking school bus, Safe Routes to School, etc.
 - **Worksite Wellness**
 - [Healthy Kansans 2020*](#): Increase support for policies and programs that expand access to healthy foods in worksites... Increase opportunities for physical activity in worksites...
- *See [Healthy Kansans 2020 Handouts](#) for additional detail*

Recall Walk Audit Observation Elements

1. **A varied mix of land uses** (live, work, shop, play, learn, pray in close proximity).
2. **Network of facilities - Good connections for pedestrian, bicycle, and transit use** (sidewalks, trails, etc.)
3. **Functional, inviting site designs** (buildings at the sidewalks, trees, benches, etc.)
4. **Safety and access for users of all ages, abilities, incomes** (lights, traffic calming).

*For specific consideration related to access to healthy foods: **Accessible, appealing, and affordable healthy food options.***

Breakout Action Session Discussion Questions

The breakout sessions will take place following the walk audits to give participants an opportunity to reflect on what they saw during the walk audit, as well as consider opportunities for improvement in their own communities. A facilitator and recorder will be assigned to each session.

Breakout session instructions

- Introduce Healthy Kansans 2020 focus area/strategy for each breakout group.
- What are examples of the following that you observed on your walk today:
 - Supportive elements?
 - Challenging elements?
 - Surprises?
- Think about your own community. Give an example of the following in your own community:
 - Supportive?
 - Opportunities?
- Discuss: Share concrete ideas with each other for promoting supportive elements, opportunities for overcoming challenging elements in our own communities.
- Considering HK2020 focus area/strategy, lessons learned on walk audit, and discussion today, what is *one* specific, concrete step forward you could take on returning to your own community toward improving health and reducing obesity in a sustainable way (e.g. starting revolving loan fund to get sidewalks repaired rather than a one-time funding effort to repair)?

Group should be ready to report out:

- Your Healthy Kansans 2020 focus area/strategy
- Supportive element in participants' communities
 - One common theme (e.g., many communities may identify sidewalks or great parks as a supportive element)
 - One unique, supportive element noted by a community that others wish they had (e.g., community has a superintendent that walks with kids to school, created culture of active transport, and 70% of the kids walk or bike to school)
- Example of challenging elements & opportunities for improvement in participants' communities
 - One common challenge/theme (e.g., sidewalks are old and in disrepair, no funds to fix)
 - One uniquely important challenge/opportunity for improvement that is worthy of attention (e.g., parks & rec department supports traditional "rectangular" parks only, no current interest in or support for developing connecting trails or lanes)
- Action steps in participants' communities
 - One "low hanging fruit" action step (e.g., painting bike lanes in one area)
 - One high impact action step (e.g., update zoning ordinance to reduce sprawl and encourage more walkable neighborhoods)
 - The wildest, coolest idea for an action step (e.g., car-free zone within 2 blocks of elementary school)