

AARP Walk Audit Tool Kit LEADER GUIDE

How to host a walkability
workshop and community walk audit

aarp.org/walk-audit



AARP Walk Audit Tool Kit Leader Guide

Walkable communities promote health, foster a sense of connection and community among residents, and provide an overall sense of place and belonging that helps make a neighborhood livable for people of all ages and life stages.

Walkability workshops and **community walk audits** provide a way for AARP state offices, local community groups, concerned citizens and others to assess an area's walkability by observing how pedestrians and drivers use a particular street or intersection, recording information about that use and then, if needed, making a case to the community and local leaders for change.

The **AARP Walk Audit Tool Kit Leader Guide** builds upon the **AARP Walk Audit Tool Kit**, a step-by-step self-service guide for assessing a community's walkability.

This guide helps a community leader or group conduct a larger-scale walkability event consisting of a workshop and an on-the-ground walk audit in which teams of volunteers observe and document the use and safety of local streets.

The guide is organized as follows:

- 1. What to Do BEFORE the Workshop and Walk Audit**
- 2. What Happens DURING the Workshop and Walk Audit**
- 3. Things to Do AFTER the Workshop and Walk Audit**

The Walk Audit Tool Kits focus on making observations that require relatively simple solutions to improve walkability. However, improvements toward walkability and livability often entail more complex considerations such as land use, redevelopment, road design and infrastructure. The walk audit work of community residents and leaders can often achieve a greater impact by using the results in support of efforts to establish so-called Complete Streets or Safe Streets policies, as well as legislation to help ensure that streets are designed and renovated for the benefit of all users — pedestrians, bicyclists, public transit riders — instead of only those driving or riding in motor vehicles.

We encourage you to adapt the tool kit for your own workshop and walk audit needs. If you have questions or comments about this resource, please let us know by writing to us at livable@aarp.org.

► What to Do **BEFORE** the Workshop and Walk Audit

The following steps and tasks will need to be done by the event coordinator or, if multiple people or organizations are involved, by an event committee or working group.

1 DETERMINE WHERE TO “AUDIT”

Identify and map the chosen walkable areas. These locations could be in residential neighborhoods or near places of worship, a shopping center or a community center.

The area to audit could also be a spot where pedestrians have been hit by vehicles in the past or where there is a known safety problem. A walkable area can be as small as one intersection or it might include several streets and intersections.

When choosing which areas to survey consider how extensive the needed improvements will be. If a complex solution or costly construction will be required, walk audit participants may feel that their efforts are unlikely to result in any change. Sometimes areas that will benefit greatly from simple solutions are great and inspiring walk audit locations.

If this is your community’s first walk audit, or if volunteer participation may be light, consider starting small with one or two intersections and a connecting street and pursuing the areas that can be improved via simple solutions. The workshop and walk audit event can then serve as a stepping-stone for building a coalition and moving forward toward more comprehensive solutions.

2 CHOOSE A DATE AND TIME FOR THE WORKSHOP AND WALK AUDIT

Think about whom you want to participate in the event and what you want them to see. Knowing your “who” and “what” will be key to whether you schedule the event for a weekday versus a weekend, during school hours or rush hour, daytime or evening, etc.

3 FIND AND RESERVE A WORKSHOP SPACE

While the walk audit portion of the event will of course take place outdoors and in the streets, the workshop activities that will happen before and after the walk audit will be held indoors.

You’ll need a space large enough to accommodate the anticipated number of attendees. That space should comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and have bathrooms available for attendees to use. A typical workshop location would be a city hall, community center, school or recreation center. The meeting space should be within a reasonable walking distance of the walk audit area. If this isn’t possible, you’ll need to arrange transportation.

4 CHECK FURNITURE, FOOD, TECHNOLOGY

Make sure that whatever workshop space you select has seating and that the seating can be arranged in a style of your choosing (e.g., classroom, theater-style or horseshoe).

You’ll need at least two tables, one for people to sign in when they arrive and another for refreshments. A third table can hold any supplies (clipboard, pens, audit sheets, etc.) you’ll be providing to participants.

A big must is to arrange for, set up and test in advance any audiovisual equipment you’ll need: a projector, laptop computer, screen, extension cords, podium, sound system, etc.

5

SEND THE INVITATIONS

Inviting the right people to your event — neighbors, civic leaders, and key governmental, nonprofit and institutional contacts — will increase the impact of the workshop. It also helps make follow-up actions easier because the people who can help make improvements will be part of the process all along.

Inviting community members who have physical disabilities or baby strollers in tow can help the walk audit teams identify real-world barriers to mobility. You can also provide walk audit team members with mobility aids such as walkers or crutches to encourage them to be sensitive to mobility barriers.

If possible, ask invitees to RSVP to your invitation or register if they intend to participate. You can give people the option of participating in only the workshop if they don't want to or can't participate comfortably in the walk audit.

The invitation and/or your confirmation response should include information about the physical expectations of the walk audit and instruct participants about what supplies (e.g., a backpack or tote bag, hat, sunscreen, sunglasses) they should bring.

Be sure to have contact information for each registrant so you can get in touch if, due to weather or an unforeseen event, the workshop and/or walk audit need to be canceled or rescheduled.

Here's a list of the types of organizations and people to invite to make your workshop and walk audit efforts a success:

- Local community groups and civic associations
- Neighbors of all walking ability levels
- Representatives from local AARP chapters
- Advocacy or volunteer organizations such as environmental and health groups
- Disability rights/advocacy organizations
- PTAs or PTOs (Parent Teacher Associations or Parent Teacher Organizations)
- Walking clubs
- Bicycling clubs
- Running clubs
- College-based student-service organizations
- Faith organizations
- Local business representatives (such as from the Chamber of Commerce, the president of the largest private employer in the region, the head of the tourism council)
- Members from a Main Street group, downtown development authority or business development district
- Staff from the state or local engineering, public works, health, aging, parking, planning, transportation, and parks and recreation departments (such as those with the titles director, traffic engineer, planner, walk-bike coordinator, Americans with Disabilities Act coordinator)
- Safe Routes to School (SRTS) coordinator
- Members of a metropolitan planning organization
- Elected or appointed government officials (mayor, city council, city manager, county manager, councilperson)
- Local law enforcement (police, fire, EMS)
- Other safety organizations

6 RECRUIT VOLUNTEERS TO BE “WALK AUDIT CAPTAINS”

Walk audit captains are important to the success of your workshop. Assuming that your audit won't involve just one group or location, these volunteers will be responsible for each of your walk audit teams from the time they leave the meeting location until they return.

You will need to recruit one walk audit captain per walk audit team. (The responsibilities of these individuals are detailed in the “Walk Audit Captain's Guide,” which begins later in this tool kit.) Estimate the number of walk audit teams — and captains — based on the number of walkable areas you want to cover.

The walk audit captains do not need prior knowledge to lead their teams effectively. However, they do need to be comfortable guiding others and be willing to carry out the duties you assign.

Before the event, try to share the captain's guide pages with your chosen team leaders so they'll know how to prepare for the audit and how to lead their assigned volunteers. Send each captain the guide, the walk audit checklists and a map of his or her assigned area.

It's a good idea to meet with your captains ahead of the event so you can review duties with them and answer any questions. The ideal is to have a pre-workshop meeting on a day other than that of the workshop. If that's not possible, ask the captains to arrive at the workshop an hour or so before the participants do.

7 PREPARE THE WALK AUDIT TEAMS

Ideally, each team should have five to 10 participants — one or two for each distinct checklist in the **AARP Walk Audit Tool Kit**. There's no maximum number of participants per walk audit team.

Team Assignments:

- Crossing Streets and Intersections
- Sidewalks
- Driver Behavior
- Safety
- Comfort and Appeal

You may want to spread the participation of any special guests and influencers, such as city officials or business leaders, among all the audit teams. Other special considerations include:

- Which walkable areas do you want certain participants to see most?
- Which participants might have interests in particular locations?
- Which participants can best help the community reimagine streetscapes?
- Which participants can best help solve the problems the teams may find?

After finalizing your participant list or wish list, write an audit team number on each name tag. This will make it easy to assemble the teams in their appropriate meeting spots during the workshop.

8

CREATE OUTREACH MATERIALS AND A SOCIAL MEDIA PLAN

Supplemental materials at the end of this guide provide a sample invitation and media advisory that you can customize.

To use social media most effectively, organizations need to do more than disseminate information. The real power of social media lies in the ability to generate dialogue and engage people in discussion.

If you, your organization or local partners already have active social media platforms such as Facebook or Twitter, use them to begin a discussion about walkability and to generate interest in the workshop.

If a strong social media presence doesn't already exist for you or those involved, trying to build a following in advance of the workshop is unlikely to produce meaningful results.

9

DEVELOP THE AGENDA

Plan for approximately three hours to stage the entire event from the "Welcome" when people arrive for the workshop through to the "Debriefing" after the walk audit is done.

A key time variable will be the walk audit. It will take from 30 minutes to an hour to complete the full walk audit. Add time as appropriate for travel to and from the audit area (as well as for restroom stops before and after).

10

PREPARE THE PRESENTATION

To get your attendees up to speed about issues related to walkability, it's helpful to present a short video or PowerPoint slideshow that explains the goals of the event and the walk audit and what will occur during the time they're with you. This presentation can include:

- Data on pedestrian and motor vehicle fatalities in the area

- Walking and bicycling data
- A history or pertinent information about the area where the walk audit will occur
- Photographs of the streets the group will be visiting
- Photographs that show examples of pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly infrastructure
- The first slide can be an outline of the event's agenda with times noted for each activity
- The last slide should contain your contact information both during and after the event

11

ORDER OR GATHER SUPPLIES

Collect the following items as needed for use during the walk audit.*

For each participant:

- A street map of the area where the walk audit will occur. (You can print a map from Google Earth or other online mapping site and then highlight the streets to cover.)
- Printouts of the walk audit survey checklists
- A clipboard and notepaper
- A pen
- A reflective vest (optional but recommended)
- A hat and sunscreen (if needed))
- A bottle of cold water

Team captains should be equipped with:

- A digital camera (such as on a smartphone)
- A stopwatch to time traffic signals
- Mobility aids such as walkers, crutches and/or canes (optional)

*The items you provide should be returned to you.

► What Happens **DURING** the Workshop and Walk Audit

1

INTRODUCTION

Welcome the audience, and thank your facility hosts and organizers. Introduce any special guests and explain their roles. It may be appropriate to have them say a few words as well. You can have the audience do self-introductions, stating their name, any agency affiliations and why they were interested in participating. You can also conduct a brief icebreaker exercise if you like.

2

THE PRESENTATION

Your slides or introductory remarks should include instructions for the participants on how to conduct the walk audit and how to assemble into teams. After the presentation, let the walk audit captains take the lead. You can accompany a survey team or stay behind to remain at the workshop location.

3

THE WALK AUDIT

Team captains and volunteers head out to their assigned locations to conduct the audits. Please refer to the accompanying **AARP Walk Audit Tool Kit** for the details of how the walk audit is conducted.

4

THE DEBRIEFING

a. When the participants return to the workshop room, ask them to confer with their audit teammates to share their observations and feedback. Ask the groups questions such as:

- What kind of road users did you see? (e.g., ages, levels of mobility and ways of getting around, such as by using wheelchairs, walkers, bicycles, skateboards, baby strollers, etc.)
- What did you see that works well?
- What did you see that needs improvement?
- Did anyone see specific perils for pedestrians?

b. Give the walk audit teams about 20 minutes to huddle and use their audit checklists to:

- Rate the walkability of each section of their audit
- Rate the overall walkability of their audit area
- List the biggest priority areas for improvement
- List the easy fixes (e.g., repairing broken pavement on a sidewalk)
- List the difficult fixes (e.g., moving a telephone pole obstruction from a sidewalk)

c. Ask the participants to hand their surveys to their team captain, who can report on:

- The location of the area surveyed
- The overall walkability ratings
- The top desired improvements

Now that participants have determined their audit area ratings, you can display slides or a computer screen as you go online to calculate the Livability Score — from the **AARP Livability Index** (AARP.org/livabilityindex) — of the streets visited during the walk audit. You can also show the Walk Score ratings of the locations ([from walkscore.com](http://walkscore.com)).

Do participants agree or disagree, and why?

NOTE: *Walk Scores are based on nearby amenities such as schools, stores, parks and restaurants. The score does not account for factors such as street and community design, safety from crime and crashes, topography (such as hills) and weather.*

5 NEXT STEPS

Early in your workshop planning, consider what general actions you may want to take to improve walkability. Once you finish discussing the findings, talk with the workshop participants, guests and larger coalition to discuss the next steps.

Staff from transportation and planning agencies can be especially helpful in shaping productive ideas to address issues found during the walk audit. Publicly ask the decision makers who are present to follow through with improvements, and commend them for their offers of assistance.

EXAMPLE: The AARP Arkansas state office handled its discussion of findings and next steps by facilitating a 90-minute debriefing. In small groups, participants identified specific projects and then gathered projects into clusters by sticking notes on a wall. By the time the debriefing concluded, the participants had reached consensus about their goals and priorities. The AARP state office then worked with its coalition partners to prepare a "Pathway Improvement Plan" for community review and incorporation into the community's master street plan.

6 ADJOURNMENT

NOTES:

► Things to Do **AFTER** the Workshop and Walk Audit

This section provides options for follow-up activities that can improve walkability. Which activities should you choose? Consider:

- The extent of the changes needed
- The amount of support for the changes being sought
- The amount of support for implementing changes
- The finances required to make the changes
- The time frame for making the changes
- The level of effort you and others are prepared to invest

Given those considerations, use the following activities as a starting point to determine which course of action may work best for your community and circumstances:

1. Contact city officials and others who offered assistance at the workshop or sent staff.
2. Hold a meeting with transportation or planning officials to consider how best to make improvements and whether plans for road design or development can be created or modified.
3. Compile data, maps and photos from the walk audits into a report to present to the appropriate body (e.g., the city council or agency boards) that can take action.
4. Work with local leaders to push for needed changes, articulate desires and draft and adopt a plan for community improvements such as sidewalks or bike lanes.
5. Seek to develop new (or strengthen existing) Complete Streets policies for decision makers and agencies to consider so all road users will be accommodated in future plans. (The National Complete Streets Coalition — completestreets.org — offers workshops on how to more effectively balance the needs of all users and routinely create and maintain complete streets.)
6. Work with local and regional committees that can promote the implementation of identified improvements. Examples of committees include transportation, aging and disabilities commissions and citizen advisory committees to the metropolitan planning organization (MPO) or local government.
7. Form a committee to determine a comprehensive approach to improving walkability, including considerations about land use and redevelopment.
8. Stay in touch with workshop participants to keep the momentum moving forward. Use the workshop sign-in sheet and invitation list to keep supporters engaged and connected.
9. Continue outreach efforts to the rest of the community.

► The **WALK AUDIT** Captain's Guide

Your Walkability Workshop Event Coordinator is:

Name _____

Contact Info _____

Your Walk Audit Team Number is _____

Thank you for volunteering as a walk audit captain. Your participation will help everyone on your team have a great experience as you work toward the goal of enhancing community walkability. This two-page guide explains your duties as a team captain. Some details may change, so when in doubt, check with your event coordinator.

You can discuss your duties and any questions with your event coordinator at a meeting on:

DATE: _____

TIME: _____

LOCATION: _____

❑ YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES

At the walkability workshop, one or more teams will be formed to conduct a walk audit. As a team captain, you are responsible for the team from the time it leaves the meeting location until it returns. You will lead team members as they jointly make observations about roadway features that work well and features that can be improved.

❑ HOW TO PREPARE

Your event coordinator will provide you with a map of the walkable survey area and a copy of the walk audit document. Your team members may not be familiar with the survey area, and they almost certainly will not be familiar with the walk audit checklist, so please review it well. If you have time, walk the mapped area ahead of time and consider any features you may want to point out to your team. The walk audit document will help you steer the team toward the types of observations that will be helpful. You may need to point out some initial observations to help

participants get their feet wet before they start making observations on their own. A presentation will be given at the walkability workshop that will further explain what to look for and how to complete the walk audit documents.

❑ HOW SURVEY TEAMS ARE FORMED

Each participant will have a number on his or her name tag that corresponds to a walk audit team. For example, if you are leading Audit Team #1, after the workshop presentation, the event coordinator will ask participants with #1 on their tag to join you in a designated spot in the meeting room.

Depending on the number of participants, you will assign them to take charge of or partner on various sections of the **AARP Walk Audit Tool Kit**. There is no maximum number of participants per team.

❑ SUPPLIES AND MATERIALS

The event coordinator will provide you with several items to distribute and use during the walk audit.

(All nonpersonal items should be returned to the event coordinator.)

For each participant:

- A street map of the walk audit area
- Printouts of the walk audit checklists
- A clipboard
- Notepaper
- A pen
- A reflective vest (optional but recommended)
- A bottle of cold water

Team captains should be equipped with:

- A digital camera (such as on a smartphone)
- A stopwatch to time traffic signals
- Mobility aids such as walkers, crutches and/or canes (optional)

❑ INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE WALK AUDIT TEAMS

Assign an individual or team to each of the five assignment areas in the **AARP Walk Audit Tool Kit**. Give a clipboard, paper and pen (total of four each) to each team. If your audit area covers an intersection with a traffic signal or crosswalk signal, give the stopwatch to someone assigned to *Assignment #1: Crossing Streets and Intersections*, so that person can time the signals and record the data.

- Assign someone to take photos with the digital camera
- Let team members know that everyone can have a “job”
- Take a moment to ask if there are any questions about the survey
- Guide the volunteers to the walkable area
- Keep track of the time and get the volunteers back by the assigned return time

Help the team conduct a successful survey by:

- Guiding the team through the walk audit document, answering questions, pointing out problems and suggesting photos
- Identifying features that work well and those that need improvement until participants “get their feet wet” and start making their own observations
- Encouraging input from all participants
- Suggesting that participants try out mobility aids if available
- Taking photographs of good and not-so-good roadway features
- Reminding participants to be safe and stay alert to their surroundings
- Making sure participants return to the workshop meeting location on time

❑ AFTER THE WALK AUDIT

Your event coordinator will lead a debriefing session to help determine the next steps for the findings from the walk audit. During this session, your team will huddle to rate your walk audit area. You will be asked to report on the team’s findings.

Thank you for your help and attention!

▶ About **SIDEWALKS**

- Eight in 10 Americans prefer being in a community that offers sidewalks and good places to walk.
- Six in 10 people prefer a neighborhood that features a mix of houses, shops and services within an easy walk versus a neighborhood that requires a car for every errand.
- People who live in neighborhoods with sidewalks are 47 percent more likely than residents of areas without sidewalks to be active at least 39 minutes a day.
- Sidewalks play a vital role in community life. As conduits for pedestrian movement and access, they enhance connectivity and promote walking. As public spaces, sidewalks are the front steps to the community, activating streets socially and economically.
- Safe, accessible, well-maintained sidewalks are a fundamental community investment that enhances public health and maximizes social capital.
- Sidewalks increase foot traffic in retail centers, delivering the customers that local shops and restaurants need in order to thrive. Retail properties with a Walk Score ranking of 80 out of 100 were valued 54 percent higher than those with a Walk Score of 20 and had an increase in net operating income of 42 percent.
- Interest in sidewalks is so keen that they've become a factor in home prices. For example, in a scenario where two houses are nearly identical, the one with a five-foot-wide sidewalk and two street trees not only sells for \$4,000 to \$34,000 more but also sells in less time.
- A well-constructed sidewalk for a typical 50-foot-wide residential property might cost a builder \$2,000, but it can return 15 times that investment in resale value. According to a 2009 CEOs for Cities report, even a one-point increase in a community's Walk Score could increase home values by \$700 to \$3,000.

From the **AARP Livability Fact Sheet: Sidewalks**, by AARP Livable Communities and the Walkable and Livable Communities Institute | aarp.org/livability-factsheets

▶ All About **COMPLETE STREETS**

Complete Streets initiatives help communities spur economic development while accomplishing transportation objectives. Small rural towns and major metropolitan centers that have implemented Complete Streets elements have resulted in positive economic benefits for commerce and property owners in adjacent storefronts and surrounding neighborhoods.

- CEOs for Cities found that a one-point Walk Score increase increased the value of homes by as much as \$3,000.
- The Brookings Institution found that increased walkability has been associated with higher retail rents, values and sales.
- Hamburg, New York's, Complete Streets initiative that focused on Main Street resulted in \$7 million in investment in 33 new building projects and doubled property values.
- The Iowa Bicycle Coalition estimates that bicycling generated more than \$400 million in economic activity in the state, which included direct expenditures on bicycle products and services as well as economic activity resulting from bicycle trips. In addition, bicycling generated roughly \$87 million in health savings statewide from improved resident fitness and decreased health care expenditures.
- Arlington, Virginia's, decision to concentrate development around a public transit system that promoted walkability and multimodal travel has produced noticeable results. As of 2012, \$27.5 billion of the county's \$57.5 billion assessed land value was located along the two Washington, D.C., Metro corridors, which occupy only 11 percent of the county's land area. In addition, the number of jobs along these corridors grew from 22,000 in 1970 to 96,300 by 2011.
- Portland, Oregon, has begun replacing some on-street parking spaces with bicycle corrals. The replacements increase the customer parking on a street from 400 to 800 percent. (One bicycle corral taking up one auto parking spot allows for 10 individual customers to park their bicycles.) Sixty-seven percent of business owners said they saw an increase in foot and bike traffic after the placement of bicycle corrals.
- Fifty-five percent of millennials and 42 percent of boomers want public transportation options.

From **The Livability Economy: People, Places and Prosperity** | aarp.org/livable-economy

▶ Sample **INVITATION LETTER**

Help make **Town/City Name** a safer, easier place to walk. Join our Walkability Workshop and Community Walk Audit

Dear Addressee:

Date

A walkable community is a healthy, thriving place in which people of all ages and abilities can get where they need and want to go.

Organization Name is hosting a Walkability Workshop and Community Walk Audit

Date: _____

Times: _____ to _____

Location: _____

We would be delighted to have you and your staff (if an official) participate. The purpose of the workshop is to make **Town/City Name** a safer, more walkable community.

As part of the workshop, we will break into teams to visit and rate nearby roadways and locations by asking and answering questions such as:

- Can pedestrians safely and easily walk on the sidewalks?
- Do pedestrians have enough time to get across the street?
- Are there spots where pedestrians should be able to walk or cross but can't?

We will only walk a short distance. Please wear comfortable clothes, and be prepared for changeable weather (umbrella, sunglasses, etc.). After the walk audit we will serve refreshments and discuss our collective findings.

We hope you will join us and work with the other participants to make **Town/City Name** a more walkable community.

For additional information about the workshop or to volunteer or register, please contact **Name** at **Phone** or **Email**.

Sincerely,

Ending for officials/special guests: Your participation will greatly add to the success of the event. We hope you will join us and work together to make **Town/City Name** a more walkable community for people of all ages. Please let me know by date if you can attend. Feel free to contact me at **Phone** or **Email** with any questions.

Sincerely,

▶ Sample **MEDIA ADVISORY**

Date

Contact Name, Title

Phone

Email

Organization Name Hosting a Workshop to Make **Town/City Name** More Walkable

Organization is holding a Walkability Workshop to make **Town/City Name** a safer community for pedestrians. Residents, local leaders, transportation officials and others will come together to survey and rate nearby sidewalks and streets, discuss findings and follow through to help people of all ages in **Town/City Name** get where they need and want to go.

WHAT: Workshop participants will visit and rate nearby roadways to evaluate and assess walkability, using a survey developed by AARP, by asking and answering questions such as:

- Can pedestrians safely and easily walk on the sidewalks?
- Do pedestrians have enough time to get across the street?
- Are there spots where pedestrians should be able to walk or cross but can't?

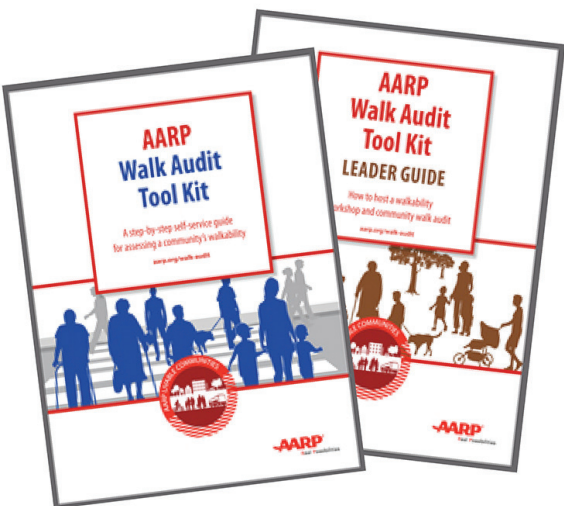
Results of the surveys will be shared with elected officials, policy makers, municipal planners and others concerned with making **Town/City Name** a safer, more comfortable and more livable community for people of all ages.

WHEN: Date and Time

WHERE: Address

FACT: According to AARP research, 40 percent of adults age 50 and older report inadequate sidewalks in their neighborhoods. Nearly 50 percent report that they cannot safely cross the main roads close to their home. Half of those who reported such problems said they would walk, bicycle or take the bus more often if the problems were fixed. About one-third of Americans do not drive, so pedestrian-friendly roadways are essential for people of all ages to both get around and to stay active and healthy.

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Available for download at [AARP.org/walk-audit](https://www.aarp.org/walk-audit)

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