

Topics for Group Discussion

It's not always obvious what is meant by 'walkability' but as soon as people start talking about fences, missing sidewalks, broken benches or the shortcuts that they use, it becomes clear and the suggestions start flowing. Holding group discussions with neighbours about local walking conditions builds connectedness between people and jogs their memories about certain places and routes where they walk.

When holding a group discussion make sure that someone is there to write the comments down. Consider taping the discussion and transcribing it, but remember, it's important to use a map or large drawing of your neighbourhood, including streets, parks and shops, so people can point to specific areas and features. The notetaker has to sometimes indicate in writing where people were pointing when they talk.

Confidentiality can be an issue for some in these discussions. People sometimes feel uncomfortable making observations about places they don't feel safe walking, for instance. Granting people anonymity could improve the quality of your discussion.

Get people to mark up maps and make their own drawings if necessary. Make sure you establish a welcoming feel at the discussions. People should feel that there is not a 'right' or 'wrong' answer, all opinions on what is working, not working, appealing or unappealing are welcome.

As a general guide, think of the group discussion as a way of getting people's ideas of:

- good and bad features of the walking environment
- how people use outdoor
- public spaces where people meet
- places people avoid
- what's missing from the neighbourhood, e.g. parks, malls, medical offices, etc
- what improvements can be made

Group Discussion Questions

PLACES YOU WALK

1. What is your favourite place to walk, why?
2. What is your least favorite place and why?
3. What are some beautiful places?
4. What are some ugly places?
5. Where do you have to walk but don't like going there?
6. Do people sit and chat in some areas? Where?

SHORTCUTS AND MISSING CONNECTIONS

7. Where are sidewalks missing?
8. Are there mudpaths where there should be paved paths? Where?
9. Do fences close off access in places you want to go? Where? (Poor connectivity)
10. Are there areas that you walk around rather than through even though it makes your walk longer?

TRAFFIC

11. Are there places where it is difficult to cross the street or traffic feels dangerous?
12. Are there traffic signals that are too long? too short?
13. Are there missing crosswalks anywhere? Where?
14. Are there clearly marked walking routes at nearby malls through parking lots?
15. Are bike lanes needed or wanted by residents?
16. Is there adequate and secure bike parking?

SAFETY AND SECURITY

17. Are there scary places that people avoid on foot? This may include places people hang out, where there are illicit activities, that are avoided at night, etc.
18. Are there places that need more lighting?
19. Are there places that have poor sightlines and feel confined?
20. Do fences make people feel unsafe or trapped?
21. Do people feel the sidewalks are wide enough to accommodate all users?
22. Do people encounter bicycles on the sidewalks?

Group Discussion Questions

CHILDREN

23. If you have children, do you let them walk around alone or unsupervised?
24. Can children walk safely to school alone?
25. Are there pleasant places for children to play nearby?
26. Are there any prohibitions on types of play or park usage?

AMENITIES AND STORES

27. Where do people buy groceries? Is it easy to get to these stores?
28. Are there nearby community centres? Libraries? Doctors Offices?
29. Are there walking paths through parking lots around the stores?
30. Are there places to sit and chat at the malls and shopping strips?
31. Are there any stores and services missing from the local area?

MAINTENANCE AND CLEANLINESS

32. Are there places where water pools and/or freezes?
33. What is it like walking in winter, is there adequate snow clearance?
34. Are there places people avoid because they smell or look dirty, ie: garbage bins and sewer smells?
35. Are there places where it's unkempt or unpleasant?

PARKS AND PUBLIC SPACES

36. Locate some parks and playgrounds where people go.
37. What are the general conditions of parks and playgrounds?
38. How are local parks used? What sports or activities predominate?
39. Are there adequate picnic tables and benches in public areas and parks?
40. Are there public washrooms in these spaces?
41. Are there shady areas to sit in the summer?
42. Are the open spaces around buildings used or fenced off?
43. Are there any community gardens, are more needed?
44. Are there ravine pathways that connect to the neighbourhood? Do people feel safe walking there?

Group Discussion Questions

TRANSIT

- 45.** How is the transit service working for people?
- 46.** Are there enough bus stops or subway stations?
- 47.** Are there bus shelters or benches at the stops?
- 48.** Do the bus stops feel safe/comfortable at night? During the day?