

WALKABLE COMMUNITY WALKSHOP HOW-TO GUIDE

Walkable communities are becoming the latest trend in real estate and REALTORS® need to be aware of how the demand for walkable communities impacts real estate and their business.

A walkable community is one where residents can walk, bike or take public transit (light rail, trolleys and/or buses) to grocery stores, shops, schools, work, cafés, markets, playgrounds and parks. Walkable communities have a mix of housing types as well as mixed-use buildings that combine residential, office, and retail. They can be high-rise urban neighborhoods, traditional downtowns and main streets, or suburban town centers.

Creating a More Walkable Community Planning Options

- ▶ **Host an Expert Speaker(s)/Forum:** Initiate a conversation by hosting a speaker or forum (multiple speakers) to discuss walkable communities and their benefits to a community; barriers and challenges to walkable communities and the next steps to take to make a community more walkable. NAR's [Smart Growth Grant](#) can help fund this activity.
- ▶ **Conduct a Walk Audit:** This is a tool that can be used to identify how walkable an area is (or isn't) in a community. A walk audit is a great way to engage the community and to initiate interest in making a neighborhood more walkable. Participants will walk along a pre-selected route to experience the walkability of an area and discuss the barriers and challenges they encounter during the walk. Walk audits usually have a leader who can point out elements and discuss what would make the area more walkable. Most states and localities have one or more experts who could conduct a walk audit. Several walk audits could be conducted in a community to see how neighborhoods compare to each other. A walk audit could lead to additional discussions on how to move forward on making a community more walkable. See one example of an [Walk Audit checklist](#). NAR's [Smart Growth Grant](#) could fund this if criteria are met.
- ▶ **Organize a Better Block Event:** [Better Block](#) is a process that empowers communities and their leaders to reshape the built environments to promote the growth of healthy and vibrant neighborhoods. It is a temporary (1-2 day) visioning event to imagine what a downtown or commercial corridor could become. A Better Block event could focus on making a downtown more walkable by demonstrating how basic improvements such as bike lanes, crosswalks, reduced traffic lanes, and widened sidewalks could transform an area for the better. NAR's Smart Growth Grant will fund a Better Block. Take a look at what the [Longleaf Pine REALTORS® did for their Better Block](#). Also see the [Build a Better Block Guide](#) for associations.
- ▶ **WalkShop/Walkable Community Workshop:** A session to gather stakeholders, neighborhood organizations, government officials, businesses and residents to learn about walkable communities; participate in a walk audit; engage in discussions as to what to do to make the area more walkable; and develop an action plan. A detailed description follows. NAR's [Smart Growth Grant](#) can help fund this activity.



Consumers' preference for walkability isn't just a trend but a structural change in the way many Americans see the American Dream.

Jeff Speck, city planner, urban designer, and author



More:

- [Walkable Communities Fact Sheet](#)
- [Walkable Communities for REALTORS® Overview Guide](#)
- [Advocating for a More Walkable Community Guide](#)
- [On Common Ground issue on Walkable Neighborhoods](#)
- [On Common Ground issue on WalkShops](#)

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WalkShop/Walkable Community Workshop

Walkable community workshops, or WalkShops, are a tool to assist communities in addressing their built environment to support better-connected, healthy, more sustainable places. The goal is to engage residents, technical and health practitioners, planners, community organizations, real estate professionals, local businesses, developers and builders, government staff and elected officials in discussions on how to make a community more walkable and develop an action plan to do so.

During a workshop, participants learn about walkable communities and identify conditions that affect walkability, connectivity, and their ability to meet daily needs through active living. Through interactive activities (i.e., a walk audit and table mapping), participants define and discuss how to make their community more walkable. The ideas that result from these conversations form an action plan including a set of recommendations with both short and long-term actions. Priorities are set and next steps are taken.

In 2016 and 2017, six local REALTOR® Associations conducted WalkShops which were funded by the National Association of REALTORS® as a special pilot project. While the pilot project is done, REALTOR® Associations can still conduct their own WalkShops using NAR's resources including our [Smart Growth Grant](#) and staff assistance.

Read about the:

- ▶ [WalkShop in Myrtle Beach, SC](#), where city leaders and the Coastal Carolinas REALTORS® are now working together to make the city safer and more walkable for residents and tourists.
- ▶ [WalkShop in Boise, ID](#), where Boise REALTORS® worked with local officials and stakeholders to see how Orchard Street, a busy, four lane road without a center turn lane, inadequate crossing options for foot traffic, limited-to-no parking, and missing sidewalks in a number of areas—making it unsafe for motorists and pedestrians, could be made more walkable.

This guide, based on walkable community workshop guides by WALC (while no longer in existence, the [Walkability Workbook](#) can still be downloaded) and [BlueZones](#), will give you a place to start when planning a WalkShop.

Five Key Planning Steps for a WalkShop

Allow at least 3 months to plan a successful WalkShop.

The effort should not end with the workshop. In order to create outcomes and opportunities for positive change, the partners should remain committed in the long-term to benefit the community's livability efforts.

1. Project Planning

- ▶ Identify key partners and form a project team
 - Key partners will help with the planning and organization of the WalkShop and support carrying the momentum forward post workshop.

Reasons to Consider a Neighborhood or Corridor for a WalkShop

- To reduce accidents and fatality rates
- To improve safe routes to school
- To better connect a neighborhood to downtown or town center
- To revitalize a failing main street or commercial corridor
- To improve the street network
- To introduce traffic calming measures
- To transform a strip-style form or suburban arterial into a walkable village
- To transform multi-lane roads, like commuter routes, to better serve and connect the community
- To ensure a planned development is in line with the community's vision for growth
- To improve connectivity to parks and open space
- To address Complete Streets, Living Streets or age-friendly design
- To focus on trail development

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- The project should align with at least one or two organizations—business, non-profit, school district, homeowners’ association, government agency, task force, or resident advocates—that already are advocating for more people- and business-friendly places.
 - Find organizations in the community who are already engaged in working towards more walkable and livable communities. Including organizations already established in the community will provide for a greater chance of success.
 - Get elected officials on board. Participation and commitment from city officials is especially important to effect real change.
 - Identify a project coordinator who will be the main point person in coordinating and organizing logistics, communicating with the team and conducting outreach.
- Identify a neighborhood/area to conduct a WalkShop.
- The community or study area can be a single neighborhood, a group of neighborhoods, a school area, a shopping center, commercial corridors, downtown, or specific street corridor.
 - Consider places that already have identified a desire for change and need a catalyst or assistance in getting started.
 - Are there any projects or initiatives underway or in the “pipeline” (street redesign, repair, repaving or restriping, new planned development, trails) where the workshop can be of benefit or help move forward?
 - Is a neighborhood or commercial corridor part of a larger long-term vision, plan, or strategy (i.e. comprehensive or general plan, pedestrian or bicycle master plan) aimed at shaping a community’s transportation, land use and/or growth.
 - Is there strong local leadership and clearly expressed desire for a model project in one community over another.
- Identify key workshop outcomes and objectives for the selected area. You can use these to measure success of the project.
- Identify a route for the Walk Audit (see sidebar).
- Submit [NAR Smart Growth Grant application](#) and find other funding sources for the WalkShop.
- Note: The 10% financial commitment from Association required for smart growth grant can be used for workshop fees such as facility rental, food, marketing, workshop materials, etc.

2. Event Logistics Planning

- Identify an expert to lead and conduct the WalkShop including the presentation, walk audit, table discussions.
- Many states and localities have established walking and biking strategies and would be a great source to identify potential speakers and experts to conduct a walk audit and lead a WalkShop.

The Walk Audit

The Walk Audit—or on-street mobile workshop—is a powerful educational tool that lets participants see, feel and hear the treatments and principles of walkability in action on their streets. Creative juices are sparked while walking together, often solving the most complex issues right on the street.

The key partners will identify half-mile to one-mile street network or corridors that would be good candidates for the audit route.

It is essential that local planning, public works or transportation departments take part in the walk audit.

Identify the walk audit route before the meeting location as the audit area may determine the best location for the meeting space.

It is often valuable for participants to role play and experience the walk from the perspective of someone in a wheelchair, using crutches or pushing a stroller. It will enhance the learning experience if any of these devices can be made available.

See one example of an [Walk Audit checklist](#).

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- Find out their fee and services rendered.
- Determine if you would like the consultant to create a set of recommendations after the WalkShop.
- NAR can provide some recommendations.
- ▶ Select the date for the workshop.
 - Determine how long you need for the workshop.
 - Select a date that allows time for the necessary coordination, outreach and preparation.
 - Make sure consultant is available.
 - Ensure key stakeholders are available and there are no other conflicts.
 - Send out a "save the date" to stakeholders as a reminder.
- ▶ Hold a workshop coordination call with the project team and consultant.
 - Describe study area's strengths and challenges.
 - Review workshop objectives.
 - Outline walk audit route.
 - Confirm date & location of workshop.
 - Discuss workshop agenda and activities.
 - Find out "homework" assignments (i.e. maps of area).
- ▶ Determine who to invite to WalkShop and send out Invitations.
 - 25- 40 attendees is an ideal number.
- ▶ Set up and manage attendee registration.
 - Contact them early in the process and update them regularly.
- ▶ Get the word out and promote.
 - Use social media. Post on Facebook and Twitter and other social media to begin the conversation about walkability and generate interest in the workshop.
 - Contact local news outlets. Conducting effective outreach to local papers, TV news channels and radio are not only important to the success of the workshop, but also to the success of any project undertaken as a result of the workshop.
 - See an example of a [promotional flyer](#).
- ▶ Secure a meeting space for the workshop.
 - The facility should be within walking distance of the walking audit route. Sometimes this is not possible and you will need to factor in additional time and resources for transport including securing a bus or trolley that can seat the anticipated maximum number of participants.

Community Stakeholders to Invite

- Mayor, City Council, planning commission, and other elected/appointed officials
- Government agency directors and/or key staff (state, city, and county)
- Transportation, Planning, Parks/Recreation, Public Works, Economic Development
- Community and advocacy organizations, such as an environmental or bicycle group, neighborhood and homeowners' associations
- Members of a Downtown Development Authority, Regional Planning Council, Main Street Organization, or Metropolitan Planning Organization
- Influential business, civic & cultural leaders
- Representatives from Chamber of Commerce
- Emergency responders including fire, police, and ambulance
- Health organizations focused on improving health and well-being
- Retailers, building owners, and other key business or landowners
- School board members and administrators (including college)
- Representatives of building industry, REALTOR® and developers' associations
- Residents including elders and teens

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- City hall, a community center or large community meeting room, school or recreation center are good choices.
- To help with budget challenges, try to get an in-kind offer for a meeting space.
- Facility should be able to accommodate anticipated maximum number of participants, tables, chairs & AV equipment.

3. Organize and Prep for Workshop

- ▶ Monitor event attendance and send follow up reminders.
- ▶ Prepare workshop materials.
 - Collect maps & other materials.
 - Order/find supplies: easels, flip charts, pens, pads, name tags, markers, etc.
 - Secure AV equipment, projector and screen.
- ▶ Ensure there are enough tables and chairs for all attendees.
 - Plan for 4-6 attendees/table.
- ▶ Arrange for refreshments and food.
 - Provide refreshments and snacks during the course of the workshop.
 - If the workshop takes place during a meal hour, such as lunch, provide a box lunch.
 - Get local businesses to sponsor food.
- ▶ Continue to promote the WalkShop and communicate to local media.
- ▶ Appoint someone to document the event and take photos.

4. Day of Workshop

- ▶ Set up Registration: Sign-in sheet with name, address, email address for follow up.
- ▶ Set up tables, chairs and AV equipment.
- ▶ Confirm that consultant has everything they need.
- ▶ See if any VIPs are in attendance and invite them to say a few words.
- ▶ Distribute materials and put maps on tables after walk audit.
- ▶ Appoint a notetaker(s) to record suggestions and priorities at the table discussions. These will be used to in your walkable community action plan.

5. Post-Event Tasks

- ▶ Form a working group/task force for follow up.
 - Organize and lead the initial efforts of a working group.



Guiding (Background) Documents

In advance of the workshop, provide the following documents to project team and consultant. The local planning or transportation department can provide the documents.

- Traffic counts (ADT) for all principle streets in the study area, ideally printed on a map.
- Comprehensive or general plan, or other long-range vision plans.
- Other master plans that correspond to the study area (i.e. downtown master plan, pedestrian and bicycle master plan, parks, recreation and open space master plan, corridor studies, parking studies, etc.).
- Other zoning maps that relate to study area.

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- Continuing to facilitate and support the movement toward improved walkability.
- ▶ Create a report.
 - Include input from participants and consultant in the report.
 - Prioritize recommendations and divide into short and long term.
 - Add photos taken during walk audit & table discussions.
 - Distribute report to stakeholders.
- ▶ Create and implement an action plan.
- ▶ Issue new releases on report and follow up activities.
- ▶ Celebrate early achievements to keep momentum going.
 - It is vital to celebrate early achievements or wins to garner buy-in and support.
- ▶ Conduct ribbon-cutting ceremonies or grand openings of new projects to keep community aware of project.

▶ Example WalkShop Schedule (See [WalkShop Workshop Agenda example.](#))

9:00 a.m.	Welcome and Introductions
9:15 a.m.	Presentation: Walkability 101
10:15 a.m.	Break
10:30 a.m.	Walking Audit (allow 60 to 90 minutes, depending on area being assessed)
11:45 a.m.	Summary of Findings, Facilitated Visioning Session
12:15 p.m.	Lunch Break (box lunches)
1:00 p.m.	Next Steps Table Breakouts: Create an Action Plan
1:30 p.m.	Tables Report Out
2:00 p.m.	Next Steps Action Plan–Blueprinting: Participants will identify next steps that are specific, measurable, actionable, and reasonable and time-sensitive (SMART)
2:30 p.m.	Closing Talk Story
3:00 p.m.	Conclude
3:30 p.m.	Project Team Debrief

For more information, contact Hugh Morris, Manager, Community Development and Growth, hmmorris@nar.realtor



Maps

Display maps of the community, especially of the study area/ walking audit route.

- Print a large map that captures the whole community with key streets labeled. Avoid too much information as only the layers with streets, parks, and buildings are needed. This map should be printed as large as three feet by five feet in size. Post on a wall or easel. Participants can identify where they live, work, and play with small sticky dots or push pins.
- Print maps of the study area/walk audit. Print enough copies for each table. Print with large margins—one to three inches—so participants can write notes in the margins.
- Distribute maps after the walking audit.