Central Massachusetts

WALK AUDITING

TOOLKIT

CMRPC
Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission

Drafting assistance for this document was provided by an AI language model, with preparation, review, editing, and final approval by planning staff.

What's In The Toolkit??

A step-by-step guide on organizing community walk audits and things to consider while planning .....pg. 4

Additional Walk Audit Resources.....pg. 14

Links to other walk audit toolkits and guides available to you.

Walk Audit Funding Sources.....pg. 16

A list of grants available to you that fund community walk audits.

Walk Audit Planning Workbook.....pg. 17

Complete this workbook during your walk audit planning to organize and support your planning process.

Walk Audit Worksheet .....pg. 20

Provide this worksheet to participants to write their observations during your walk audit.

Walk Audit Sign-In Sheet.....pg. 24

Use this simple sign-in sheet during your walk audit to keep record of those who participated.

Walk Audit Report Template.....pg. 25

Use this template to summarize your walk audit findings into a concise report.

INTRO

Communities throughout Central Massachusetts often use walk audits to collect community input and inform planning processes. The purpose of this toolkit is to provide municipal staff, committee members, and transportation advocates with a resource on organizing impactful walk audits in their communities. Utilize this toolkit as a step-by-step guide as you plan your next community walk audit.

Resources also included in this toolkit:

- CMRPC Walk Audit worksheet
- CMRPC Walk Audit report template
- Other walk audit toolkits available to you

WHAT IS A WALK AUDIT?

A walk audit, also referred to as a walkability assessment, is a qualitative assessment and community engagement tool to assess pedestrian safety and overall walkability within a specific focus area. During a walk audit, stakeholders gather to walk or roll a specific route or around a specific location. The purpose of a walk audit is to gather firsthand information that may not be visible through maps, reports, or data analysis alone. Participants can identify barriers that affect mobility and quality of life, such as missing sidewalks, unsafe crossings, poor lighting, drainage problems, or obstacles that limit accessibility. Community input collected during the audit helps ensure that proposed improvements reflect the needs and experiences of residents.

Following the walk audit, observations and recommendations are compiled into a report that can inform planning efforts, policy decisions, and grant applications. By combining professional expertise with direct community feedback, walk audits provide valuable insights that support safer, more accessible, and more vibrant public spaces.

DECIDE THE PURPOSE OF YOUR WALK AUDIT

QUESTIONS TO ASK: WHAT IS OUR GOAL? WHERE WILL THIS DATA GO?

1 Should we do a walk audit at all?

Before we go into planning our audit consider that an audit may not be necessary at all or may not be the best course of action. Avoid holding a walk audit with no clear purpose or goal.

- When to or when not to do a walk audit

  A Walk Audit can be helpful:

  - When assessing a specific area of concern the community is looking to improve
  - When used to inform a larger planning process or initiative
  - When attempting to engage and educate the community around pedestrian safety and active transportation

  A Walk Audit may not be the best option:

  - When the purpose of the audit is not clear
  - When focused on addressing issues related to other transportation modes. In these cases, other audits and assessments may be more effective. For example, if focused on biking related issues or safety concerns for vehicles, consider a bike audit or road safety audit instead.

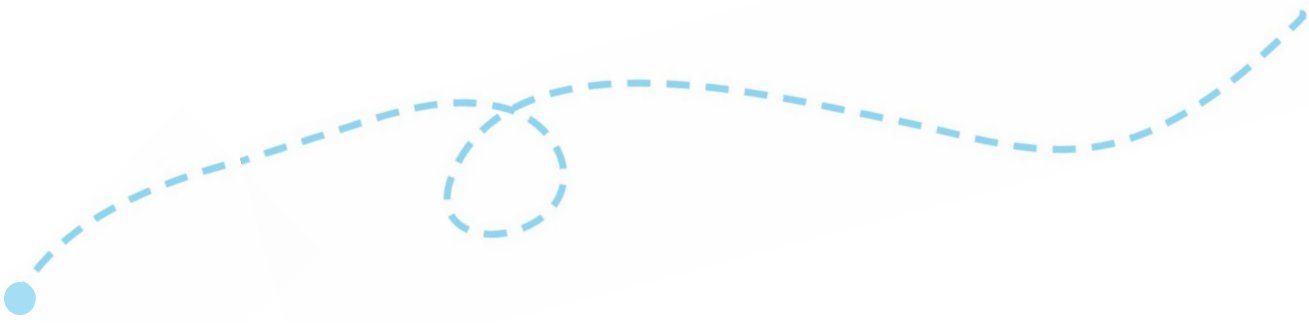
2 Determine the purpose of your walk audit

- Walk Audits can be used as a qualitative assessment tool to feed into larger formal planning processes such as Active Transportation Plans, Pedestrian Plans, and Master Plans

- Walk Audits can also be used to engage and educate the community around traffic safety and pedestrian advocacy

3 Decide where the resulting data can be used

Walk audit reports can be extremely useful in informing decision-making and transportation planning. Decide who may be interested in the final report, and brainstorm how it can inform improvements.



PULL RELEVANT DATA

QUESTIONS TO ASK: WHAT ARE THE CONDITIONS IN THIS AREA? WHO LIVES HERE? WHERE ARE PEOPLE GOING? IS THERE A HISTORY OF CRASHES?

4

Look at local data

Data can help walk audit participants gain a better understanding of your focus area and why a walk audit is necessary.

a. Crash data
b. Pedestrian infrastructure
c. Demographic

5

Consider any relevant existing plans

To avoid redundancy, be mindful of any relevant planning efforts that have already taken place. Existing plans can provide helpful insight into current community concerns and priorities.

PLAN YOUR ROUTE

QUESTIONS TO ASK: WHERE SHOULD WE GO? WHAT LOCATIONS ARE MOST IMPORTANT?

6

Keep it short

The length of your audit will depend on the physical capacity of your group. A general rule of thumb is to keep your total route less than one mile.

7

Spot or route audit?

You can also choose to only audit a specific location instead of a route if it better suits your needs. A spot audit will allow you to focus all of your time and attention assessing a specific location or intersection of concern.

8

Identify locations of interest.

Planning your route ahead of time will help to keep your audit focused and intentional. Consider any locations of interest or concern that should be incorporated into the route.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

QUESTIONS TO ASK: WHO SHOULD I INVITE? WHAT PERSPECTIVES ARE NEEDED? WHO WOULD BE INTERESTED?

9

Diversify your participants

The key to an thorough walk audit is ensuring a wide variety of experiences are represented; including race/nationality, socio-economic status, physical ability, and age. Also target outreach to ensure there is representation from both municipal staff and decision makers as well as neighborhood residents. Inclusivity is key.

10

Language Translation

Depending on your community and your potential attendees, consider any language translation that may be needed. Include additional languages for event flyers, sign up forms, worksheets, and even live interpretation during the audit if necessary.

11

Utilize mixed-media promotion

Use a mix of social and traditional media for promotion if attempting to invite the public to attend. You can also choose to organize a walk audit with a specific group of stakeholders and invite those participants directly.

12

Consider RSVPs

You may decide it would be helpful to know who and how many plan to attend your audit ahead of time. Consider the best way for participants to RSVP. Electronic platforms for RSVP's such as Eventbrite or even a simple Google form can be relatively user-friendly. Utilize your RSVP form for participants to request any language and accessibility needs or any other accommodations.

CONDUCT YOUR AUDIT

QUESTIONS TO ASK: WHAT DO WE NEED?

11 Pick your framework

Decide the walk auditing framework you will base your observations on. You may choose to touch on overall walkability or focus your walk audit on a specific concern such as lighting or speeding. In addition to the CMRPC framework and resources provided in this toolkit, there are also frameworks you can utilize to guide your audit, such as the AARP or Safe Routes to School National Partnership.

12 Friendly Reminders

Send out a final event reminder to potential attendees a few days before the audit.

13 Prep your materials

Decide what materials you will provide to participants during the audit. Worksheets with a map of your route and additional space for notes will help keep the group on track and help to collect observations at the end. Consider other materials such as:

- Clipboards, pens, forms, tablet

DEVELOP YOUR REPORT

QUESTIONS TO ASK: HOW DO WE SHARE WHAT WE SAW? WHO NEEDS TO SEE THIS?

14

Organize your report

Structure your report in such a way that anyone who was not involved in the effort can still understand your purpose for conducting a walk audit, your walk audit route and surrounding area, and group observations.

Consider the following sections:

- Background, data, route map, audit observations, key themes

15

Identify where your report will go

Walk audit organizers will ideally have identified direct short-term opportunities to use the resulting report in decision making such as in transportation planning and advocacy initiatives. If not, consider using the report to build stakeholder interest and buy-in. Consider uploading your report to the WalkMassachusetts Walk Audit database (Walk Audit Database - Google Sheets), a database of walk audits that have taken place throughout the state

FOLLOW UP!

QUESTIONS TO ASK: WHAT'S NEXT? HOW DO WE IMPLEMENT SOLUTIONS? HOW DO WE MAINTAIN MOMENTUM?

15

Stay in touch

Maintain the relationships you've developed to conduct this walk audit. Follow up with residents, advocates, and community-based organizations, etc. and ask about their experience. Remain in touch with them as you determine next steps together.

16

Identify the highest priority

Focus your efforts on the biggest concern identified during the walk audit. This can be an issue that was identified frequently or based on more pressing priorities such as safety.

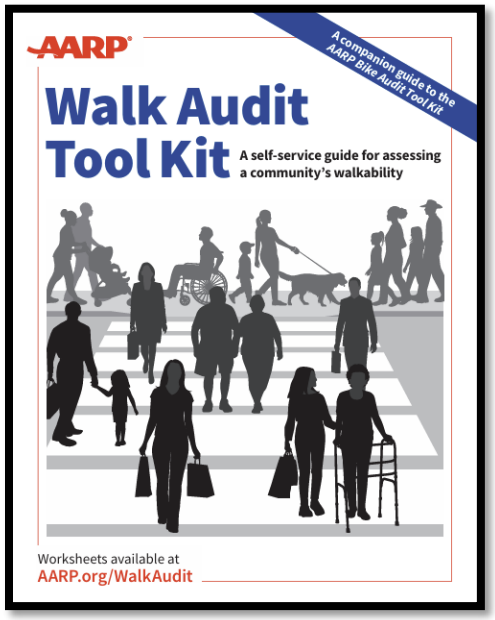
17

Funding, funding, funding!

Seek grant opportunities to help address this high-priority issue. Demonstration projects are a great way to temporarily test a solution with a low-cost, quick-build installation.

RESOURCES

AARP WALK AUDIT TOOLKIT



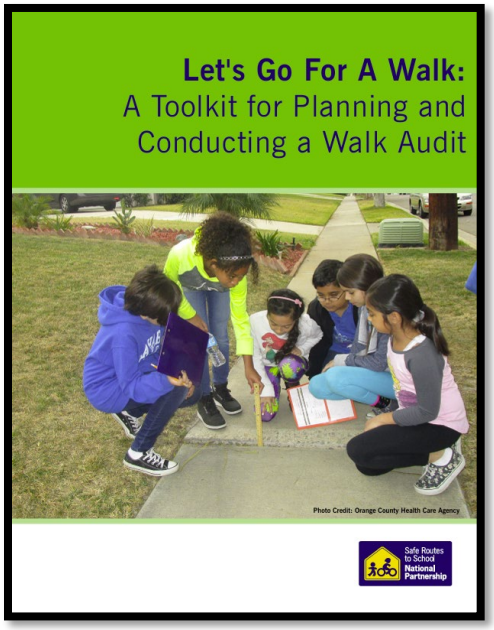
The AARP toolkit acts as a clear step-by-step guide to organizing a walk audit with definitions of common terminology used by transportation professionals. AARP provides a successful walk audit framework and other useful resources including walk audit worksheets and a companion AARP Bike Audit toolkit.

(AARP Walk Audit Tool Kit)

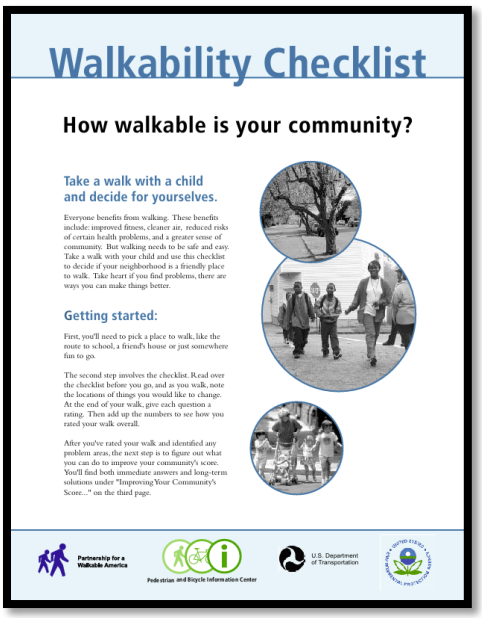
SAFE ROUTE PARTNERSHIP

This toolkit from the Safe Routes to School National Partnership provides tools for organizing community walk audits with specific tips related to safety for students.

(Safe Routes to Schools National Partnership-Walk Audit Toolkit)



NATIONAL HIGHWAY TRAFFIC SAFETY ADMINISTRATION



This toolkit from the Safe Routes to School National Partnership provides tools for organizing community walk audits with specific tips related to safety for students.

(National Highway Traffic Safety Administration - Walkability Checklist)

WALK AUDIT ACADEMY

Walk Audit Academy is an online video series outlining steps to consider when planning a walk audit. Walk-Massachusetts offers a cohort-based training program as well for interested communities.

(Walk Massachusetts - Walk Audit Academy)

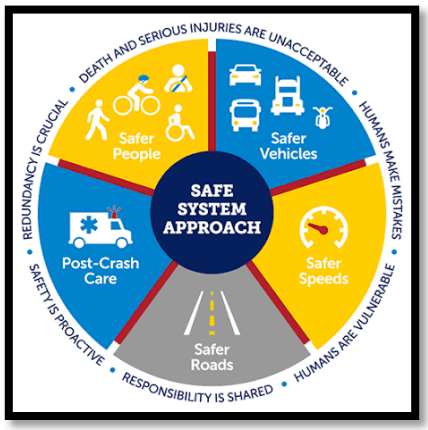
GRANTS

AARP COMMUNITY CHALLENGE GRANT

AARP community challenge grant funds quick-build projects that improve the quality of life for residents of all ages, especially older-adults.

(AARP Community Challenge Grant)

SAFE STREETS FOR ALL (SS4A)



Safe Streets and Roads for All (SS4A) is a grant program through U.S. Department of Transportation for planning, demonstration, and implementation projects focused on traffic safety.

(Safe Streets and Roads for All (SS4A)) Grant Program | US Department of Transportation

AMERICA WALKS COMMUNITY CHANGE GRANTS

America Walks Community Challenge Grants provides funding and technical assistance to advance walkable communities, mobility, and pedestrian safety.

(Community Change Grants - America Walks)

Walk Audit Planning Workbook

Use this workbook to guide and organize your walk audit planning

DECIDE THE PURPOSE OF YOUR WALK AUDIT

Should we do a walk audit at all?

Yes	No	
☐	☐	The purpose and goals of the audit are clear
☐	☐	Pedestrian safety is the primary concern we hope to address

***If you have answered "No" to either question, considering delaying your audit or utilizing another tool**

What is your purpose?

Yes	No	
☐	☐	The walk audit will be used to inform a larger planning process or initiative
☐	☐	The walk audit will help to engage and educate the community around pedetrian safety and active transportation

How can the resulting data be used?

_____

_____

_____

_____

Plan Your Route

Describe your route

_____

_____

List key locations along your route

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

How long is the route from start to end? _____ mile(s)

Stakeholder Engagement

List any specific individuals or oragnizations that will be invited to participate in the walk audit

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

What languages will be needed?

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Check off the forms of media that will be used in promotion. Ensure you are considering both digital media (left) and traditional media (right)

- ☐ Social media
- ☐ Email
- ☐ Website
- ☐ Text message/WhatsApp
- ☐ Newspaper
- ☐ TV
- ☐ Radio
- ☐ Tabling/canvassing

CONDUCT YOUR AUDIT

What walk audit framework and resources will you utilize?

_____

What materials will you need during the audit?

- ☐ Clipboards
- ☐ Pens
- ☐ Tablets
- ☐ Speed readers / Infrared Thermometer / etc.
- ☐ Walk Audit Worksheet / Route Map
- ☐ Sign-in Sheet
- ☐ Water
- ☐ Reflective Vests

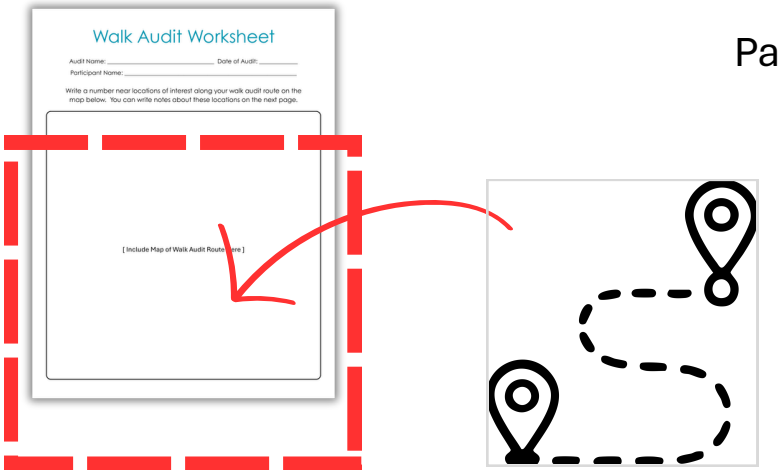
DEVELOP YOUR REPORT

List any individuals or organizations who should recieve a copy of your walk audit report

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

How to use the **Walk Audit Worksheet**

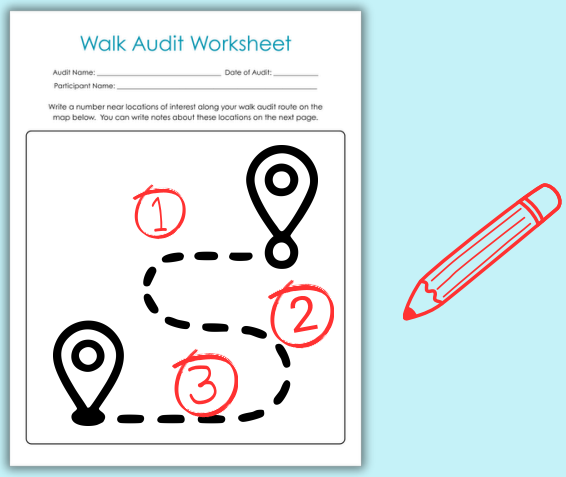
1



Paste your route map in this space for participants

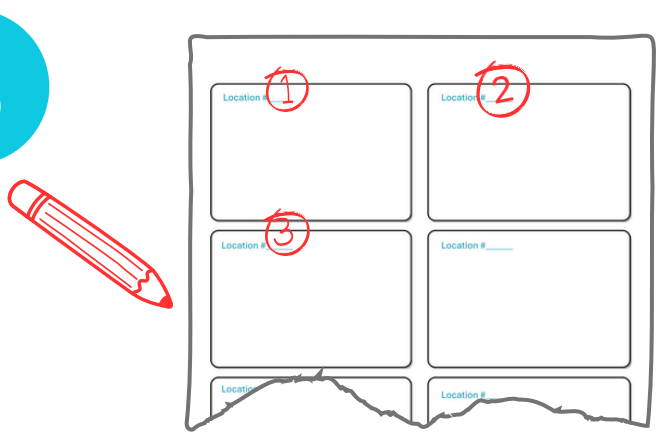
before your audit

2



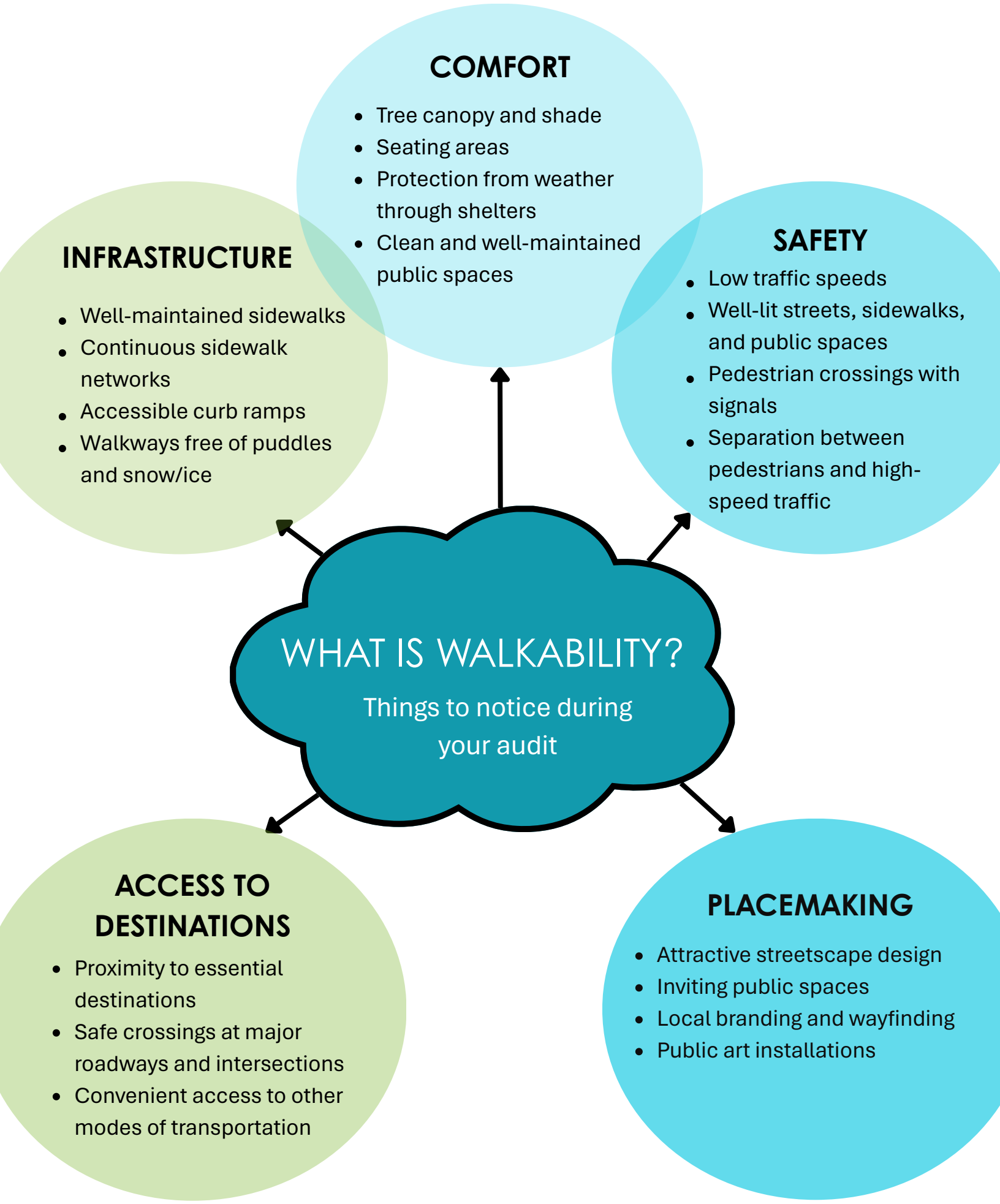
Participants will write a number at key locations along the walk audit route in the map.

3



Participants can use the back of the worksheet to write their observations.

Encourage particpants to write a number in each box to match their notes with the specifc key location they numbered on the map.

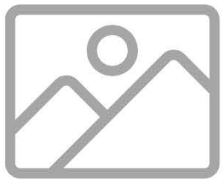

COMFORT
Tree canopy and shade
Seating areas
Protection from weather through shelters
Clean and well-maintained public spaces
INFRASTRUCTURE
Well-maintained sidewalks
Continuous sidewalk networks
Accessible curb ramps
Walkways free of puddles and snow/ice
SAFETY
Low traffic speeds
Well-lit streets, sidewalks, and public spaces
Pedestrian crossings with signals
Separation between pedestrians and high-speed traffic
WHAT IS WALKABILITY?
Things to notice during your audit
ACCESS TO DESTINATIONS
Proximity to essential destinations
Safe crossings at major roadways and intersections
Convenient access to other modes of transportation
PLACEMAKING
Attractive streetscape design
Inviting public spaces
Local branding and wayfinding
Public art installations

Walk Audit Worksheet

Audit Name: _____ Date of Audit: _____

Participant Name: _____

Write a number near locations of interest along your walk audit route on the map below. You can write notes about these locations on the next page.



[Click To Upload Walk Audit Route Map]

Location #_____

Location #_____

Location #_____

Location #_____

Location #_____

Location #_____

General Comments:

Walk Audit Sign-In

Audit Name: _____ Date of Audit: _____

Name:	Affiliation:	Email:

Audit Name:_____

Walk Audit Report

Prepared by: _____ Date:_____

CENTRAL MASSACHUSETTS
Regional Planning Commission

BACKGROUND:

Briefly describe your community and why there was a need for a walk audit. Explain the existing concerns of stakeholders and how this walk audit came to be.

PARTNERS:

Listen any partners that assisted in planning this walk audit you would like to highlight.

WALK AUDIT ROUTE:

Describe your focus area. Mention any locations of interest or important landmarks highlighted during the audit.

[Include Map of Walk Audit Route Here]

Top 3 Concerns:
List the top three concerns identified by participants during the audit to be priortized.

Key Observations & Concerns:
Describe assets and concerns observed during the walk audit.

[Use this space for any photos taken
during the audit

Recommendations:

Describe any recommendations for improvment