



# ***Ashley Park Walk Audit - New Bedford, MA***

## ***Safe Routes to Parks***

October 17, 2017



**MAKING MASSACHUSETTS MORE WALKABLE**

Old City Hall | 45 School Street | Boston MA 02108 | T: 617.367.9255 | info@walkboston.org | www.walkboston.org





## Purpose of the Walk Audit

The City of New Bedford was awarded a Safe Routes to Parks (SRTP) technical assistance grant from the National Parks and Recreation Association. The goal of the SRTP program is to increase safe access to parks and improve health outcomes in underserved areas. Using Ashley Park in New Bedford's South End Neighborhood as a pilot park, WalkBoston worked with New Bedford City staff to develop a process of assessing the walking routes to the park. Lessons learned from this walk audit and pilot project will inform future park evaluations in New Bedford.

## Neighborhood Land Use Patterns

Ashley Park, located in New Bedford's South End neighborhood, is in a primarily residential area with small businesses, restaurants and bars occupying the west side of Bolton Street, the corner of Bolton and Rivet Street, and along the north side of Rivet Street. Family Dollar is currently under construction on the south side of Swift Street at the Orchard Street intersection. Several institutions are also in close proximity to the park, including DeValles Elementary School, Congdon Elementary School, and the Our Lady of Mt Carmel Church buildings. Residential neighborhoods with apartments, multi-family houses and single-family houses are located east, north and west of the park.

Residents, business owners, park visitors and City staff mentioned levels of drug activity and prostitution occurring in certain areas of the park and along some of the neighborhood streets. While the police reports do not show violent crime occurring within the study area, perceptions of crime and gang-related activities are real. According to the police officer in attendance, most of the criminal activity occurs to the east of Ashley Park between County Street and the water. Nevertheless, the perception of crime prevents some people from coming to the park during twilight and evening hours.

The focus of this walk audit was on identifying physical challenges in the walking environment, such as cracked sidewalks and dangerous intersections. While crime and fear for personal safety can be real barriers to walking, it was not within the scope of this workshop to make recommendations to address these issues directly. However, improvements to the built environment can have an affect on crime rates and increase feelings of personal safety.



*Ashley Park is a neighborhood asset with a playground, basketball courts, softball field, and Community Center building.*

## Ashley Park

Ashley Park provides passive and active recreation opportunities for local residents. A softball field dominates the northeast corner of the park, with home plate near the Rivet Street/Orchard Street intersection. Basketball courts and a playground with a splash pad are located along Swift Street at the southern side of the park. A brick plaza with mature trees, benches and flowerbeds is located at the Bolton Street/Rivet Street intersection. In addition to the 5.5 acres of open space, the park also has a Community Center where seniors and other residents come to play cards, dominoes, and attend community events.

The Department of Parks, Recreation and Beaches has discussed plans to redesign the park, which may include removing the softball diamond, improving the plaza and seating areas, and developing better park entrances and walking paths within the park. While no timeline has been set for these enhancements, feedback received during the public meeting and from walk audit participants supported the desire to remove the softball field and improve park facilities.

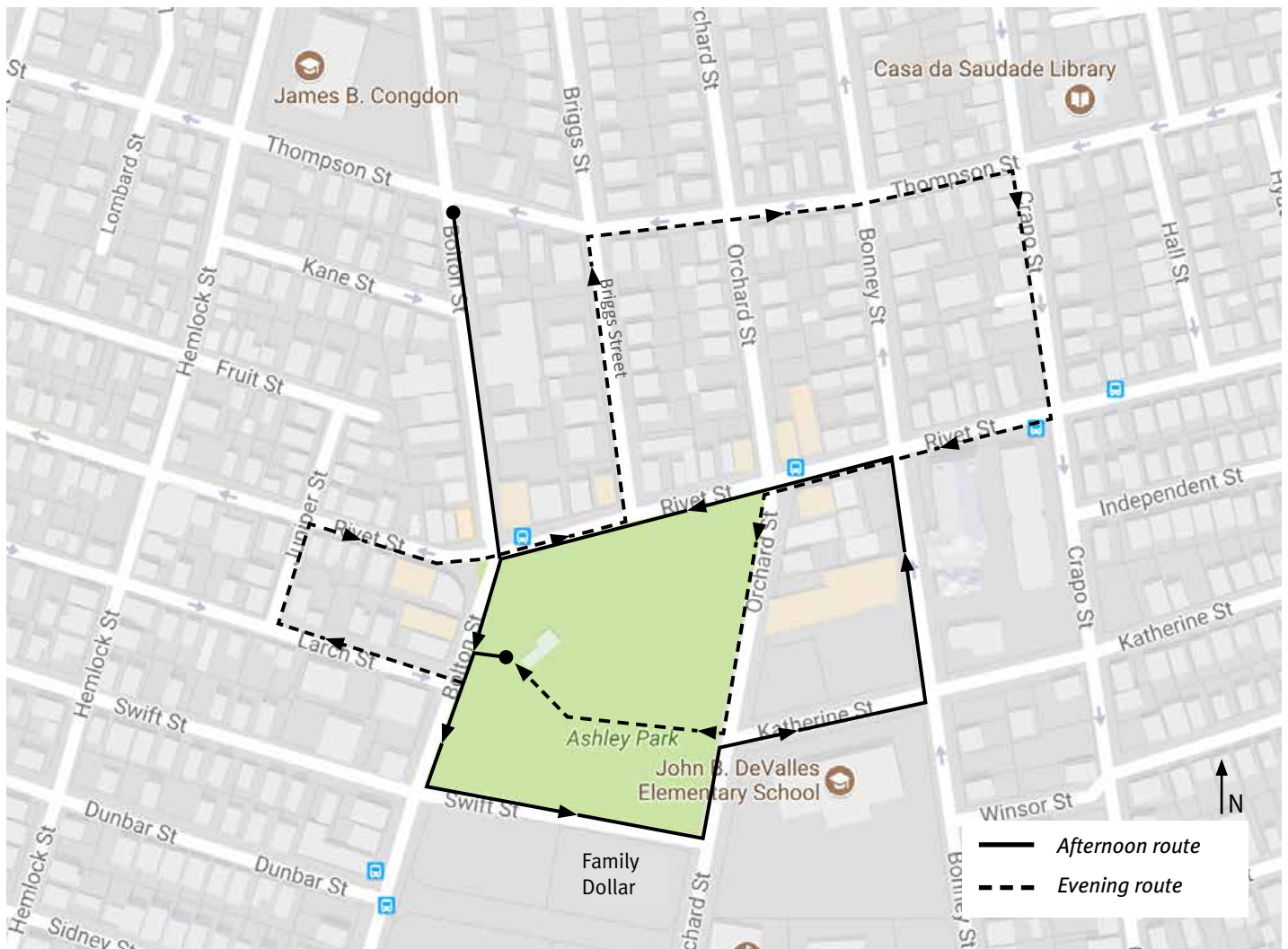
## Walk Audits

WalkBoston, together with our community partners, conducted two walk audits around Ashley Park on October 17, 2017 – one during the daylight hours to observe daily use and neighborhood travel patterns, and one at twilight to observe the light levels in the park and along neighboring streets. Close to 20 people total participated in both audits. The primary audience for the afternoon walk audit was seniors who visited the Community Center weekly to play cards and dominoes. The evening walk included local business owners and residents. A partial list of participants can be found in Appendix A.

The walking route varied between the afternoon and evening audits with the evening audit covering more of the residential neighborhood to the north and west of Ashley Park. Each walk audit route is shown

on the map below. Along the route, participants stopped to observe street conditions and discuss recommendations for safety improvements. City staff with information about planned infrastructure projects and land use decisions in the neighborhood helped to answer questions. At the conclusion of each audit, the groups gathered to discuss their observations.

This report details our findings from the audits and includes the input received at a community meeting held on October 10, community surveys distributed via Facebook, and comments from community-based partners and City staff.



Ashley Park walk audit routes

## Key Recommendations

Taking into account measures of walkability, which include connectivity, destinations, safety and comfort, the pedestrian network around Ashley Park scores relatively high. All but two blocks of the walking route had sidewalks of adequate width. Many of the sidewalks are in need of at least minor repairs, but most are passable even with a wheelchair or stroller. Most of the intersections have marked crosswalks, although some need to be painted more boldly and some curb ramps need to be upgraded. Light levels appear low in some areas around the park perimeter. More study about where and how to light the area is recommended. Overall, the neighborhood has a connected network of walkable streets that with some sidewalk repair, better pavement markings and increased signage will continue to provide good access to Ashley Park.

The walk audits generated several overarching recommendations to improve pedestrian safety and the quality of the walking environment around Ashley Park. Each is described in detail below with proposed short-term and long-term fixes listed for each recommendation.

1. Locate entrances to Ashley Park where people are most likely going to arrive, such as at street intersections and near park amenities – playground, basketball courts, or Community Center.
2. Improve visibility of street crossings with appropriate signage and pavement markings. Add missing crosswalks at key crossings. Realign diagonal stop lines to be perpendicular to the road edge.
3. Repair broken, crumbling sidewalks along the edges of Ashley Park, while preserving existing trees, where possible. Add sidewalks and curbing where missing in the study area.
4. Improve light levels at night in and around Ashley Park.
5. Improve streetscape along Bolton Street to encourage walking from the Congdon School to Ashley Park.



*Entrances to Ashley Park could be more frequent, better marked, and located where people need them.*

**Locate entrances to Ashley Park where people are most likely going to arrive, such as at street intersections and near park amenities – playground, basketball courts, or Community Center.**

Ashley Park has fences along all of its edges except at the Rivet Street/Bolton Street intersection where the brick plaza and seating area are located. The fences are chain link – varying in height with the taller fences/netting along the first base line of the softball field. There are several entrances along the perimeter marked with bollards, shrubs and pathways leading into the park. None of the entrances have gates or are locked. However, the entrances are not well marked and, in many cases, are not located along a desire line. For example, there is no park entrance at the corner of Swift and Bolton Streets. Park users must walk outside the park either along Swift Street or Bolton Street to reach an entrance.

Land uses have changed around Ashley Park since it was originally designed. The new Family Dollar store will have a driveway opposite the existing park entrance on Swift Street. Moving this entrance may make sense to decrease the chance of pedestrian/vehicular conflicts at this location.

Issues remain between the neighboring businesses along Rivet and Orchard Streets with the softball field. Business owners complain of errant balls breaking

windows and endangering patrons. No serious injuries have been reported, but the concern is real. The Department of Parks, Recreation and Beaches knows of the issues and plans to relocate the softball league to another more suitable location and redesign the park to better fit community needs.

**Short-term fixes:**

- Find a different field for the adult softball league currently using the field.
- Fix broken fence along Swift Street where chain link has been peeled back to the pole (presumably for truck access).
- Increase visibility of existing park entrances by trimming existing vegetation. Install temporary signage, pavement markings and seasonal plantings to better announce entrances.
- Include reuse of softball field, location and design of park entrances, and alternative fence solutions in scope for park redevelopment.

**Long-term fixes:**

- Secure funding for Ashley Park design and construction.
- Determine if streetscape improvements, such as sidewalks, curb ramps, and lighting, can be included in the scope of the park redesign project. Coordinate with the New Bedford Department of Public Infrastructure on timing and potential funding streams for road design improvements.



*The high fences along the softball diamond create a barrier to entering the park, and do not do enough to keep foul balls and homeruns from breaking windows in neighboring businesses. A more open, passive seating area along this edge would better serve the business owners and patrons.*

Improve visibility of street crossings with appropriate signage and pavement markings. Add missing crosswalks at key crossings. Realign diagonal stop lines to be perpendicular to the road edge.

The majority of intersections have marked crosswalks across all approaches. Those approaches missing crosswalks are listed below in the “short-term fixes” section. Most of the crosswalks in the study area are painted with two parallel lines, except those near the DeValles School, which have a ladder crosswalk pattern. The ladder crosswalk pattern is more visible and more distinct from the stop lines used at stop-controlled intersections. Ladder crosswalks are more expensive to paint and to maintain, but the additional paint has been shown to increase awareness of the crossings and positive driver yielding behavior.

*Ladder crosswalks versus standard crosswalk pavement markings along the walking route around Ashley Park.*



*Rivet Street/Orchard Street intersection*



*Bonney Street/Rivet Street intersection*

In addition to using a ladder crosswalk design to make the crossings more visible, signage can increase awareness. Mid-block crossings and high-volume pedestrian crossing locations should have “Pedestrian Crossing” warning signs to add emphasis to the crosswalk. Signs are recommended at the locations listed in the “short-term fixes” section.

The pedestrian crossings at the Bolton Street/Rivet Street intersection are long as they run diagonally between apex curb ramps. Furthermore, drivers park their cars up to or on the crosswalk while running into the bakery or hardware store. The parked cars limit a pedestrian’s ability to see oncoming traffic and a driver’s ability to see people crossing the street. Redesigning the Bolton/Rivet Street intersection with curb bump-outs would reduce crossing distances, slow traffic speeds, and improve pedestrian visibility.

The stop lines at the Bolton/Rivet Street intersection are painted at an angle rather than perpendicular to the road edge. Repainting them would help to distinguish them from the crosswalks and give pedestrians more space to cross safely.

**Short-term fixes:**

- Missing crosswalks:
  - » All approaches at the Bolton/Swift intersection (particularly important now due to recent leasing of the mill building south of Ashley Park)
  - » @Bolton/Larch Street intersection near the walkway leading to the Community Center (no stop lines or traffic signals)
  - » Across Rivet Street @Briggs Street (no stop lines or traffic signals)
- Crosswalk signage recommended at these crossings:
  - » Across Orchard Street @Katherine Street intersection
  - » Across Orchard Street @Swift Street intersection
  - » Across Bolton Street @ Swift Street intersection
  - » Across Bolton Street @ Larch Street
  - » Across Rivet Street @ Briggs Street
- Repaint stop lines at the Bolton Street/Rivet Street intersection.
- Enforce parking restrictions near crosswalks around Ashley Park.



*Bolton Street/Rivet Street intersection has long crossing distances and minimal pavement markings.*

**Long-term fixes:**

- Redesign Bolton Street/Rivet Street intersection with curb bump-outs or other traffic calming devices to shorten crossing distances, slow traffic and improve pedestrian visibility.



*Goulart Square is home to several local businesses that attract residents from all over New Bedford.*

Repair broken, crumbling sidewalks along the edges of Ashley Park, while preserving existing trees, where possible. Add sidewalks and curbing where missing in the study area.

As discussed earlier in this report, the neighborhood has a connected network of sidewalks along almost every street. Many of the sidewalks around the park, however have not been replaced in many years and are showing signs of wear. The sidewalk on Katherine Street in front of the DeValles School has a dramatic cross-slope which is particularly difficult to navigate in icy conditions. Tree roots and the freeze/thaw cycle have upended some concrete panels, while other panels have cracked with age. In order to ensure people with all abilities have access to the park, it is important to make sidewalk repairs so that wheelchair users and strollers are not forced into the streets.

There are two locations within the study area that are missing sidewalks:

1. Along the north side of Katherine Street adjacent to the surface parking lot and across from DeValles Elementary School
2. Along the west side of Bonney Street between Winsor Street and the Bonney Street playground.

The proximity to the DeValles School, Ashley Park and the Bonney Street playground should make sidewalk construction at these locations a priority.



*Sidewalks are crumbling or nonexistent along Katherine Street across from DeValles Elementary School. In addition to walking to school, people come to markets held in the parking lot on the right side of this photograph. A smooth, continuous sidewalk should be a priority in this location.*

#### *Short-term fixes:*

- Make repairs to sidewalks around Ashley Park where possible, before full sidewalk reconstruction is funded.
- Consider including new sidewalks in Ashley Park redesign project scope.
- Locate areas with missing or non-compliant curb ramps.

#### *Long-term fixes:*

- Install sidewalk and curbing along the north side of Katherine Street adjacent to the surface parking lot and across from DeValles Elementary School.
- Install sidewalk and curbing along the west side of Bonney Street between Winsor Street and the Bonney Street playground.
- Repair all non-compliant curb ramps and install curb ramps where they are missing.



*Trees have uprooted concrete sidewalk panels along all sides of Ashley Park. Sidewalks - in general - have not been upgraded in this area in several years.*



## Improve light levels at night in and around Ashley Park.

The evening walk audit participants were able to see light levels in and around Ashley Park and along some of the neighborhood streets. In general, the light levels did not seem adequate. The City of New Bedford has switched to LED lights in all street fixtures. Since the conversion, there have been concerns about the “spotlight” effect where some areas are brightly lit, and other areas remain dark. The spacing of the existing streetlights (80’ on center) was calculated based on a different light bulb. The Department of Public Infrastructure (DPI) has changed the specifications to a 60’-on-center light spacing, which is in effect when street lighting strategies are redesigned.

In general, streetlights occur on one side of the street due to the location of the electrical conduit. This is problematic along the north side of Ashley Park where the streetlights are located on the north side of Rivet Street. The plaza, seating area and Community Center building are not well lit by the streetlights, and few other fixtures are in place on the park-side of the street. The basketball courts have their own spotlights, which actually cause the northeast corner of the park to appear even darker. Short-term strategies to add lighting to this corner were discussed including adding a light fixture to the softball spotlight pole and changing the bulbs on the Community Center light fixtures to emit more light. The scope of the Ashley Park redesign project will include a new lighting strategy for the park.

### *Short-term fixes:*

- Change bulbs in existing fixtures on the Community Center.
- Add a light fixture to the existing softball light pole to add light to northeast corner of the park.
- Include new lighting strategy in Ashley Park redesign project scope.
- Evaluate light levels along the residential streets leading to Ashley Park. Make recommendations for lighting improvements to be implemented when funding is available.

### *Long-term fixes:*

- Upgrade streetlights as identified in evaluation to improve light levels in the neighborhood.



*Walking between moving trucks and blank walls does not feel comfortable along Bolton Street between the Congdon School and Ashley Park.*

## Improve streetscape along Bolton Street to encourage walking from the Congdon School to Ashley Park.

The Congdon School is less than a 5-minute walk from Ashley Park (.11 miles). However, the land uses and lack of trees along Bolton Street do not create a comfortable, walkable street. This block of Bolton Street is lined with light industrial uses, such as a moving company and warehouse spaces, where trucks and driveways dominate the street. The sidewalks are wide, but feel empty and uncomfortable with few pedestrian scale elements. While changing land uses is unlikely, improving the streetscape with trees and enforcing no parking on the sidewalks would greatly enhance the safety and comfort of the walk from Congdon to Ashley Park.

### *Short-term fixes:*

- Enforce parking restrictions along Bolton Street.
- Determine if street trees can be planted along Bolton Street given current land uses and utility locations.
- Identify potential funding stream for tree planting.

### *Long-term fixes:*

- Review zoning code to determine if appropriate to change land uses in the long-term. Form-based code is in development for Goulart Square.

## **Appendix A. Walk Audit Participants**

Officer Timothy Gibbney, New Bedford Police Department  
Kim Ferreira, Mass in Motion New Bedford  
Dawn DiMarco, Mass in Motion New Bedford  
Mary Rapoza, New Bedford Department of Parks, Recreation and Beaches  
Stephanie Crampton, New Bedford Department of Public Infrastructure  
Jennifer Carloni, New Bedford Department of Planning, Housing & Community Development  
Maria Ramos, New Bedford Farmer's Market  
Shayne Trimbell, SRPEDD  
Jose Carlos Santos  
Lionel Goncalves, Ambiance Park Café  
Pito da Libe, Ambiance Park Café

Stacey Beuttell, WalkBoston  
Dorothea Hass, WalkBoston

NOTE: Several members of a group of senior men who play cards and dominoes in the Community Center joined us for the afternoon walk audit. We neglected to pass around a sign-in sheet to record their names. They were an incredible source of information and shared their daily experiences walking to and from Ashley Park. We are grateful for their participation.

## Appendix B. Terminology

Below are images and definitions of the terms used to describe the walking environment in this report.

### Crosswalk and Stop Line

Crosswalks can be painted in a variety of ways, some of which are more effective in warning drivers of pedestrians. Crosswalks are usually accompanied with stop lines. These lines act as the legally mandated stopping point for vehicles, and discourage drivers from stopping in the middle of the crosswalk.



*Crosswalk patterns*  
Source: USFHA



*Crosswalk and stop line*  
Source: [http://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/ped\\_bike/tools\\_solve/ped\\_scdproj/sys\\_impact\\_rpt/images/fig16.jpg](http://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/ped_bike/tools_solve/ped_scdproj/sys_impact_rpt/images/fig16.jpg)

### Curb Ramp and Detectable Warning Strip

Curb ramps provide access from the sidewalk to the street for people using wheel chairs and strollers. They are most commonly found at intersections. While curb ramps have improved access for wheelchair-bound people, they are problematic for visually impaired people who use the curb as an indication of the side of the street. Detectable warning strips, a distinctive surface pattern of domes detectable by cane or underfoot, are now used to alert people with vision impairments of their approach to streets and hazardous drop-offs.



*Curb ramp and detectable warning strip*

### Curb Extension/Curb Bulb-out

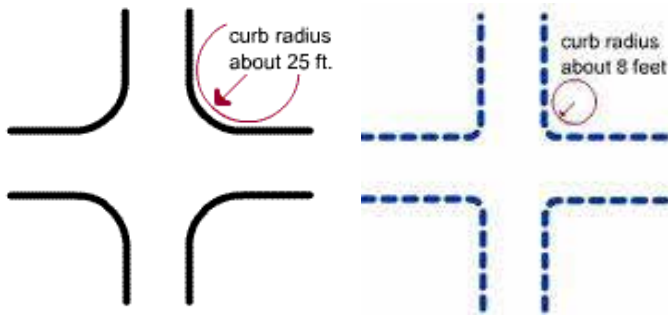
A sidewalk extension into the street (into the parking lane) shortens crossing distance, increases visibility for walkers and encourages eye contact between drivers and walkers.



*Curb extensions are often associated with mid-block crossings*

## Curb Radius

A longer curb radius (on the left in figure below) allows vehicles to turn more quickly and creates longer crossing distance for pedestrians. A shorter curb radius (on the right in the figure below) slows turning speeds and provides pedestrians shorter crossing distances.



(A) Gravel-filled curb extension

There are two excellent examples of the shortening of curb radii in Woburn, MA. The first (A) is a low-cost solution using a gravel-filled zone between the original curb line and the newly established road edge. The second is a higher-cost solution using grass and trees and extending the sidewalks to the new curb. Both work to slow traffic.



(B) Grass, trees and extended sidewalk in curb extension

## Fog Line

A fog line is a solid white line painted along the roadside curb that defines the travel lane. It narrows a driver's perspective and helps to slow traffic speeds. Fog lines are used in urban, suburban and rural locations.



Fog lines delineate the vehicular driving zone on wide roadways.

## In-street Pedestrian Crossing Sign

In-street pedestrian crossing signs are used at the road centerline within crosswalks to increase driver awareness of pedestrians in the area. These signs are a relatively low-cost, highly effective tool in slowing traffic by the narrowing travel lanes. They are popular with road maintenance departments since they can be easily moved for snow removal.



## Appendix C. Walk Audit Tool

### Safe Routes to Parks - Walk Audit Tool



Date/Time	
Weather Conditions	

#### Park Name/Neighborhood:

Park Access	
<input type="radio"/> Entrance(s) – easy to find, welcoming, in the right place(s)?	
<input type="radio"/> Safe crossing to park entrance(s)? (yes/no)	
<input type="radio"/> Visibility into the park? – no obstacles such as gates/fences, vegetation, etc.	
<input type="radio"/> Public transit stop nearby?	
Neighborhood Character	
<input type="radio"/> Land use: residential, commercial, industrial or mixed use?	
<input type="radio"/> Neighborhood destinations: schools, parks, library, museum, shops, services?	
<input type="radio"/> Surface parking lots? (yes/no)	
<input type="radio"/> Buildings occupied? (yes/no)	
<input type="radio"/> Building facades – blank walls, engaging storefronts, sidewalk cafes?	
<input type="radio"/> Are there people walking around?	
<input type="radio"/> Does it feel safe?	

# Safe Routes to Parks - Walk Audit Tool



Date/Time	
Weather Conditions	

## Street Name/Intersection:

Street Description	
<input type="radio"/> Number and width of travel lanes – narrow, adequate, wide?	
<input type="radio"/> Street Parking –one or both sides?	
<input type="radio"/> Shoulders? Wide, narrow?	
Vehicular Traffic	
<input type="radio"/> Posted speed limit signs (yes/no)	
<input type="radio"/> Vehicle speeds (fast/slow)	
<input type="radio"/> Volume (heavy/light)	
Sidewalks	
<input type="radio"/> On both sides of the street?	
<input type="radio"/> Wide? Continuous? Smooth surface?	
<input type="radio"/> Against the curb or separated from vehicular traffic?	
<input type="radio"/> Number of driveways? (many or few) Narrow or wide?	
Crosswalks	
<input type="radio"/> Condition? Marked and signed?	
<input type="radio"/> Curb ramps/detectable warning strips?	
<input type="radio"/> Pavement markings: 2 lines, zebra/ladder, stamped, pavers?	
Traffic signals	
<input type="radio"/> Pedestrian signals? (Countdown/Pushbuttons)	
<input type="radio"/> Phasing - Traffic stops in all directions? Traffic stops only in lanes pedestrian is crossing?	
<input type="radio"/> Timing – enough WALK time to cross?	
<input type="radio"/> Right turn on red prohibited? (yes/no)	

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## Safe Routes to Parks - Walk Audit Tool



<b>Street Furnishings</b>	
<input type="radio"/> Trees? (yes/no)	
<input type="radio"/> Benches? (yes/no)	
<input type="radio"/> Trash receptacles? (yes/no)	
<input type="radio"/> Bicycle facilities? Lanes, sharrows?	
<input type="radio"/> Lighting? (Vehicular/Pedestrian) (lit at night/dark)	
<b>Traffic Calming</b>	
<input type="radio"/> Curb extensions?	
<input type="radio"/> Pedestrian refuge islands or medians?	
<input type="radio"/> In-street pedestrian signs?	
<input type="radio"/> Speed tables? Raised crossings?	