



**EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES TO  
IMPROVE WALKABILITY**  
*A TRAIL GUIDE*

Walkability is important for everyone. A walkable community is one which makes it easier and safer for people of all abilities to get around. A walkable community is a place where the built and social environment supports people to live active lifestyles. When the environment supports an active lifestyle then people's health, wellbeing and quality of life are improved.



## How to use this trail guide

This trail guide is a resource designed to help guide you along the path to creating walkable communities, it focuses on ways in which you can build support for improving walkability. It is for anyone who is interested in making their community an easier, safer and more enjoyable place to get around by walking, wheeling and using public transit.

In this trail guide you will find eight "points of interest". They provide suggestions for engaging key stakeholders and creating partnerships as these are important aspects when it comes to promoting walkability within your community. The purpose of this resource is to encourage communities to address walkability in a broad sense. Although the resource has been named a "trail guide", we are not solely aiming to promote the development of pathways/trails, instead, the resource focuses on encouraging communities to consider broader walkability improvements at the community level. We use the term "trail guide" as a metaphor for how you might like to approach advocating for these improvements.

The "points of interest" included in this guide are not a complete list, it is important to work within your local context and use the collective wisdom of your community to understand what's the best approach to take. There is no particular order in which you should use this guide, flip through and read up on the "points of interest" which interest you the most.

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# Build Partnerships



Partnerships can help to give power and legitimacy to initiatives. It can also help you learn about what is happening in the community and allow you to combine forces with both public and private stakeholders to leverage resources. Here are some things to consider to help you build partnerships:

Identify possible partners by completing a [stakeholder analysis matrix](#) to understand what their position is and at what capacity they could be involved.

Try to understand the perspective of others. Is there a way you can address concerns without sacrificing your core goals?

Use existing relationships. For example, who else do you know that has a relationship with the local municipality?

Consider partnering with those outside of your sector. Think about non-traditional partnerships such as the health department working with engineering or planning departments.





# Use community voice



Draw on the expertise, energy and enthusiasm of the community. Municipalities are responsible to their community and must respond to the voices of residents, so let your voice be heard!

Identify and combine forces with existing groups who share similar interests or goals.

If no groups exist, consider helping your community form a “Walkability Action Group” or “Active Living Coalition”. Ensure the group has a diverse mix of people who represent the different needs in the community.

If working with an action group or coalition, remember to “lead from behind” and be conscious of empowering rather than being prescriptive.





## Point of Interest

# Speak to the right people



One key element of successful walkability promotion is being able to engage key decision makers or “change agents” in your vision for a walkable community. It is important to have these people on board as they are the people who have influence and therefore the ability to prioritize or implement walkability improvements.

Do you know anyone who works for the municipality? They may be in another department but they could help connect you.

Develop a list of decision makers and opinion leaders you would like to approach. Who do you know that could most effectively approach each person?

Familiarize yourself with the municipality’s relevant planning documents e.g., official community plan, transportation master plan, bylaws and other strategic planning documents. See [“Point of Interest - Do Your Homework”](#).

There are a variety of people who could be involved in improving the walkability of a community. On the next page are examples of potential key stakeholders at both the municipal and community level. Their roles and level of influence may differ between communities therefore it is necessary to use local knowledge to determine who to engage and how best to engage them. This list may be a good place to start building your knowledge of the diverse mix of stakeholders involved in walkability. Your community may not have all of these departments and roles, therefore it is important to engage local change makers and build partnerships which are specific to your context.



# Municipal Stakeholders

<b><i>Municipal Department &amp; example job titles</i></b>	<b><i>Description</i></b>
<b>Elected Officials</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• City/Town Councilor</li> <li>• Mayors/Reeve</li> </ul>	Represent the needs of the community at large. They work with administration to determine the municipality's directions for the long-term health and welfare of the community.
<b>Municipal Planning</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strategic Planner/Town Planner</li> <li>• Urban or Regional Planner</li> <li>• Active Transportation Coordinator</li> </ul>	Evaluate the municipality's public assets, systems and services and whether they are meeting needs and expectations. They work with elected officials to determine priorities, set goals and create a vision for the community. This department develops land use plans to create communities, accommodate population growth, and revitalize facilities.
<b>Engineering Services/ Public Works</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Municipal Engineer</li> <li>• Traffic Engineer</li> </ul>	Responsible for specifying, designing, constructing, and maintaining municipal infrastructure e.g. streets, sidewalks, water supply networks, sewers, street lighting, etc.
<b>Economic Development</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Economic Development Officer</li> </ul>	Responsible for encouraging economic improvement initiatives for business and the community as a whole.
<b>Parks &amp; Recreation</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recreation Coordinator</li> <li>• Director of Recreation and Sports</li> </ul>	Plan recreation activities according to the demands of the population served within the resource constraints of the program, facility or parks and recreation department.
<b>Age and Disability</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accessibility Coordinator</li> </ul>	Provide support and resource for people with a disability to fully participate in the community as well as healthy ageing programs and services to support ageing-in-place within the community.
<b>Community Development</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social Planner</li> <li>• Community Development Officer</li> </ul>	Provide assistance in the distribution of funding, implementation of community projects and monitoring progress with the aim of improving well-being and quality of life in a community.
<b>Youth Services</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Youth Development/Engagement Officer</li> </ul>	Provide information, resources and programs specific to youth to enhance their health and wellbeing.
<b>Indigenous Services</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Indigenous Services Officer</li> </ul>	Provide a variety of resources to Indigenous people aimed at supporting and enhancing work across: education, housing, employment, human rights, funding, justice, health, and services.
<b>Arts and Culture</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cultural Development &amp; Programming</li> </ul>	Provide grants and opportunities for artist development and appreciation within communities.

# Other Community Stakeholders

## General Community

- Community Coalitions or Community Action Groups
- Interested community members e.g. specific user groups such as dog walkers, people with mobility aids
- School Councils
- Age Friendly Committees
- Neighbourhood Associations
- Wellness Committees
- Community Events Board
- Traffic Safety Committees
- Recreation Boards
- Local media

## Provincial/National

- Family and Community Support Services
- Environmental land operators e.g. Parks Canada
- Parks Committees and Water Management
- Roads Authorities
- Traffic Safety Council
- Parks and Recreation Association eg. ARPA, Communities Choosewell
- Environmental Sustainability Organisations
- Not for Profit organisations with an interest in walkability eg. Active Neighbourhoods Canada
- Charities

## Health

- Public Health Professionals
- Local Health Promotion Professionals
- Primary Care Networks (PCN)
- Public Health Inspectors

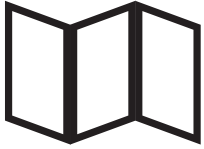
## For Profit

- Land Developers
- Retailers
- Local Business Associations
- Engineering Firms





# Do your homework



It is important to do your research about what documents guide municipal action in your area. It is a good idea to try and align your walkability initiatives with your municipality's plans and strategies. This shows the municipality that you want to work together to address similar issues, align priorities and make the most of available resources. These documents can also provide an understanding of what the community has already done to address walkability.

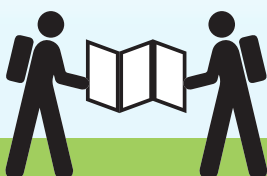
There are some key municipal documents which are important to be aware of. They include;

**Municipal Development Plan (MDP).** Every municipality is required to have an MDP in place. An MDP communicates the long term desired land use for a community, details how a community is expected to change over time and predicts the shape it will take in the future.

**Inter-Municipal Development Plan.** Two or more municipalities may develop a plan together, this can help prevent any future land use conflicts between municipalities. It is sometimes led by the county or could also be led by two municipalities working together.

**Municipal Strategy (Corporate Strategic Plan).** The city or town's own strategic direction is outlined in this document. Depending on the size of the community, larger areas of the strategy may be addressed in other specific plans or strategies. Some examples are included below:

- Transportation Plan
- Active Transportation Strategy
- Environmental Sustainability Plan
- Walkable Environments Framework
- Pedestrian Strategy
- Pedestrian Policy Design Report
- Sidewalk Connectivity Plan/Principal Pedestrian Network Strategy
- Urban Design Framework
- County Land Use Policies
- Community Services Plan
- Official Community Plan
- Economic Development Plan
- Active Living/Physical Activity Strategy
- Recreation Plan
- Trails Plan
- Structure Plans (for townships)
- Municipal Public Health & Wellbeing plan
- Bylaws and applications for development, redevelopment, zoning changes
- Disability, Inclusiveness and Access Plan
- Age Friendly Communities & Infrastructure Plan







## Understand local politics



It is important to understand the decision making system at work in the local community.

Find out who the local elected officials are, for example, who are the Members of Legislative Assembly and Town Councilors. Once you have identified who they are, make an effort to find out their professional and personal interests as this can help you in framing your communications with them.

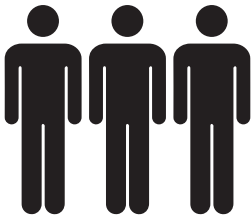
Speak with people who have had experience working with the local government system. This can help you to understand both the planning system and decision making process as well as to be informed about the key timelines and players.

Take note of key dates such as election or campaign timeframes as these can be good times to secure election commitments or promote walkability as part of a campaign.





## Get involved



There are lots of ways to participate in what is happening within your community. Municipalities are required to seek feedback and conduct community consultation on many of their projects. Use this as an opportunity to engage them in a conversation about walkability.

Provide feedback on how to improve walkability in municipal projects. Are there any consultations being held? Can you write a submission or complete a survey about an upcoming project?

If the opportunity presents, join a municipal advisory committee.

Attend and promote walkability at Council meetings that are open to the public.

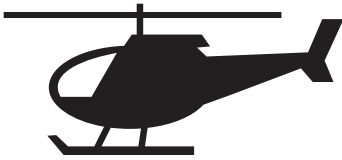
Show up! Be an active member of your community by attending and supporting local events.

If there are no current opportunities for consultation then create your own! Local coalitions can bring feedback together using tools like Facebook polls or by holding community conversations with local groups. Afterwards, be sure to take these learnings to your local Council.





## Raise the profile



One way of gaining the attention of key decision makers is to raise the profile of walkability in the community. There are a number of ways to raise the profile of a cause, consider the following points when developing and delivering your communication strategies. Remember to use your creativity! Novel approaches can be great for attracting attention.

Consider developing a media strategy to help stage and guide your efforts. Check out the [Community Tool Box](#) website for further information on how to develop a media strategy.

Find a journalist or columnist who is interested in community walkability. Where possible, provide human interest stories and personal anecdotes.

Tailor communications to your audience and ensure you maintain a positive message throughout.

Create an event and invite key players e.g. “walk in my shoes” type events where people can experience the issues first hand.

Engage influential leaders in the community to share your message.





## Be persistent



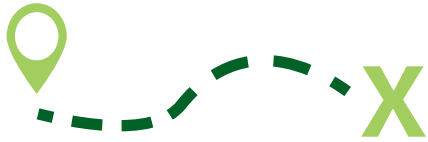
Achieving change can take a long time and a lot of work, but remaining persistent and following up on your actions can be the final key to success.

Repeat your message in varying formats, at diverse locations, and to different audiences.

Follow up and revise your approach. Be aware that often you'll need to follow up many times before you finally speak to the right person or get the result you would like.

Celebrate when you reach a milestone or achieve success. Celebrate the big and small wins!





## What's next?

Building support for walkability is an important first step! We hope that this guide may empower you to bring about positive changes in your community and we wish you all best on your path to creating walkable communities.

If you would like more information or support please email [activeliving@ahs.ca](mailto:activeliving@ahs.ca)

This document is based on information from the following:

1. *Heart and Stroke Foundation Built Environment Toolkit, Shaping Active, Healthy Communities, 2008*
2. *America Walks Webinar, Strengthening Change in Your Community by Engaging the Right People, 2016. Retrieved online <<http://americawalks.org/strengthening-change-in-your-community-by-engaging-the-right-people/>>*
3. *Guidebook for preparing a municipal development plan 2016. Retrieved online <<https://open.alberta.ca/publications/9781460138700>>*

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