

Scouting Goals & Tips for Taking Pictures: Healthy Community By Design Workshop Preparation

By Mark Fenton

The following is a list of locations and facilities that would be helpful to observe and/or take digital photos of in preparation for an active and healthy community workshop, presentation, or planning session. It is not necessary to visit all of the settings precisely or exhaustively, but rather to capture the range of environments that are most representative of what is typical in the community. Ideally you will include some things, which are considered the most promising or healthy settings in the community, and some which are the most challenging, and look at both physical activity and nutrition factors. This list also gives you an idea of what I look at when scouting a community in preparation for a community workshop.



Schools. Visit one or two schools at arrival or dismissal so you can observe 1) typical traffic patterns around the school, 2) method of transportation or “mode split” (walk, bike, bus, automobile), and 3) driver/parent behavior.

- Note: Goal is *not* to see the best school where many children walk and bike, but rather a typical school with representative traffic and walk/bike behavior.
- Key questions: How do most children in our community get to/from school? What is typical for the region? Do parents let their children walk/bike? If not, why? Is it physical or environmental conditions, fears for safety, or other issues? Are there any programs or efforts underway to increase active travel?
- What are other health-promoting attributes or challenges in the school setting?
E.g.
 - Shared use of school facilities for sports/recreation, community programs?
 - Vegetable gardens on school grounds?
 - Vending machines and/or cafeteria offerings?
 - Physical Activity breaks? PE? Recess?

Residential development. Find each of the following:

- Typical contemporary residential subdivision. Generally these are single use (residential only), lower density, often lacking sidewalks, trails, corner stores, etc. Many have cul-de-sacs and single entries onto collectors and arterial roads.
- Traditional (often older) neighborhood, ideally with a grid network of streets, perhaps alleyways, sidewalks & street trees, smaller lots, perhaps corner stores.
- Key questions: What is typical for the region? What does code currently require? What has the higher value per square foot, the newer subdivision or older neighborhoods? Any value at all put on those older, more walkable neighborhoods? Does one type of area have traffic or other challenges?

Retail/commercial settings. Find each of the following:

- Typical big box retail and/or strip type development. What is typical for retail and commercial development now? Specifically what are current parking and design requirements?
- Traditional “downtown” or Main Street style retail district, ideally with attributes such as buildings up at the sidewalk, multi-story buildings (retail first floor, office or residential above), street amenities (trees, benches, bicycle parking, etc.), on-street parking.
- Key questions: Are there historic Main Streets or village/city centers in the region? Are they economically vibrant or struggling? What distinguishes the most economically successful areas in the region?

Note: If doing regional or county-wide work, this is an opportunity to visit and take photos of a community center or downtown other than the largest regional center, which broadens the perspective of the work you’re doing.

Trail and greenway facilities, open space and recreational areas.

- Observe examples of multi-use trails and associated amenities such as typical trail cross-sections, trail heads, local connectors, as well as representative users.
- Space for active (ball-fields, basketball and tennis courts, pools) and passive recreation (park lands and picnic areas, open space and trails).
- Key questions: Is there a regional trail plan, or are there smaller plans for specific trails or local areas? In particular, is there any focus on creating a connected trail system that supports non-motorized transportation to key destinations such as neighborhoods, retail clusters, schools, public services? Are trails required by policies, such as subdivision regulations and development review guidelines? Are recreational areas dispersed and close to residential areas, or clustered and designed entirely for automobile access?

Transportation facilities in general. Specifically any notable and innovative pedestrian, bicycle, and transit designs and facilities.

- Good examples of engineering, traffic calming, safety and other design improvements such as bicycle lanes, roundabouts, improved pedestrian crossings and traffic calming devices such as median islands or speed tables?
- Key questions: Are innovative designs suggested, rewarded, or required by policy, or are they absent or a rarity? What is the response to such designs? Is there a Complete Streets policy in place (requiring consideration of pedestrians, bicyclists, & transit as well as motor vehicles in all road work), and if so, do design standards reflect this policy?

Healthy nutrition factors. Are any of the following present?

- Tools to shorten the distance from the farm to table, such as community gardens at schools, neighborhoods, and parks, as well as farmers markets.
- Conserved agricultural lands and consolidated village development; neighborhood stores and green grocers that bring fruits and vegetables closer to residential areas.
- Examples of low impact development practices (e.g. drainage swales, rain gardens) to minimize storm water run-off and watershed contamination.

Scouting Goals/Pictures

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- Location of fast food restaurants and drive-through establishments. Many or few? Near to schools or low income neighborhoods?
- Key questions: Are there restrictions on drive-through restaurants and fast food establishments? Are there land use policies to preserve agricultural lands and consolidate development near village and city centers (such as purchase and transfer of development rights)? Any incentives for green grocers or farmers markets in underserved neighborhoods/areas?

Note: If you are taking photographs of representative areas, be sure to:

1. Set your camera on the lowest possible image density or quality, or otherwise reduce the size of the image files so that they're easier to email and handle. You do not need high-density images for use in PowerPoint shows, for example.
2. Capture people naturally using the setting when possible to provide scale and context.
3. Consider setting up a photo-sharing site so that it's easier to post, view, and copy photos as we prepare for the workshop.