



EFFECTIVE ENGAGEMENT

ARTICLE 80 *Modernization*

Site Walk Facilitation Guide

CITY of BOSTON



City of Boston
Planning Department

SITE WALK FACILITATION GUIDE

PURPOSE OF A SITE WALK

- Introduce the project vision and goals
- Learn about and observe existing site conditions, historical context, and community priorities in relation to the project
- Offer an opportunity to build trust with the community

WHAT IS IT?

The site walk is a one hour walk with community members within a 0.5 mile radius of the proposed site.

WHEN WILL IT HELP?

The site walk is a helpful way to share and understand important site context. This is a great way for new and seasoned developers to introduce themselves to a neighborhood and build trust. No agreements or commitments should be made during this engagement activity.

As a relational form of engagement, the observations and conversations can help inform future concepts and corresponding public engagement for the project.

DOCUMENTATION

Once the Proponent has completed any early engagement activities, they will be asked to provide a summary of the engagement in the Small Project Review Application (SPRA) or Project Notification Form (PNF).

Documentation for a Site Walk should include:

- Date of the walk
- Location and route map
- Estimated number of attendees

STRUCTURE OF THE SITE WALK

We recommend creating a route with three to five stops around the site. The goal of each stop is to allow community members to provide important community-based knowledge and context that can help support the future design of the proposed development project. At each stop participants will be encouraged to make note of and share their observations, questions, and lived experiences. The development team can record the discussion through notes and photographs.

SUGGESTED STAKEHOLDER ROLES

Stakeholder	Role	
Proponent Team	Facilitator, Notetaker & Coordinator	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Facilitator: Shows up in a listening role. Guides participants through the walk and creates a space for people to engage• Notetaker/ Coordinator: Takes notes of questions posed, ideas or feedback shared, and communicates with the participants before and after the engagement
The Planning Department	Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provides resources + guidance• If needed, can support with outreach efforts or identification of community stakeholders
Community Members	Community Knowledge Stewards	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Share lived experience and history related to this site or the surrounding area• Communicate community needs and priorities in relation to project

BEST PRACTICES

Framing	It is important that you, as a developer, are in a listening role. At this point it is important for you to learn from the community.
Accessibility Services and Accommodations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• In case of a larger group (20+ people), consider breaking the group into two subgroups during the walk• Bring bottles of water to offer participants, especially on hot days• Choose a time and day that works for most people; consider work hours, federal holidays etc• When spreading the word and inviting people to join the site walk, include any accessibility constraints given the terrain and other factors• Ask at the start of the site walk if anyone has any accessibility needs
Tech Considerations	Bring a portable microphone to allow people to easily hear the facilitator

B

Route Selection

- Keep the walking portion to 1 hour maximum. Include 3-5 stopping points with places to sit along the route
- Walk at least 2 different types of street types (eg: main and side roads)
- Accessibility: Consider pavement quality, elevation and accessibility (stairs or ramps)

Communications

- Create and circulate the site walk information and if relevant, registration link (see invite message below)
- Create and share the walking route map with expected stop locations
- Share a route map with clearly indicated information pertaining to accessibility along route

Participant Documentation

- We encourage allowing for spoken, visual, and written methods for community members to share their comments, questions, and stories
- Example template for written notes and observations below
- Consider bringing voice recorder or using recording app on cell phones to record audio during the walk
- Share a digital photo album to receive photos taken by community members during the walk. For example Google Photos or Pedlet (a platform where participants can add images with short notes)

Materials

- Send map of route and plan for walk at least one week in advance to registered attendees
- Either before or afterwards send digital photo album link for participants to share photos they take during the walk
- If relevant, consider sharing sketch of the project to help people visualize any early thinking on the potential proposed project
- Written notes template
- Clipboards and pens or pencils

EXAMPLE

INVITATION & REGISTRATION

Send an email invitation to the outreach list which may be a combination of community organizations, community leaders, civic groups, elected officials, and Planning Department staff. See example invitation below.

EXAMPLE INVITE 

Hello Neighbor!

Our team at XYZ invites you to an upcoming site walk as we introduce and discuss a potential new development project at 123 X Street. We aim to learn alongside you during the early stages of developing our project concept. Please join us on May X, 2025, from 6:30 PM to 7:30 PM. We kindly ask you to register in advance so we can anticipate the number of attendees and ensure our walk can meet folks needs.

About the Walk:

- The walk will last for one hour and cover a distance of 0.7 miles, featuring four stops. Please refer to the attached route map for additional details.
- The route will wind along flat, shaded sidewalks. Although there is one steep hill on Y Street towards the end.
- While we will share some initial ideas regarding our project, our primary focus will be to learn from you about your knowledge of this site, its history, and important community context.

We eagerly look forward to meeting you and discovering how this project can positively contribute to your neighborhood.

EXAMPLE AGENDA**DURING THE SITE WALK**

Time	Topic	Materials/ Content
5 mins	<p>Set up and Settle In</p> <p>Give an overview of the site walk plan including where the group will walk and stop. Ask participants to share if they need any accommodations today. Encourage participants to openly share observations, ideas or questions at any time during the event</p>	Share any materials for recording notes, questions, observations
10 mins	<p>Project Introduction</p> <p>Provide a general introduction to the project. Be sure to note that this is an early stage and you expect additional changes during the upcoming City-led development review process.</p>	Optional: Share a draft project sketch

Time	Topic	Materials/ Content
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Project Introduction Continued

As a way of building trust, it may be helpful to focus on your intention with the new development project:

- How do you imagine the project integrating with the neighborhood it is in?
- What services, benefits or standards are you striving to include?

**45
Mins**

During Site Walk

In addition to listening and learning from attendees, consider asking questions that will help you gain additional insights. Below is a non-exhaustive list of example prompts to consider:

Prompt people to share their observations/ insights via conversation, written notes, or photographs

Historic Context

- What should we know about the history of this area and this site in particular?
- What has worked or has not worked about recent nearby development projects?

Getting Around (transport & mobility)

- What should we know about this street?
- Are existing curb cuts, for where cars enter and leave the building, in the right location?

Building Look and Feel

- What are elements of nearby or surrounding buildings that you especially like?
- If height is a concern, is there a particular side or part of the site that you would prefer to see more or less height?

Small Business & Local Culture

- What are some small businesses or establishments that you visit often or are integral to the area/ neighborhood?
- What is something we might not know about this neighborhood that makes it unique?

5 mins



Wrap Up

Thank everyone for participating! Encourage them to sign up for the [Planning Department email list](#) to stay up to date on future engagement opportunities about this project

EXAMPLE

NOTES TEMPLATE

The below example is one of the many ways you can ask people to document their thoughts and observations. Another method might be to ask participants to take pictures and upload into a shared digital photo album. You can download and use [this template](#).

Your Logo		During this site walk, the project team wants to hear from you! Please share your insights and knowledge of your neighborhood. This will help us understand how our project can be a good neighbor.		
Welcome!		  Want to take pictures instead? Scan the QR code to upload your pics		
		Stop #1	Stop #2	Stop #3
1	What about this space is special to you and your neighbors?			
2	What should we know about the history of this area?			
3	What do you think is most important to include in a new project here?			
4	What is something we might not know about this site?			