

MONTANA MAIN STREET

Walking Audit Checklist for Main Street Districts

Overview

Use this worksheet to assess building conditions, accessibility, signage and public space quality. Conducting a walking audit helps Main Street leaders and community stakeholders assess the strengths and weaknesses of their district. This structured checklist provides a framework for evaluating building conditions, pedestrian accessibility, signage and overall district character.

By completing this audit, communities can identify opportunities for preservation, revitalization and small-scale improvements that enhance the visitor experience and support local businesses.

Instructions

- Walk through a two to four-block area of your Main Street district.
- Take photos of areas that need improvement.
- Make notes about areas that excel or need attention.
- If possible, conduct the audit with a diverse group of stakeholders, including business owners, residents and local officials.
- Consider both day and evening conditions to account for lighting and activity differences.

1. Storefronts and Building Conditions

- Are façades well-maintained (paint, materials, brickwork, windows)?

- Are there signs of neglect (peeling paint, broken windows, boarded-up storefronts)?

- Are historic features intact, or have inappropriate alterations been made (vinyl siding, covered brickwork, removed decorative elements)?

- Are vacant buildings well-maintained and free from visible deterioration?

- Do businesses use consistent, well-designed signage that complements the district?

2. Pedestrian Accessibility and Safety

- Are sidewalks wide, unobstructed and well-maintained (no cracks, uneven pavement or trip hazards)?
- Are crosswalks clearly marked and located at appropriate points?
- Are there ramps and curb cuts for wheelchair users and strollers?
- Is pedestrian lighting adequate, especially at night?
- Are there benches, shade or other resting areas available for visitors?
- Are trash cans, bike racks and other street furniture functional and well-placed?

Photo Opportunity: Capture areas where walkability is strong and locations where improvements could be made.

3. Parking and Traffic Flow

- Are parking spaces clearly marked and accessible?
- Is there an appropriate balance of on-street parking and pedestrian space?
- Are speed limits clearly posted and appropriate for a Main Street environment?
- Do vehicles yield to pedestrians at crosswalks and intersections?
- Are there bike lanes or bike-friendly infrastructure in place?

Photo Opportunity: Identify areas where parking, biking and pedestrian infrastructure could be improved.

4. Signage and Wayfinding

- Is there clear signage directing visitors to parking, key attractions and public amenities?
- Are historic signs preserved, or have significant cultural markers been removed or replaced?
- Are business signs legible, well-lit and visually consistent with the district's character?
- Do street signs, banners or directional signs enhance the district's identity?

Photo Opportunity: Take photos of strong signage examples and areas where wayfinding improvements are needed.

5. Public Space and Gathering Areas

- Are there inviting public spaces (plazas, seating areas, green spaces) where people can gather?
- Are these spaces active and well-used, or do they feel empty and underutilized?
- Are trees, planters or landscaping elements well-maintained?
- Are there elements of public art, history or cultural representation?

Photo Opportunity: Highlight welcoming gathering spaces and locations that could benefit from design interventions.

6. Lighting and Safety Perception

- Are streetlights functional and appropriately spaced for pedestrian safety?
- Do storefronts and public spaces feel safe and inviting after dark?
- Are there areas with poor visibility or dark corners that may deter visitors?
- Do businesses have adequate exterior lighting?

Photo Opportunity: Capture areas with effective lighting and those where improvements are needed.

7. Business Mix and Activation

- Is there a good mix of businesses (retail, dining, services, cultural spaces)?

- Are storefront windows engaging and transparent, allowing pedestrians to see inside?

- Do businesses extend their presence to the sidewalk with seating, displays or decorative elements?

- Are there empty storefronts that could be activated for pop-ups, art installations or temporary uses?

Photo Opportunity: Show vibrant storefronts and spaces that could benefit from activation.

Next Steps: Turning Observations into Action

Once the audit is complete:

- Review photos and notes to identify trends and priority areas.
- Summarize key findings for your Main Street committee or local officials.
- Create an action plan with small, medium and long-term improvements (e.g., facade improvements, new seating, better signage).
- Engage property owners, businesses and community groups in solutions.
- Consider funding sources, such as facade grants, historic tax credits or city improvement programs.

Final Reflection

- What three areas stood out as strengths in your district?
- What three areas need the most improvement?
- What is one small change that could have an immediate impact?

Use this checklist as a starting point for revitalization efforts. Small, strategic changes add up to a big difference!