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PROCEEDINGS

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Perceptions towards Sustainable Walking Paths in Urban Areas of Sri Lanka

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Providing public open spaces close to neighborhoods, such as parks and city squares is becoming impossible with the limited land resources. Developing walking paths with natural settings, is becoming interesting as they improve the mental and physical health of people. Sri Lanka recently introduced jogging tracks or walking paths on stream banks, on par with sustainable development. Researchers identified walking as a common and the best physical exercise among many residents irrespective of their age. For effective use of walking paths, it is recommended to maintain some basic attributes such as car parks, shading, quality pavement, toilets, cafeteria, garden seats, public safety etc. There is no evidence of previous studies on attributes in jogging tracks in Sri Lanka. Hence, this research focused on identifying public perceptions on attributes of walking avenues in Sri Lanka. Diyawanna Oya, Oruthota and Kiribathgoda jogging tracks were selected as cases. Data were collected using a questionnaire from 150 visitors selected through convenience sampling, during the two peak time slots. Robust

test of equality of Means and Homogenous Subsets techniques were used to analyze preference of respondents. Results reveal majority of the respondents were males of 36 – 45 age group and who works for private companies. Ranking order presents that 'safety' is first while wash rooms and shading are second. Third preference is for garden seats and cafeteria while people prefer changing rooms with reasonable payments. The study strongly recommends the policy implications on ensuring the safety and providing the preferred requirements to encourage wide-scale walking participation of the public focusing on many benefits both to the community and the government.

Keywords: *Walking paths, Sustainable development, Attributes, Healthy living, Public perception*