

MT. PLEASANT PLANNING COMMISSION SIDEWALK CONSTRUCTION PRIORITIZATION POLICY

By State Statute and City Charter, the Planning Commission is charged with the annual review of the City's 5-Year Capital Improvement Plan. The purpose of this review is to assure that the City's capital expenditures are in keeping with the provisions of the adopted Master Plan.

Commissioners have watched over the past several years the agonizing special assessment process for new sidewalks. Although the Master Plan is silent regarding sidewalks, the Planning Commission decided to look at the issue and see if sound planning principals could be used to improve the prioritization of where new sidewalks were being scheduled to be built.

A Sidewalk Committee was created consisting of Planning Commission members John Bradac, Frances Lichtman and Lyn Markham. The committee gathered information, examined maps and reviewed materials from experts in the field of "walkable communities". Committee members learned the following from that process which they felt were important facts to consider regarding sidewalk-related issues:

1. The predominate street pattern in the city is the traditional grid system. This pattern is very efficient for the movement of traffic and the construction of sidewalks that link neighborhoods.
2. The city has 73.5 miles of streets within the city limits. If the ultimate goal of a walkable community is to have sidewalks on both sides of all streets, the Sidewalk Committee calculated that 147 miles of sidewalks would be needed in the city.
3. The city has 64.7 miles of sidewalks (approximately 44%) of the above goal.
4. A review of the existing sidewalk map suggests that older neighborhoods seem to have more sidewalks than areas developed in the 1950's through 1980's.
5. Even in the older neighborhoods there are gaps in the sidewalks that affect the connectivity of neighborhoods.
6. There is a major difference between "designated school walking routes" and "school walking zones".
 - a. "Designated school walking routes" refer to the streets determined by school principals to be the route by which students should approach the school.
 - b. "School walking zones" refer to the geographical area surrounding schools in which students are expected to walk and therefore are not eligible for bus transportation.
 - c. If there are not sidewalks in "school walking zones" leading to the "designated school walking routes", the routes lose their effectiveness and the safety of students may be compromised.

7. The current cost of installing sidewalks is approximately \$21.00 per lineal foot (note there are 5,280 feet in a mile) with the City picking up approximately 60% of the cost in special assessment districts.
8. The City Commission has provided \$100,000 annually since 1995 for new sidewalk construction (approximately 1 mile per year). At this rate it will take approximately 82 years to provide sidewalks at all missing locations.
9. All new home construction and commercial developments require a sidewalk to be built at the time of occupancy unless waived by the Planning Commission. This requirement in the zoning ordinance will help to reduce the amount of time it will take to provide sidewalks on all city streets compared to installing walks via special assessments.
10. Sidewalks installed for new home or commercial development are expenses incurred solely by the developer.
11. There are locations in the city where there is inadequate ROW to install sidewalks. The Commission discovered the following locations:
 - North side of Pickard Street between the Chippewa River and Crawford Road
 - North Fancher between Sampson and Industrial Drive
 - West Broomfield between Deming and Crawford
12. Sidewalks are a necessary component of a walkable community. Walkable communities tend to have stronger, healthier and cohesive neighborhoods with less traffic congestion and a stronger sense of civic identity.
13. The City has ordinances that require all commercial properties to keep their sidewalks clear of snow within 24 hours of a snowfall. There is no such requirement for residential or multiple-family properties. This greatly lessens the usability of sidewalks for many months of the year. The City plows 22.3 miles of these walks which are “designated school walking routes”. The cost of this service is paid for by the City’s general fund.
14. Sidewalk access to parks, especially on the “West Side”, have many gaps.
15. A visit to the Walk To School web site is beneficial (www.walktoschool-usa.org).
16. A visit to the Walkable City web site is beneficial (www.walkable.org).
17. The current policy used to prioritize the location of new sidewalks is:
 - Both sides of all major streets
 - All school walking routes
 - To in-fill gaps in the existing grid
 - All other streets
18. The Beyond 2000 document, prepared in 1995, contained numerous references to sidewalks. Those references reinforced the Planning Commission’s understanding that the community supports the concepts of a walkable community.

Conclusion

The current prioritization policy does not properly consider desirability, connectivity or utility of sidewalk placement when new construction is proposed. Refining and weighing the criteria used for prioritizing new sidewalk construction will enable strategic decision-making and focus our limited resources on building sidewalks in areas of greatest utility and need.

Recommendations

The Sidewalk Committee recommends that the following actions be taken:

1. The Planning Commission, Parks and Recreation Commission and City Commission embrace a walkable community philosophy by:
 - a. Continuing to provide high levels of financial support for new sidewalks, completion of sidewalk gap areas, and existing sidewalk repair.
 - b. Recognizing that the desirability of sidewalk placement may be tempered by its use/value to residents, location within a specific grid or zone, and its ability to provide a connection within and between neighborhoods.
 - c. Exploring the costs/benefits of providing city snow plowing services for all sidewalks within school walking zones.
2. Sponsor an annual Walk To School and Walk To Work Day in the community.
3. Sponsor a Dan Burden workshop for the community. The topic of the workshop would be people friendly walkable communities.
4. Revise the new sidewalk location selection prioritization policy as follows:
 - a. Highest Priority
 - 1) Designated school walking routes
 - 2) School walking zones (those areas where children are not bussed to a school and are expected to walk)
 - 3) Placement of a sidewalk on one side of a street in which the side selected would be based on the following factors: environmental tree impact, grid connect-ability
 - 4) One side of streets on a 1/4 mile grid (this will put a walk within approximately 1320' of all residents) and the second side of streets on a 1/4 mile grid if part of a major utility project or street reconstruction project.
 - 5) Streets where sidewalks are requested by more than 50% of the property owners
 - 6) Both sides of major streets with an hourly traffic count at or above 350 vehicles in any 1 hour time period within 24 hours.
 - 7) One side of all streets within a 1/4 mile of designated generators of pedestrian traffic including the following:
 - a) CMU campus
 - b) Mt. Pleasant High School

- c) Entrance routes to city parks
 - d) West Intermediate School
 - e) Others designated by the Planning Commission
- 8) New sidewalk construction on both sides when part of an extensive street reconstruction project
 - 9) New sidewalk where a gap exists within the city block and/or a void in the sidewalk grid of up to 1 block exists that impedes pedestrian walking connectivity.
- b. Medium Priority
- 1) One side of major streets with a an hourly traffic count at or above 250 vehicles in any 1 hour time period within 24 hours.
 - 2) Second side of streets on a 1/4 mile grid
 - 3) All other streets not addressed on lowest priority
- c. Lowest Priority
- 1) Streets in industrial zoned districts
 - 2) Dead end or cul-de-sac streets
 - 3) Areas with gravel streets
 - 4) Paved streets with a traffic count less than 250 vehicles in any 1 hour time period within 24 hours.
 - 5) Streets in flood plains
5. Send written notification to property owners when sidewalk work in front of their property is proposed within 3 years of the Capital Improvement Budget. It is understood that certain sidewalks may be completed out of sequence due to changes in funding availability or changes in neighborhood conditions. When projects are taken out of sequence and moved ahead in the Capital Improvement Budget, the minimum notification required for special assessments by Charter shall apply.
 6. Create a Sidewalk Prioritization Committee to annually review and comment on the future sidewalk construction plans contained in the City's Capital Improvement Budget. The committee shall be comprised of a representative from:
 - Planning Commission
 - Parks and Recreation Commission
 - Mt. Pleasant Public Schools
 Plus:
 - Public Works director
 - Public Safety director
 - City Planner
 7. Define traffic counts as 24-hour Average Daily Traffic (ADT) counts which are less than 36 months old, with the average of two traffic counts taken, one of which is not more than 1 year old.