

City of Mt. Pleasant

Sidewalk Construction Prioritization Guidelines

Background

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. In 2004 the Planning Commission considered the issue of sidewalk location and construction and developed guidance which included recommendations for prioritizing where new sidewalk construction occurs. In 2014 the Planning Commission was asked to revisit this earlier work and update any information or recommendations they felt were needed to reflect current conditions. Between these two separate efforts the following information was learned:

1. The predominant 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 the community is to have sidewalks on both sides of all streets, it is calculated that 147 miles of sidewalks would be needed in the city.
3. The city has 85 miles of sidewalks (approximately 58% if the goal was sidewalks on both sides of all streets).
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 \$25.00 per lineal foot.
8. 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 helps to reduce the amount of time it will take to provide sidewalks on all city streets compared to installing walks via special assessments.

9. Sidewalks installed for new home or commercial development are expenses incurred solely by the developer.
10. There are locations in the city where there is inadequate ROW to install sidewalks. The Planning 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

It is recognized that there may be other areas within the City that also have inadequate ROW

11. 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.
12. 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. To be a truly walkable community, access to sidewalks and other means of pedestrian access should be available year round, including in the winter months. The City plows approximately 25 miles of these walks which are "designated school walking routes". The cost of this service is paid for by the City's general fund.
13. Sidewalk accesses to parks, especially on the "West Side", have many gaps.
14. A visit to the Walk Bike to School web site is beneficial (www.walkbiketoschool.org).
15. A visit to the Walkable and Livable Communities Institute web site is beneficial (www.walklive.org).
16. The pre-2004 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
17. 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

Refining and weighing the criteria used for prioritizing new sidewalk construction will enable strategic decision-making and focus limited resources on building sidewalks in areas of greatest utility and need. Consultation with the 2011 Greater Mt. Pleasant Non-Motorized Plan revealed that many of the recommended sidewalk projects in that plan were either outside of the City limits or did not conflict with the recommendations and prioritization criteria which follows.

Recommendations

After their review in 2014, the Planning Commission recommends 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. Investigate snow plowing services for all sidewalks, especially those areas within the vicinity of schools.

2. Establish the sidewalk location selection prioritization guidelines as follows:
 - a. Highest Priority
 - 1) Compliance with provisions of the American with Disabilities Act (ADA)
 - 2) Designated school walking routes
 - 3) School walking zones
 - 4) Sidewalk locations described in the City's Master Plan (as described in sections pertaining to the Non-motorized Plan and Complete Streets).
 - 5) Gaps which exist in the existing sidewalk network and occur in front of vacant property along otherwise designated school walking routes.
 - 6) 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
 - 7) Streets where sidewalks are requested by more than 50% of the property owners
 - 8) Consideration should be given to construction of sidewalks on both sides of streets which have high traffic counts
 - 9) When part of an extensive street reconstruction project

 - b. Medium Priority
 - 1) One side of streets with lower traffic counts.

 - 2) 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) Streets in flood plains
3. 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.
4. Hold a Work Session with the Planning Commission and City Commission annually with the specific goal to review and comment on the future sidewalk construction plans contained in the City's Capital Improvement Budget. The joint meeting should include representation from the following:
- Parks and Recreation Commission
 - Mt. Pleasant Public Schools
 - Public Works director
 - Public Safety director
- It is understood that these guidelines are used to help prioritize construction of new sidewalks, but ultimately the decision of where to construct new sidewalks will be determined by the City Commission as part of the annual operating budget process.
5. The general preference is to construct straight sidewalks, a minimum of five feet wide, and a starting distance of one foot from the property line. Variations on construction should be allowed depending on the amount of right-of-way available and should be designed where practical to allow driveway parking space to allow at least enough space to park one vehicle, preserve landscaping and to work around mature trees.