



Land Use & Environment Committee

Sidewalk Repair Policy Briefing

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Title

Sidewalk Repair Policy Briefing

Recommended Action

Committee Recommendation:

Not referred to a committee.

City Manager Recommendation:

Receive a briefing regarding Sidewalk Repair Policy.

Report

Issue:

Whether to receive a briefing regarding Sidewalk Repair Policy

Staff Contact:

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Presenter(s):

Michelle Swanson, AICP, Senior Planner

Background and Analysis:

Some sidewalks in Olympia are in a state of poor repair, and efforts to encourage the adjacent property owners to fix them are often not successful.

Current practice

In February 2022, this Committee was briefed on the City's approach to sidewalk repair. The Committee requested that staff explore policy options to improve the state of repair for sidewalks.

Currently, OMC 12.36.010 requires adjacent property owners to repair their sidewalks. The City does prioritize and maintain some sidewalks on the same streets where we maintain street trees. Those are streets downtown and along many major streets, which are shown in the attached map. These streets have a lot of pedestrian activity, and many of them also have transit stops along them, which people typically walk to.

Elsewhere, we generally send a letter to the property owner and request that they repair the sidewalk adjacent to their property. In some instances, when the sidewalk is reported directly to Code

Enforcement rather than to Public Works Transportation staff, Code Enforcement staff will pursue the case. This results in uneven enforcement.

Policy Approaches

Staff researched what other cities do to address sidewalk repair and found a range of approaches. These will be reported to the committee in the presentation.

Next steps

To make progress on sidewalk repair starting next year, the forthcoming *2024-2029 Preliminary Capital Facilities Plan* will include a program to repair some sidewalks. From this program, we will get a better understanding of the costs of sidewalk repair. Additionally, staff proposes:

- Doing an inventory of sidewalks to learn the scope and scale of damaged sidewalks
- Continuing the policy of requesting that property owners repair their sidewalks
- Suspending code enforcement of sidewalk repair until a full policy can be developed

By doing an inventory, we can understand the extent of the repairs that are needed. With more data about the scope and scale of the problem, plus a better understanding of the cost of repairs, we can be better informed on how to design an effective program. With this information, staff can return to this Committee with clearly defined policy options to consider.

Climate Analysis:

Making it easier for people to walk is a key strategy for reducing greenhouse gas emissions from the transportation sector. Ensuring that sidewalks are in good repair is one way the City can promote walking.

The majority of sidewalk damage is caused by street tree roots. The City has robust street tree requirements, which is important not only for reducing the urban heat island effect but also to make walking more inviting. Managing the conflicts between street tree roots and sidewalk repair is one of the many ways Olympia can adapt to climate change.

Equity Analysis:

For many vulnerable people, walking - often to a bus stop - is their primary form of transportation. This includes children, some elders, and people who cannot afford a vehicle. For some people with disabilities who use walking aids, such as wheelchairs or walkers, a damaged sidewalk can be a barrier that prevents them from getting to where they need to go.

Additionally, uneven enforcement of the current policy is inequitable.

Neighborhood/Community Interests (if known):

Sidewalk damage is consistently raised as a concern by residents and business owners. Most property owners are not aware that they are responsible for fixing them. For some property owners, sidewalk repair can be a financial burden.

Financial Impact:

The sidewalk repair program that will be proposed in the *2024-2029 Preliminary Capital Facilities Plan* is likely to be for \$600,000. Of that, staff estimates that \$100,000 will be needed to do the

sidewalk repair inventory.

Options:

1. Receive the briefing.
2. Do not receive the briefing.
3. Receive the briefing at another time.

Attachments:

Map of Areas of Street Trees Maintained by the City