

Olympia Planning Commission

July 6, 2026

Olympia City Council
PO Box 1967 Olympia
WA 98507-1967

SUBJECT: Sidewalk Repair Policy

Dear Mayor Payne and Councilmembers:

The Planning Commission received a briefing regarding development of a sidewalk repair policy on May 4th, 2026, with further discussion on June 15th, 2026. It is our opinion that sidewalks in Olympia are critical public transportation infrastructure and that they should receive at least the same public support as streets and roads. Well maintained sidewalks throughout the City of Olympia to be necessary in meeting the Transportation Vision of the Comprehensive Plan. The Sidewalk Condition Assessment (published March 16, 2025) highlights numerous areas of deficiency in maintenance and suggests that the current approach to sidewalk maintenance is failing.

We would like to commend the city for commissioning the Sidewalk Condition Assessment, as well as starting sidewalk maintenance with the resources at hand. We look forward to expanding efforts along with the expanded Transportation Benefit District funding for multimodal transportation. The Planning Commission understands that the current support for sidewalk maintenance is about \$500,000 in annual capital funding and a single fulltime city crew focused on sidewalk maintenance is being established.

The Commission discussed the following aspects of a sidewalk repair policy in anticipation of the City Council considering a new Sidewalk Repair Policy:

- Who pays? The current city ordinances make it the responsibility of the adjacent property owner to maintain the sidewalk in front of their property. The Planning Commission recommends that this policy be updated to make sidewalk maintenance the City's responsibility:
 - First, sidewalks are currently not being adequately maintained. If there was increased enforcement to provide adequately maintained sidewalks, many property owners, particularly homeowners, are not well positioned to pay for or contract sidewalk repair efficiently.
 - Second, sidewalks are key public infrastructure that support all kinds of mobility, including walking, rolling, access to transit, and trips that include driving. The city is better positioned for efficient sidewalk repair and proactively directing funding with equity in mind. Sidewalks should be supported similar to other city-maintained road infrastructure.
 - Consider liability. How does the repair policy effect City or property owner liability?
- Small vs. Large Property Owners. The Planning Commission generally thought that differentiating between property owners (e.g. larger commercial owners or schools vs. single family homes) would

be unfair with costs likely passed on to small businesses or people living in larger apartment buildings.

- Partnerships. Explore grants, non-profit or community resources to assist with neighborhood sidewalk repairs. We understand that construction in the right of way requires bonding and may not be suitable for mechanisms like neighborhood matching grants.
- Site prioritization. One of the major policy questions asked in the city survey on sidewalk policy was whether to prioritize urban corridors or pedestrian destinations. The Planning Commission recommends prioritizing pedestrian “destinations”, with the following considerations:
 - Prioritize sidewalks that serve the most people and trips, but balance with a geographic diversity of destinations so more people can see side walk maintenance in action near where they live, play, and work.
 - Identify lower-severity issues that can be quickly corrected to improve access to functional sidewalks.
 - Collaborate with Intercity Transit to support bus stops (especially stops supporting high ridership and frequent use).
 - We particularly support staff expanding the definition of pedestrian “destinations” to include grocery stores (as presented, defined as w/ “fresh produce”).
- Create a downtown sidewalk repair policy in a future update of the Downtown Strategy. The Leland Consulting Group mentioned this during their briefing to OPC on June 15th, 2026. Downtown is the heart of the city, and attracts many visitors, and would benefit from a sidewalk repair policy for the whole area, rather than on an ad hoc basis.
- Investment in maintenance. We support the city getting started with sidewalk maintenance even as the policy is refined, the need is great, and experience will help guide policy. However, the Planning Commission believes that more resources are needed now to stabilize maintenance, even if it means forgoing other important mobility improvements. Current projected timelines for catching up on the backlog are too long and adequately maintaining infrastructure that we already have should be the most affordable and fastest way to improve mobility for everyone.

Additional considerations.

- Street trees. Sidewalk damage, particularly panel uplift, can often be traced back to tree roots, while trees also contribute to walkability of sidewalks and streets. It is the understanding of the Planning Commission that design requirements for tree placement, soil preparation, and tree species selection have been improved to protect trees and prevent uplift. We encourage flexible policies in sidewalk repair to avoid damaging large trees and continuing to find more space for streets trees in the right of way that avoids conflicts with sidewalks (e.g. wider planting strips). Well maintained sidewalks can go hand in hand with meeting or exceeding tree canopy cover goals.
- Vegetation. The sidewalk condition report noted many sidewalks being blocked by vegetation. It was noted that code enforcement is often successful in these scenarios, but the Planning Commission recommends that any sidewalk maintenance policy needs to be more proactive in enforcement, protect against vegetation on private property damaging sidewalks, and work with the community to make sure vegetation does not block sidewalks.
- Vacancy study. The Planning Commission would like to understand if there is any correlation between sidewalk disrepair and building vacancy.
- The planning commission discussed the possibility of requiring sidewalk repair at the time of sale.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Greg R. Quetin". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Greg Quetin
Chair