

Cities can achieve long-term success with sidewalks



Once a commitment has been made to proceed with sidewalk improvements, cities should review current sidewalk ordinances. The ordinances need to address both repair and maintenance as well as new construction. The ordinance also needs to include provisions for addressing the costs of repairing, maintaining and installing new sidewalks.

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Sidewalks have long been a part of the municipal landscape providing a safe avenue for pedestrian traffic. As with any other infrastructure, cities must dedicate appropriate attention and resources to maintain this valuable community asset.

Most communities have an ordinance that outlines specific requirements for sidewalk maintenance and construction. Even with the ordinance, cities still have sidewalks in disrepair, requests for sidewalk removal and new housing subdivisions with no sidewalks. City councils are often split on the need or desire for sidewalks. As a result, progress in achieving a long-term solution can be difficult. The solution must begin with one simple ingredient - commitment. The commitment to establish and enforce a sidewalk program is the key to maintaining and improving this important community asset.

Cities need sidewalks to provide a safe and attractive means to transmit pedestrian traffic separately from vehicular traffic. Street right-of-ways historically included appropriate width to accommodate the roadway, a sidewalk on each side and a green space or boulevard between the sidewalk and edge of road. Sidewalks were required wherever a roadway was to be constructed. Over the years sidewalk materials have progressed from wood or gravel to more permanent hard surfacing such as concrete or asphalt. Of these, concrete is the overwhelming preferred choice due to ease of installation and long service life with minimal maintenance.

Sidewalk improvements fall into two categories: 1) repair and maintenance and 2) new construction. Repair and maintenance applies to the existing system. New construction applies to areas where no sidewalk currently exists, generally in newer subdivisions. However, areas of older, more established portions of town may also be without sidewalks.

Once a commitment has been made to proceed with sidewalk improvements, cities should review current sidewalk ordinances. The ordinances need to address both repair and maintenance as well as new construction. The ordinance also needs to include provisions for addressing the costs of repairing, maintaining and installing new sidewalks. Guidelines for payment may differ for maintenance versus new construction.

Repair and Maintenance

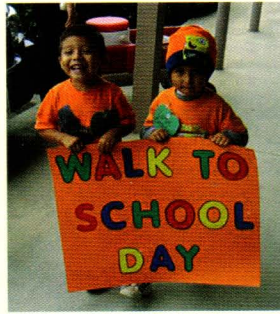
Areas in need of repair can be easily identified looking at the surface condition, differential movement, heaving (tree roots) or other issues. Once the areas have been identified, property owners should be notified their sidewalk is in need of repair and given the option to do the work themselves or have repairs carried out by the city. Cities do have the option to require property owners to use a qualified or pre-approved contractor, which can sometimes save them money. Payment for repairs should follow the city's established ordinance and may include: a) the property owner hiring the workers, b) or the property owner paying the city and its contractor or c) allow the city to assess the cost in the same manner as a property tax.

New Construction

New construction can occur in either established areas or new subdivisions. If not already established, it is recommended to create an ordinance that requires sidewalk construction in any new subdivisions as they are developed. In most cases, the developer assumes responsibility for the

Safe Routes to School (SRTS) Funding

SRTS is an international effort to increase safety and promote walking and bicycling to school through engineering, education, enforcement, encouragement and evaluation. The 2005 federal transportation bill included a new SRTS federal funding source of \$612 million over five years for both infrastructure and non-infrastructure reimbursement grants. The infrastructure projects can include sidewalk improvements, speed reduction improvements, crossing improvements, bicycle and pedestrian paths and secure bicycle parking facilities. The non-infrastructure grants can go towards activities that encourage walking and bicycling to school.



The SRTS Grant Program is 100 percent federal funding with no local match required. Eligible applicants are state, local and regional agencies, including non-profit organizations and schools. The primary beneficiaries must be kindergarten through eighth grade students and the projects must be within two miles of a school. For more information and to download a grant application, go to www.dot.state.ia.us/saferoutes/. The program is administered by the Iowa Department of Transportation. The application deadline for 2008 funds is October 1, 2007.

construction and cost of the installation. The city may also choose to require the developer or property owner to install sidewalks within a certain time period regardless of when other site improvements take place to avoid long term "gaps" within the development. New sidewalks in established areas where none currently exist can be addressed in the same manner as repairs.

Financing

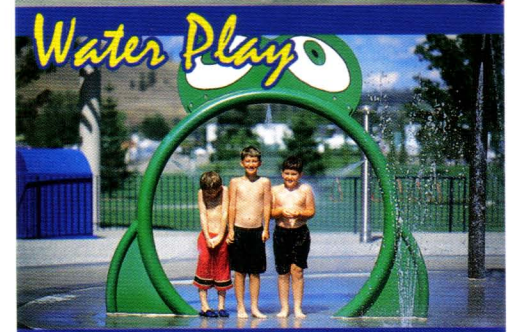
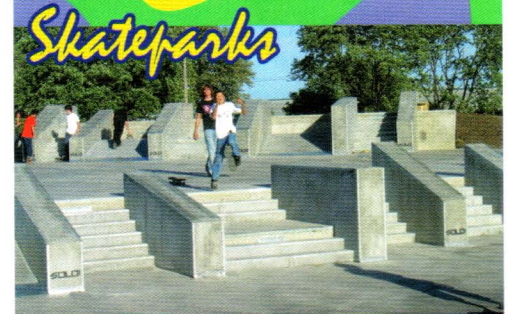
Cities have several options for financing new sidewalk projects. Some cities may wish to participate in some or all of the cost in an effort to help stimulate growth and development. If partial participation is made, the simplest methodology is to provide reimbursement based on a set cost per running foot. The cost allowance can be adjusted from year to year to reflect current financial conditions. If the city decides to fully fund the sidewalk construction, it is likely that a bidding process can be used to better control project costs.

Repairs and maintenance are generally the responsibility of individual property owners. However many communities have areas where repairs are needed and sometimes occur because city ordinances have not been followed or enforced. Enforcement can be implemented with the property owner bearing the expense. This is often where controversy occurs and can divide the city and property owners. A more successful strategy may be to share the cost between city and property owner. This strategy can result in a more timely execution of the ultimate goal. Again, the simplest methodology is to provide a reimbursement allowance based on a set cost per running foot.

Financing options available to cities can include: general fund revenues, general obligation bonds, Road Use Tax Funds (RUTF), local option sales tax, casino revenues, grant or creating a special assessment.

Special assessment funding for a sidewalk project may not be desirable due to the additional costs associated with the process. Preparation of an assessment plat and schedule, together with the associated public hearing and legal process, significantly adds to the cost of the improvement. However, there may be instances where a city intends to construct street paving improvements in areas where no sidewalks exist. If special assessments are utilized for the street improvements, the city may wish to include sidewalk improvements with the street project.

The key ingredients to a successful sidewalk program are commitment and money. Cities have tools available to address this problem; it is a matter of implementing them. While improvements will not occur overnight, developing a plan and beginning its implementation will result in measurable results.



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