

STAFF REPORT

To: Planning and Economic Development Committee

Date: September 15, 2015

From: Ken Putnam, PE, Transportation Director

Via: Mr. Gary Jackson, City Manager

Subject: Neighborhood Sidewalk Policy

Summary Statement: Staff is seeking approval of the attached proposed Neighborhood Sidewalk Policy.

Review: City Council has created a neighborhood sidewalk project line item in the capital budget, and staff was directed to create a policy to use in choosing new sidewalk projects for the funding. Before coming to this body, the proposed policy was reviewed and endorsed by the Multimodal Transportation Commission (MMTC) and the Neighborhood Advisory Committee (NAC).

Background: City Council has created a neighborhood sidewalk project line item in the capital budget, and in order to prioritize the potential projects in an objective and transparent way, the attached policy is being proposed.

The policy identifies initial and secondary screening factors for the selection process. Initial screening is done using elements that can be obtained and quantified via geographic information systems (GIS). The elements selected as the initial screening factors are: proximity to transit stops and community destinations, areas zoned for small lot or multi-family residential use, prevalence of low-income households and of households without motor vehicles, and two measures of safety: traffic volume and pedestrian crash history.

A set of secondary screening factors will be applied to the top-ranking projects as determined by the initial screening process. The secondary screening criteria are not ones that can be reliably screened via GIS. They are: connectivity to the transportation system, whether sidewalk is already present on one side of the street, construction feasibility, and if a choice must be made from two or more similarly ranking projects, geographic distribution of projects.

The policy proposed was created under the direction of a four-person Neighborhood Sidewalk Committee, made up of members of the MMTC, and including the NAC representative to the MMTC. Considerable committee member and staff time and energy have been invested in this project, including by Information Technology Department staff. All involved believe that the attached policy achieves the goal of clearly identifying sidewalk projects that would be included in the universe of potential projects, and outlining the factors that will be used to prioritize those potential projects.

This work was advised by public input in the form of a survey and interaction with residents and representative groups. Input was gathered at the NAC Festival of Neighborhoods via face-to-face input and a short survey to complete and return. Additional survey opportunities were promoted via the city's neighborhood, transit and bicycle and pedestrian mailing lists, and through other contacts.

Pros: The attached policy provides guidance for project selection for neighborhood sidewalk construction and allows staff to move to selection of projects under the program.

Cons: This policy, like all that guide a selection process, has limitations; however, the policy includes provisions for review and revision if needed.

Fiscal Impact: There is no known fiscal impact associated with this action.

Action Step: Direct adoption as policy, referral to City Council for adoption, or return for revision.

Attachment:
Proposed Neighborhood Sidewalk Policy

Neighborhood Sidewalk Policy

Applicability. This policy applies to sidewalks constructed with funding identified in the city's Neighborhood Sidewalk capital category.

Definition. Neighborhood sidewalks are paved pedestrian facilities that are parallel to, but with some physical separation from, streets that are classified as minor arterials, collectors, or local streets and are located within primarily residential areas. They have the purpose of creating safe connectors to education, business, transportation, recreational, or government centers.

Minimum requirements for consideration. Streets that are identified as a needed linkage in the approved Pedestrian Master Plan. Primary streets (i.e. US and NC numbered routes) are not included in the universe of neighborhood streets. In addition, streets that do not meet the minimum traffic volume specified to necessitate sidewalks for new development or redevelopment shall not be considered for construction under this policy. That minimum volume is currently 300 vehicles per day.

Prioritization. Within the available funding, projects shall be selected based on their compliance with the following prioritization criteria:

Initial Screening Factors

- **Proximity to destinations.** Potential projects will be rated on proximity to transit and to community destinations. These elements will be additive (proximity to a school AND proximity to a transit stop AND proximity to ...). The community destinations include:
 - Transit stops (within 1/4 mile)
 - Major grocery stores (within 1/2 mile)
 - Asheville City Parks (within 1/2 mile)
 - Asheville City Recreation Centers (within 1/2 mile)
 - Buncombe County Libraries (within 1/2 mile)
 - Schools, see Appendix for details (within 1/2 mile)
- **Zoning.** Areas with residential zoning at a density of 8 dwelling units per acre or higher (RS8, RM8, RM16).
- **Demographics.** Prevalence of low-income households and of no-vehicle households.
- **Safety**
 - **Pedestrian Crashes.** Crashes reported within 5 years and along the project segment or within 150 feet of each end of the segment and along the same street. Using most recent 5-year NCDOT or City of Asheville data available.

- **Traffic Volume.** Using either actual or estimated count, as available.

Secondary Screening Factors. Secondary screening factors will be applied to the top-ranking projects as determined by the initial screening process. The number of projects to consider in the secondary screening process will be based on the anticipated funding available.

- **Connectivity.** The project must contribute to the continuity of the transportation network.
- **Presence/Absence of Sidewalk on one side of the street.** If a continuous sidewalk already exists on one side of the street, sidewalk for the second side of the street will not normally be considered for construction under this program.
- **Construction feasibility, including available funding, geographic constraints, and right-of-way.** Adequate right-of-way and/or easements must exist or be donated to the city.
- **Geographic distribution.** In the event that there are two or more similarly ranked projects and a choice must be made between them, consideration will be given to achieving distribution of projects across the city to the extent that is reasonable.

Public Input. Recognizing that public input is vital to all planning, the public shall be consulted as to the contents of this policy prior to implementation of the policy, and at reasonable intervals to ensure that the policy continues to reflect the community's vision. It is anticipated that the first reassessment of this policy shall be within five years of implementation.

Future Involvement of the Neighborhood Sidewalk Committee. The committee will meet as necessary to advise staff or revise this policy, as requested by city staff or by the Asheville Multimodal Transportation Commission.

Appendix A, Neighborhood Sidewalk Policy

The purpose of this appendix is to expand on certain elements in the policy and to document the processes used. It has the same organization as the policy. If a section is not listed here, no additional information was felt necessary. This is a reference document rather than the day-to-day working document.

Minimum requirements for consideration. This section includes reference to a minimum traffic volume for requiring sidewalk for development/redevelopment projects. That minimum volume is currently 300 vehicles per day as in the UDO and/or City of Asheville's Standard Specifications and Details Manual.

Prioritization

Initial Screening Factors

Each of these factors is counted and then scored. The scoring was intended to give approximately equal weight to each of the factors: proximity to destinations, zoning, low income households, zero vehicle households, and traffic volume, and to have pedestrian-involved crashes weigh in addition to those factors.

- **Proximity to destinations.**

The destination elements are additive (proximity to a school AND proximity to a transit stop AND proximity to ...). Each element was counted and then scored by using a range of counts to achieve a score.

- **Transit stops.** Source: City of Asheville GIS data. Transit ridership data was obtained from ART system data that is collected for other reporting purposes.
- **Major grocery stores.** This includes full line grocery stores, not convenience stores or other limited-inventory stores. Source: data set created and entered into GIS for this project.
- **Asheville City Parks.** Source: City of Asheville GIS data.
- **Asheville City Recreation Centers.** Source: City of Asheville GIS data.
- **Buncombe County Libraries** inside Asheville city limits. Source: City of Asheville GIS data.
- **Schools.** Institutions that are considered schools for the purposes of this policy are:
 - Asheville City Schools, Buncombe County Schools and Charter Schools inside the City of Asheville which serve students in any combination of grades from Pre-Kindergarten through 12th grade. Source: NC Division of Public Education registries.

- Private schools inside the City of Asheville which are registered with the NC Division of Non-Public Education, have an enrollment of 100 students or more, and serve students in any combination of grades from Pre-Kindergarten through 12th grade. Source: NC Division of Non-Public Education registry.
- Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College
- UNC Asheville

Source: data set created as noted within each classification and entered into GIS for this project.

- **Zoning.** Areas with residential zoning at a density of 8 or more dwelling units per acre (RS8, RM8, RM16). This criterion applies to zoning, not necessarily current use. Areas with RM16 zoning are given twice the value of those with RS or RM8 zoning.
- **Demographics.** Demographic information is based on available US Census data.
- **Safety**
 - **Pedestrian Crashes.** Crash data may use either the most recent 5-year NCDOT or City of Asheville data available. The choice of data sets will be based on completeness and accuracy of the data. In the initial ranking from this policy, NCDOT data was used.

Secondary Screening Factors.

- **Presence/Absence of Sidewalk on one side of the street.** If a continuous sidewalk already exists on one side of the street, sidewalk for the second side of the street will not normally be considered for construction under this program. If discontinuous sidewalk exists, construction of sidewalk to make a continuous sidewalk on one side of the street will be considered.
- **Construction feasibility, including available funding, geographic constraints, and right-of-way.** Constructability assessments and cost estimates will be made by the city's Capital Projects Division, or its designee.

Initial/Current Public Involvement Plan. The public involvement plan was developed by the Neighborhood Sidewalk Committee, which consists of representatives of the City of Asheville Multimodal Transportation Commission and the City of Asheville Neighborhood Advisory Committee (NAC). Initial involvement included seeking input at the NAC Festival of Neighborhoods via face-to-face input and a short survey to complete

and return. Additional survey and personal interaction opportunities were promoted via the city's Neighborhood Coordinator, transit and bicycle and pedestrian mailing lists, and other staff contacts. The community group Just Economics was contacted and agreed to distribute the survey as coincides with their plans. The surveys remain open for input, which can be used when this policy is revisited.

The Neighborhood Sidewalk Committee. At the time of initiation of this policy, the committee consisted of three members of the Multimodal Transportation Commission (MMTC) and one from the Neighborhood Advisory Committee (NAC). That NAC member was also the NAC's regular liaison to the MMTC.