

2007 Plan: Pages 187-189

The 2007 Plan proposed approximately 25 miles of new sidewalk be provided to fill sidewalk gaps along major streets. The NTP focused primarily on sidewalk deficiencies along major street facilities and those providing access to schools. The plan noted the increased safety and convenience needs for pedestrians walking along higher speed, higher volume roadways. The Plan did not, therefore, define all areas with missing sidewalk segments as “Sidewalk Gaps.” It is recognized that there are large areas in the city where sidewalks do not exist; these areas are found mostly in neighborhoods along local streets. While installation of sidewalks in such areas could also fill an important non-motorized function, these missing sidewalk segments are not listed in the NTP as sidewalk gaps to maintain primary focus on major street sidewalk deficiencies

The 2007 Plan’s recommendation was to install the high priority sidewalks as a Near-term Opportunity. City policy requires that street projects include and provide coincidental non-motorized improvements. The Plan cited the West Stadium Blvd reconstruction project that implemented bike lanes, crossing islands, and sidewalks in addition to the bridge and street reconstruction. Continued application of this policy has resulted in several new sidewalk segments being provided since 2007. Examples include Dexter Avenue from Huron to Maple, Packard Road along the St. Aubin right-of-way, and along portions of S. State Street and E. Stadium Blvd as part of the Ann Arbor Bridges project. Beyond the investments for new sidewalks coincidental to street projects, no sidewalk funding mechanism, other than the method described next, has yet been identified.

An additional funding source for constructing new sidewalk is via special assessment. While a sidewalk repair component of the City’s Street Millage was approved by voters in 2011, installation of new sidewalks was explicitly excluded as an allowable use of that revenue. Per the Fact Sheet for Sidewalk Repair Millage, City of Ann Arbor: “Installing a new sidewalk for the first time would be considered an initial improvement, which would mean that the adjacent property owners would be charged for the work. A special assessment is typically applied to the properties.” However, adjacent property owners (particularly single family residential owners), faced with the sometimes significant cost of sidewalk installation, often oppose the special assessment for such new sidewalk construction. This limits, to some degree, the utility of this approach to filling sidewalk gaps in the City.

Since the 2007 Plan did not identify funding sources for sidewalk construction beyond that coincidental to street projects or via Special Assessments, many gaps identified in the 2007 Plan remain, and a few additional gaps have been identified.

To comprehensively address sidewalk gaps in the city, an adequate policy base and funding program are needed. The Plan Update, while continuing to maintain the 2007 Plan sidewalk gap listing, is now placing increased emphasis on seeking to identify funding to fill those gaps. Partly in response to this

identified ongoing need, the FY2014-2015 City Budget allocated \$75,000 of general funds to study the sidewalk gap issue in more detail. This analysis, anticipated to take approximately 18 months, will:

1. Complete a GIS inventory of sidewalks/gaps
2. Generate planning level estimate of costs to fill all gaps
3. Research sidewalk gap elimination strategies employed by other communities
4. Form Stakeholder/Advisory Committee
5. Characterize the nature of gaps (small discrete gaps, neighborhood level gaps, those per the NTP, etc.)
6. Develop tentative gap elimination prioritization criteria and funding strategies
7. Undertake public engagement regarding tentative prioritization and funding strategies
8. Prioritize sidewalks based on research and public engagement
9. Develop detailed funding strategies
10. Develop a Draft Plan and conduct additional public engagement
11. Revise and present Final Plan to City Council
12. Begin implementation of the plan

This effort will allow staff to develop an implementation program that not only responds to the needs outlined in the Plan, but also to address sidewalk gaps at a level beyond the scope of the NTP.

Federal policy was updated and clarified in March 2010, through a new US Department of Transportation Policy Statement on Bicycle and Pedestrian Accommodation Regulations and Recommendations. It states that transportation projects should incorporate safe and convenient walking and bicycling facilities, unless:

“The cost of establishing bikeways or walkways would be excessively disproportionate to the need or probable use. Excessively disproportionate is defined as exceeding twenty percent of the cost of the larger transportation project” (FHWA).

During the upcoming sidewalk gap elimination planning, project specific location issues need to be taken in to account. There are, for example, locations along roadways where the provision of a sidewalk segment is not practical, feasible, or the investment is not warranted by the limited use such a facility might serve. A more detailed evaluation is needed to so that identified efforts to eliminate sidewalk gap areas are consistent with this local and federal policy.

The Plan Review acknowledges the need for filling sidewalk gaps and defining appropriate funding sources for addressing this important program area. It recognizes the increased attention to the need to fill sidewalk gaps evidenced by City Council’s recent budget action. Once the sidewalk planning effort is completed, the task will turn to securing the resources necessary to address this non-motorized system need and installing improvements. Although several years have passed following adoption of the 2007 Plan, through this plan review effort the City has framed addressing sidewalk gaps as an important issue. Over the next few years the goal is to develop a better definition of the problem, secure additional

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avenues for funding and create a more walkable community by making appropriate investments pursuant to the NTP and additional information that emerges from the sidewalk planning process.

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