



METROPOLITAN COUNCIL

Member of Metro Council

Emily Benedict Councilwoman, District 7

January 31, 2020

Vice Mayor Jim Shulman
Metro Historic Courthouse
One Public Square, Suite 204
Nashville, Tennessee 37201

Dear Vice Mayor Shulman,

Thank you for your commitment to the betterment of the city by seeking answers to the ongoing issues relative to sidewalk creation and maintenance. It has been an eye-opening experience, both for the committee and for many departments. There are some quick wins, as well as longer term solutions, and most importantly, obstacles that need to be removed that will all result in a more walkable Nashville. Thank you for entrusting all of us to compile these findings.

The Special Committee on Sidewalks was directed by you to answer the following:

Sidewalks - a perpetual issue for Nashville. Who has the list of current and future sidewalks? How is that list determined? How much does it cost to build a linear foot of sidewalk in Nashville? How does that cost compare with other peer cities? And is there a way to reduce the cost so that we can get more sidewalks?

We spoke with many stakeholders, including Public Works, Planning, Procurement, Metro Water and Stormwater Services, and the Mayor's Office of Transportation. The Committee findings and recommendations are summarized below.

Who has the list of current and future sidewalks?

- Public Works creates a bi-monthly report of sidewalks currently under construction and of upcoming construction. A portal available to the public called "Sidewalks Project Tracker" maps that ongoing and upcoming construction.
<https://mpw.nashville.gov/sidewalks/>
- MPW has a list for future sidewalk development over the coming years, up to as many as five years in advance.
- It should be noted that MNPS and Parks maintain many of their own sidewalks, which come from their own budgets. The work they do was outside of the scope of this committee.

How is that list determined?

- That list is populated by MPW based on differing priorities:
 - Sidewalk construction projects are determined, first, according to Chapter 5 of the 2017 WalknBike plan. The plan used a scoring system to create a list of 71 miles of sidewalk that make up the "Priority Sidewalk Network." These 71 miles are the priority amongst 1,900 miles of "greatest need" sidewalks, which is a subset of the 4,700 miles of missing sidewalk segments in Metropolitan Davidson County.
 - Public Works selects projects from the Priority Sidewalk Network based on ease of construction, cost, district/geographic equity (typically, one project for each PBZ district), and complaints in Hub Nashville. The proposed list from Public Works is reviewed and finalized by a committee made up of Public Works, Planning, MTA, and Parks. The list must be approved by the Mayor's Office. Finally, approval is sought from each of our 35 Councilmembers.

How much does it cost to build a linear foot of sidewalk in Nashville?

- Public Works budgets \$1,000 per linear foot of sidewalk, which assumes a more complicated project including the implementation of curb and gutter, side slope regrading, tying-in driveways, using fill and building retaining walls, and moving utility poles and lines. The current average cost of sidewalk is \$837 per linear foot, which is 18% professional services costs and 82% construction costs.

How does that compare with other peer cities?

- The comparison to peer cities is being reviewed by both Public Works (MPW) and the Mayor's Office of Transportation.
- Cobb County, Georgia shared with Public Works its sidewalk construction costs (which did not include professional services costs). In Nashville, 74% of sidewalk construction cost is spent on stormwater drainage. In Cobb County, stormwater drainage makes up 30% of the cost. Comparing line items, Nashville pays three times the amount that Cobb County spends on costs attributed to stormwater drainage. In conversation with Cobb County, Public Works learned that Cobb County has competitive bidding for site-specific projects.

For your final question I decided to rephrase it to the Committee and to Metro departments as:

- How can we make building sidewalks more cost effective?
- How can we build sidewalks more quickly?
- If you could waive a magic wand, how could you make your role in building sidewalks better?

How can we make building sidewalks more cost effective?

- Nashville needs dedicated funding and personnel for sidewalk creation, which would result in a more consistent machination for MPW, therefore reducing costs.
- The bidding process needs to be opened to more than a single contractor to allow for competitive pricing and less delay in implementation. Also, once a project is selected, it should be spot bid with multiple vendors. This includes not only construction, but design, and every other stakeholder which we outsource.
- Use alternative pedestrian methods where safety can be ensured. Ex: striping, bollards. This is especially important in trouble areas that could have quick improvement.
- Eliminate or change the Sidewalk Bill #493 in-lieu contribution option. Public Works estimated a cost of \$1000/linear foot for new sidewalk production. This cost could be drastically reduced if a sidewalk was built by the developer/contractor/homeowner while a home is undergoing renovation/redevelopment.
 - If we cannot eliminate the in-lieu contribution, developer/contractor/homeowner should build as if the sidewalk is coming soon. No items should be allowed in the space for a planned sidewalk which might be difficult to remove later. This includes hardscapes, fencing, driveway infrastructure, landscaping, mailboxes, etc. This land should be prepared and graded for the future sidewalk.
 - Increase the in-lieu fee. It is currently \$152/linear foot vs MPW's \$1000/linear foot. A fee increase would encourage more developers to build the sidewalk and discourage payment of the in-lieu contribution which pushes back construction and covers only a fraction of the sidewalk cost. Developers push back on this cost many times due to expensive items like utility pole relocation, and improvement to water and sewer pipes. These developers should be required to contribute to the betterment of their neighbors, who will be there long after the developer has sold their property.

How can we build sidewalks more quickly?

- The most important factor is political will from the Council and from the Mayor. To become a walkable city, there must be urgency to pedestrian safety by providing a dedicated revenue stream. MPW cannot hire additional staff and execute a robust plan without a long term plan that is supported by taxpayers, which should be led by elected officials.
- Remove all district-centered political motivation from the sidewalk building process. Stick to the WalknBike plan (or a new plan that will maximize our rate of building sidewalks), and do not allow favoritism in individual Council districts. We must show that there is a citywide commitment, and that prioritization is determined by ranked safety needs for all Nashvillians.
- MPW should be the sole party responsible for sidewalk development and maintenance. There should be a dotted line report structure to departments that support the creation of sidewalks. For instance, MPW would have oversight to the work of MWS and NES relative to each sidewalk project.

- MPW Staffing - there is only one full-time staffer dedicated to sidewalk infrastructure (new and existing) within MPW. From addressing building and ROW issues to project management and procurement, this group should be expanded to between 3 - 5 individuals, and even more headcount if we create stretch goals that will increase our sidewalk development exponentially.
- Design a “good, better, best” strategy when building sidewalks. In many places, we need the current level of quality that we build, however in other places a less robust product could work equally well. This determination should be made by MPW.

If we could wave a magic wand, how do you think we could improve the process?

- Pedestrian level lighting. Our street lighting is designed for cars, not pedestrians. Especially at corners, pedestrian level lighting would increase visibility.
- Lower speed limits to 20 mph on residential streets. Allow for cut-through streets to be higher, but on purely neighborhood/residential streets, no one needs to drive more than 20 mph.
- Include sidewalks as a matter of priority in the new Transportation Plan. The Mayor’s Office recently committed to “Vision Zero” to eliminate traffic fatalities in Nashville, and an important facet to address is pedestrian deaths. Linking sidewalk production to a reduction in traffic and increased use of public transportation must be understood and promoted. Link sidewalks to high-use WeGo stops.
- Evaluate the Priority Sidewalk Network scores and whether they are in line with any new approved Transportation plan. The Priority Sidewalk Network scores were focused on creating pedestrian access to the major transit corridors, which were important under the prior transportation referendum. Importantly, the major transit corridors were not included in the Priority Sidewalk Network under the 2017 WalknBike Plan because the prior transportation referendum would have otherwise addressed movement along those corridors. Special attention should be paid to sidewalks along the major transit corridors under the new Transportation Plan.
- Increased education, enforcement and ticketing of pedestrian safety laws. This would send a clear message to Nashville drivers that pedestrian safety is a high priority.
- Alternate walking infrastructure – Sidewalks of varying widths, roadway shoulders, greenways and other items are all options to allow for more miles of pedestrian connectivity. Using alternate walkway types rather than the traditional curb and gutter could reduce cost.
- Due to our enormous need, it’s worth exploring if we could hold workshops on how to build your own sidewalk. Homeowners could be encouraged to ‘build their own’ sidewalk whenever possible. This would still require inspection by Codes to ensure compliance with ADA and overall conformity with the city’s sidewalk plan.

Final thoughts:

One Councilmember noted: "I would not only score sidewalks, but I would also get feedback from council members and residents on sidewalk needs in their area. When we had an opportunity (in a sidewalk committee meeting) to see the 5-year projection for sidewalks based on the council district I was appalled to see the streets that were selected in my district, considering they'd have little impact on connectivity." In brief, sidewalks need to be de-politicized so that they can be administratively planned, designed and constructed. The staff of MPW needs to be empowered to plan their work.

Currently, Public Works builds approximately four miles of new sidewalk each year. In 2018 and 2019 the Sidewalk Program was annually funded for \$30 million, with \$20 million allocated to new sidewalk construction and \$10 million to repair and to fill sidewalk gaps. At this rate, it will take decades to build the Priority Sidewalk Network, and only if we keep the funding at the currently low level.

Last year, 2019, is on record as the year with the highest number of pedestrian fatalities, with 32 lives lost. These mothers and fathers, daughters and sons represent the urgency that we need to have to prevent future tragedies. This year is already on pace to beat that record, with four deaths as of January 30. It's a record we should be committed to turning around. The velocity at which we make that turnaround is up to our citizens and our city's leadership. I hope it is swift.

I would like to thank the hard work of the committee members. Having both Councilmembers and civilians working together on this has made all the difference.

Respectfully submitted,



Emily Benedict
Councilwoman District 7
Chair, Special Committee on Sidewalks

Committee Members

Council Members

Councilwoman Emily Benedict, District 7, Chair
Councilmember Erin Evans, District 12
Councilmember Jonathan Hall, District 1
Councilmember Antoinette Lee, District 33
Councilmember Mary Carolyn Roberts, District 20

Civilian Members

Layan Alhasan, Mayor's Youth Council

Clint Camp, District 7 resident

Stacy Dorris, District 24 resident

Lindsay Gilmore, District 29 resident

Shawn Jackson, District 14 resident

Tera Rica Murdock, District 24 resident

Tommy Wilemon, District 7 resident