

Sidewalk Infill Program – Balanced Approach to Sidewalk Infill and Tree Retention

ISSUE

This report outlines the sidewalk infill program and the conflicts that can occur with trees when constructing sidewalks in established areas. An assessment process for sidewalk infill locations when trees are present in the available right-of-way is also included in the report.

BACKGROUND

At its Regular Business Meeting held on June 27, 2016, City Council approved the Active Transportation Plan (AT Plan). The plan identified the need to expand and enhance the City’s sidewalk network. A lack of sidewalks can discourage people from walking as they are forced to walk on the street or on unpaved areas beside the street. This is not considered an acceptable provision for accessibility, nor can it be considered desirable by users, and it is unsafe placing pedestrians in driving and parking lanes. Expanding and enhancing the sidewalk network supports the goals of creating more places for walking, safer walking, and making walking a more convenient and attractive choice for moving around.

At its Regular Business Meeting held on March 25, 2019, City Council received a report regarding the Active Transportation Implementation Plan, and resolved, in part:

- “1. That the Active Transportation Implementation Plan be endorsed with the exception of the elements pertaining to the Downtown AAA Network, which is the subject of a future report to City Council; and”

The implementation strategy included five key components:

- Integration with standard practice;
- Leverage other projects;
- Shelf-ready projects;
- Leverage all funding opportunities; and
- Measure and report progress.

At its Regular Business Meeting held on January 27, 2020, City Council received a report detailing the Sidewalk Infill Prioritization Criteria. The criteria utilizes a combination of land use and street context to determine which missing sidewalk locations will have the most impact on the safety and walkability of the pedestrian network. The criteria prioritizes:

- streets with higher traffic volumes and travel speeds;
- streets with higher potential for pedestrian demand;
- pedestrian access to parks, schools, and major destinations;
- destinations that serve vulnerable users such as older adults and children; and
- integration with transit and future Bus Rapid Transit service.

Details on the criteria is presented in Appendix 1.

At its Regular Business Meeting held on June 29, 2020, City Council received the Saskatoon Transportation Strategy – Infrastructure Plan report, and resolved, in part:

- “1. That the list of prioritized transportation projects be approved in principle;”

The number one priority included on the list of projects was infill sidewalk projects.

At its Regular Business Meeting held on July 27, 2020, City Council received the Municipal Economic Enhancement Program – Reallocation Prioritization List report, and resolved:

- “That the budget allocations as shown in the attached Final Reallocation List be approved; and that the Administration be directed to take appropriate action to deliver the initiatives.”

On the Final Reallocation List, funding of \$3 million was approved for sidewalk infill projects.

At the Standing Policy Committee on Transportation meeting held on September 8, 2020, the Sidewalks Infill Accelerated Implementation Program – Follow Up report, which included a list of sidewalk infill projects totalling \$20 million was received. The committee resolved, in part:

- “1. That the Administration report back with the full list of known missing sidewalks; and
2. That the Administration indicate that the infill sidewalk priority ranking is subject to change.”

CURRENT STATUS

The Sidewalk Infill Program involves the design and construction of new sidewalks or pathways adjacent to existing arterial, collector and local streets. In accordance with Council Policy C07-030 - Street Design, and current design standards, sidewalks are required on both sides of arterial, collector, and local streets in both residential and industrial neighbourhoods. As this was not the standard over much of the City’s development, there are many established neighbourhoods that are missing sidewalks on one or both sides of the street.

The Administration estimates there are 370 kilometres, or approximately 2,200 blocks, of missing sidewalk throughout the City. This number is an estimate only, using the data currently available in the corporate Geographic Information Systems (GIS).

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From 2017 to 2019, the following metres of sidewalk have been installed:

Sidewalk Installed by Sidewalk Infill Program			
	TIER ¹ Funding	PTIF ² Funding	Total
2017	0	2,995 m	2,995 m
2018	0	267 m	267 m
2019	260 m	0	260 m
Total Metres	260 m	3,262 m	3,522 m
Total Cost	\$100,000	\$1,052,000	\$1,152,000

¹ TIER = Transportation Infrastructure Expansion Reserve

² PTIF = Public Transportation Infrastructure Funding

No sidewalk was installed in 2020 as the 2020 program focused on prioritizing locations and developing functional plans for \$20 million of sidewalk infill (approximately 30 kilometres of sidewalk) to be prepared for possible provincial and federal funding opportunities. The functional planning process has identified that along the 30 kilometres of sidewalk infill, there are approximately 300 trees that require removal and over 200 trees that are located less than 1.5 metres from the edge of the proposed sidewalk.

Missing sidewalks are currently funded through TIER at \$200,000 annually.

Additional background on the Sidewalk Infill Program is included in Appendix 1.

DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS

In established neighbourhoods, there are often conflicts located in the space where a sidewalk would typically be installed. Some of the common constraints include streetlights, overhead power poles, utility boxes, private landscaping and fencing, significant grade changes, limited right-of-way and trees. Many of these issues can be addressed through relocating the conflict, such as with utilities or by installing a substandard sidewalk if there is insufficient ROW available. Trees, however, present an additional challenge as they often cannot be relocated and can be injured or destroyed if construction activity is permitted close to trees or if structures are built into the growing space of a tree. Council Policy C09-011 - Trees on City Property, establishes protocols to “protect, preserve and perpetuate the health, beauty and safety of the City’s urban forest for the enjoyment of its citizens, past, present and future”. A detailed discussion on the challenge of sidewalk conflicts with trees is included in Appendix 2.

To provide a balanced approach to sidewalk infill and tree retention, the Administration is proposing a Tree/Sidewalk Assessment Process. This process is to assess conflicting goals in Council Policy C09-011 - Trees on City Property and Council Policy C07-030 - Street Design.

The provision of sidewalks and the preservation of trees both add value to the community in different but important ways. The proposed process strives to find the balance between these two assets by acknowledging that in certain situations, it may be prudent to provide a safe sidewalk to support the pedestrian network. While in other

situations, there may be significant value in retaining healthy, mature trees, striking a balance among the trade-offs between providing sidewalks and preserving the City's urban forest.

After sidewalk infill locations are prioritized, the top scoring locations are reviewed for tree and sidewalk conflicts using the Tree/Sidewalk Assessment Process. The process contains two sets of criteria. The first set of criteria determines the level of conflict between the proposed sidewalk and adjacent tree(s). The second set of criteria determines if it is reasonable to ask pedestrians to choose an alternative route in order to retain the trees. The process also explores whether a mitigation option is available that would permit the sidewalk to be installed near the existing tree. A flow chart detailing the complete process is provided in Appendix 3.

The process has three possible outcomes:

1. Functional plans are developed for sidewalk infill locations with trees where it has been determined there is an acceptable level of conflict, allowing the tree and sidewalk to co-exist.
2. Functional plans are developed for sidewalk infill locations where there is a greater level of conflict but mitigation options are viable, allowing the tree and sidewalk to co-exist.
3. Functional plans may or may not be developed for sidewalk infill locations where there is a greater level of conflict and no mitigation options are available that will allow the tree and sidewalk to co-exist. In these situations, an analysis would be conducted that would consider opportunities for alternative pedestrian routes as well as the value of the tree(s) that would require removal. This information would be applied to a balanced set of principles developed to guide a documented decision-making process and determine an outcome to proceed or not proceed with functional planning process. If it was determined that functional plans for sidewalk in these locations would not be pursued at this time, the areas would be re-evaluated if there are changes to the suitability of the alternative pedestrian route or a change in the condition of the tree(s).

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Completing the Tree/Sidewalk Assessment Process will require staff resources. At this time, it is anticipated that the resources required to complete the assessment process can be absorbed into the current programs for both Urban Forestry and Transportation. A review of Urban Forestry staff capacity to provide required site inspection and maintenance activities will be undertaken as part of the assessment process. If additional resources are necessary, they will be identified in an upcoming report.

Sidewalk infill locations that require the removal of trees would be subject to additional costs to cover the compensation of the tree and these costs would be included in the total sidewalk construction cost at each location.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS

There are no privacy or legal implications. The social and environmental implications have not been quantified.

ENGAGEMENT

Standard construction notices are a part of the sidewalk construction process. If additional engagement is required, a communication plan and engagement strategy would be developed at the appropriate time.

NEXT STEPS

1. Apply Tree/Sidewalk Assessment Process to sidewalk locations identified for the reallocation pool funding.
2. Prepare a report for March 1, 2021 Standing Policy Committee on Transportation outlining any changes to the sidewalk infill locations previously identified for the reallocation pool funding.

APPENDICES

1. Sidewalk Infill Program Description
2. Sidewalk Conflicts with Trees
3. Tree/Sidewalk Assessment Process

Report Approval

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