



STAFF REPORT

TO: Public Works Committee
CC: Tom Veith, PE, Engineering Director
Scott Kugler, AICP, Community Development Director
Josh Clements, AICP, Planning Director
FROM: David Salmon, Transportation Coordinator
AGENDA ITEM: Updating Transportation and Mobility Chapter - Sidewalk Policy in
City of Sun Prairie Comprehensive Plan
DATE: November 11, 2025

Background

Referral for update to Comprehensive Plan and Sidewalk Policy

Sun Prairie City Council made a referral to update the Sidewalk Policy and Transportation Chapter of the City's Comprehensive Plan at the [September 16 Committee of the Whole Meeting](#) (item starts at 24:42) and discussed again at the [October 28 Committee of the Whole Meeting](#) (item starts at 2:27:00). The sidewalk policy provides guidelines on where sidewalks are constructed, and other design and construction standards related to sidewalks.

[Adopted Sidewalk Policy](#)

[Chapter 8 - Mobility and Transportation](#)

Proposal

What changes are being proposed?

Sun Prairie City Council has referred to staff several goals they would like to achieve as part of the update to this policy, including:

- (A) Preserving trees
- (B) Protecting wildlife
- (C) Maintaining neighborhood aesthetics
- (D) Pursuing cost savings when constructing sidewalks as part of street reconstruction projects.

Amendments to two specific areas of the policy are intended to address the above goals, which were reviewed by the Council on October 28th and directed to City Committees for their review and recommendation.

In addition, city staff have identified recommended changes to the policy for alignment with to new federal legislation around accessibility, and consistency with city transportation plans and policies that have been adopted since the Comprehensive Plan was adopted in 2019. These recommendations are separate from the sections that the City Council has directed Committees to consider and color-coded to ease of identification.

A draft updated policy can be found in Appendix A of this memo. They are grouped into three parts:

(1) Updates to address tree preservation, wildlife habitat, and neighborhood aesthetics

1. Update Design Considerations to provide more flexibility to minimize impacts to existing trees when designing and constructing sidewalks.
2. Update Required Locations to required locations to add sidewalks to only one side of reconstructed streets that do not currently have sidewalks on both sides.¹ This includes identifying a new street reconstruction design process that includes Public Works Committee selecting where sidewalks will be constructed prior to other design work occurring.

Staff Recommend updating Design Considerations to include additional flexibility in the design and construction process to mitigate impacts on street trees. Engineering and Forestry staff are currently utilizing these techniques to minimize impacts to street trees. **See Green Text in Appendix A**

Staff Do Not Recommend updating the required locations to add sidewalks to only one side of reconstructed streets. **See Orange Text in Appendix A**

- This change may lead to some tree preservation, particularly on the side of the street that does not receive a sidewalk, however, there are few scenarios where adding sidewalks leads to no impact to existing street trees. New public trees are planted the year after reconstructions within the terrace, the space between the sidewalk and the curb.
- Preserving select trees on one-side of the street would come with the tradeoff that only half of the households on a given block will have ADA-compliant walkways in front of their house in the next 50-years. As summarized in the City's Comprehensive Plan, Active Transportation Plan, and Vision Zero Action Plan, some of the biggest concerns expressed by the community are the lack of sidewalks and safe pedestrian crossings, including not enough safe pathways for children walking to and from school and activities. In a 2018 community survey conducted as part of creating the Comprehensive Plan, 55% of respondents said YES to sidewalks on local residential streets, 79% of respondents said YES to sidewalks on residential collector streets, and 56% of respondents said NO to sidewalks on cul-de-sac bulbs. In a 2024 community survey conducted as part of creating the Vision Zero Action respondents identified a lack of sidewalks and safe crosswalks as two of the top three safety concerns in Sun Prairie. Moving to a one-sided policy would only address these concerns for some households and not others, which raises concerns about equity in providing accessible facilities for all residents.

(2) Updates to pursue cost savings in street reconstructions

1. Update Required Locations to add sidewalks to only one side of reconstructed streets that do not currently have sidewalks on both sides. This includes identifying new street reconstruction design process that includes Public Works Committee selecting where sidewalks will be constructed prior to other design work occurring.

Staff Do Not Recommend updating the required locations to add sidewalks to only one side of reconstructed streets. **See Orange Text in Appendix A**

- Not constructing a sidewalk on one side of the street does not result in a 1:1 cost savings of that dollar amount. Sun Prairie has many residential streets that were built much wider than needed, which leads to speeding and safety hazards within neighborhoods. When street reconstruction occurs, the City typically narrows the width of the roadway by moving curbs towards the center of

¹ [Click here to find the Greater Madison MPO map that includes Sun Prairie roadways functional classifications](#)

the roadway on both sides of the street. This provides space for sidewalks and also provides traffic calming as there is [evidence that wider travel lanes encourage greater speeding and lead to more crashes](#). Narrowing roadways typically results in financial savings that cover a substantial portion of the cost of sidewalk construction in the immediate term, while providing long-term savings when maintenance and future replacement costs are considered.

- Pursuing this form of cost savings would come at the expense of safe, comfortable, and accessible pedestrian facilities for people with disabilities, children, and all other residents and visitors of Sun Prairie.

(3) Staff-recommended updates for consistency

Federal policy requirements have changed since the current city policy was adopted in 2019. In addition, the city has adopted plans and policies pertaining to transportation and equity and directly relate to sidewalk standards. Without these changes, the City's Comprehensive Plan would remain inconsistent with federal policy and other recent city policy documents.

1. Update the purpose statement and policy to reflect policy goals of the [Sun Prairie in Motion - Active Transportation Plan \(Adopted in 2023\)](#) and [Vision Zero Safety Action Plan \(Adopted in 2025\)](#)
2. Update purpose statement and policy to reflect the [Public Right-of-Way Accessibility \(PROWAG\) Guidelines](#) adopted in 2024 under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Architectural Barriers Act (ABA)

Staff Recommend updating the Transportation and Mobility Chapter – Sidewalk Policy to reflect these changes in federal legislation and City plans and policies. **See purple text in Appendix A**

Staff Recommendations

- **Staff Recommend** updating Design Considerations to include additional flexibility in the design and construction process to mitigate impacts on street trees. **See green text in Appendix A**
- **Staff Do Not Recommend** updating the required locations to add sidewalks to only one side of reconstructed streets. **See orange text in Appendix A**
- **Staff Recommend** updating the Transportation and Mobility Chapter – Sidewalk Policy to reflect changes in federal legislation and City plans and policies. **See purple text in Appendix A**

Context

What are the purposes of sidewalks?

Sidewalks are critical infrastructure for use by a person traveling by foot or using a wheelchair. A well-designed sidewalk improves the safety and mobility of pedestrians. [According to the Federal Highway Administration](#), pedestrians walking along roadways with sidewalks are 65-89% less likely to be involved in a crash.

A well-designed sidewalk network provides direct, accessible, and connected walking routes to desired destination without gaps or abrupt changes. Sun Prairie has several neighborhoods that were constructed without sidewalks creating a gap between many residents' homes, desired destinations, and the rest of the sidewalk network.

Who are sidewalks designed for?

Sidewalks are designed for all people. Special consideration and attention in sidewalk and walkway system design includes individuals with mobility constraints, such as those using a wheelchair, walker, or white cane, as well as children, families, dog walkers, and seniors. The U.S. Department of Transportation adopted the [U.S. Access Boards Public Right-of-Way Accessibility Guidelines \(PROWAG / ADA\)](#) in 2024 that provides detailed guidelines on how to design sidewalks that are "readily accessible to and usable by pedestrians with disabilities". All newly constructed, and repaired, sidewalks in Sun Prairie must comply with PROWAG / ADA standards.

Leading national groups see safety, accessibility, and equity benefits from sidewalks

Many leading national organizations identify the value of sidewalks and discuss the role they play in creating more livable communities for aging residents, safe routes to school for children, and reduce the risk of collisions between vehicles and pedestrians. Check out the links below for more information.

- [Livable Communities Fact Sheet - Sidewalks | AARP](#)
- [Safe Routes to School Guide: Sidewalks | Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center](#)
- [Proven Safety Countermeasures - Walkways | Federal Highway Administration](#)
- [Pedestrian Safety Guide - Sidewalks | US Department of Transportation](#)
- [Urban Street Design Guide - Sidewalk Design | National Association of City Transportation Officials](#)

History of Sun Prairie's Sidewalk Policy

Sun Prairie became a City in 1958 and for the first forty years designed the public right-of-way almost exclusively for automobiles. Starting in 1999, Sun Prairie's City Council committed to providing safe, comfortable, and accessible pedestrian pathways within the public right-of-way by passing a resolution adopting a sidewalk policy. This marked the beginning of a commitment to include pedestrians as a core element of the City's transportation policy and infrastructure investments that continue to this day. Sidewalk policies were adopted by resolution in 1999 and 2003, and as part of the Comprehensive Plan in 2009 and in 2019. In 2005, Sun Prairie began to construct sidewalks on both sides of reconstructed streets.

What is the purpose of Sun Prairie's Sidewalk Policy?

The purpose of this policy is to help the City meet the transportation needs of current and future residents. The long-term objective is a complete, continuous, and connected walkway network that provides safe, comfortable, and accessible facilities for all current and future residents. That includes the non-driving population which includes aging adults, students, low-income individuals, those with

physical, mental, or intellectual/developmental disabilities, and those who prefer not to drive. Implementation of this policy helps to increase walking and biking, improve safety, and promote equity so that Sun Prairie has safe walking, biking, and rolling paths that connect all residents to the places they want and need to go.

Since adopting this policy as part of the 2019 Comprehensive Plan, Sun Prairie's City Council has taken additional steps to plan for and provide policy guidance around safety, accessibility, and equity. The City has adopted:

- [Sun Prairie in Motion - Active Transportation Plan \(Adopted in 2023\)](#) – The Active Transportation Plan creates an approach and toolkit to make walking, biking, and rolling in Sun Prairie easier and safer. It guides City staff and officials as they decide where to build new bikeways, paths, and sidewalks, and focus investment in the areas that need it most. to the plan incorporates an equity lens to ensure that pedestrian facilities are distributed across the community and are designed to be inclusive of all users.
- [Vision Zero Safety Action Plan \(Adopted in 2025\)](#) – This plan primarily focuses on the “Safe Systems Approach” to reduce risk factors associated with the transportation network including designing safer streets for safer speeds and ensuring that all transportation users (including drivers and non-drivers alike) are provided safer facilities.

Appendix A

Draft Sidewalk Policy Update – City of Sun Prairie November 2025

A. PURPOSE STATEMENT

- ~~This policy is established to help the City meet the transportation needs of current and future residents throughout the year. The long-term objective is a complete and connected active transportation network that maximizes mobility and safety for all residents, including those with disabilities and those that are unable or choose not to drive.~~ This policy is established to help the City meet the transportation needs of current and future residents throughout the year. The long-term objective is a complete, continuous, and connected active transportation network that provides safe, convenient, and accessible facilities for all current and future residents, including the non-driving population which includes aging adults, students, low-income individuals, those with physical, mental or intellectual/developmental disabilities, and those who prefer not to drive. Implementing this policy helps to increase walking and biking, improve safety, and promote equity so that Sun Prairie has safe walking, biking, and rolling paths that connect all residents to the places they want and need to go.
- ~~The policy is further established to comply with the Federal Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 enacted to facilitate the access of disabled persons to public rights-of-way (sidewalks, curb ramps, crossing controls, etc.). The act requires that pedestrian routes leading to streets, transit stops, and accessible parking areas be designed and constructed to accommodate persons with disabilities.~~ The policy is further established to comply with the Public Right-of Way Accessibility (PROWAG) Guidelines adopted in 2024 under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Architectural Barriers Act (ABA). The purpose of PROWAG is to ensure that pedestrian facilities located in the public right-of-way are readily accessible to and usable by pedestrians with disabilities. Despite on-going efforts to improve access, pedestrians with disabilities throughout the United States continue to face major challenges in public rights-of-way because many sidewalks, crosswalks, and other pedestrian facilities are inaccessible. Equal access to pedestrian facilities is of particular importance because pedestrian travel is the principal means of independent transportation for many persons with disabilities.
- ~~Sidewalks in street rights-of-way are primarily intended to serve pedestrian traffic. Bicyclists are strongly encouraged to ride on city streets and multi-use paths; however, bikes may be used on sidewalks anywhere not explicitly prohibited (see ordinance 10.32.060). Multi-use paths shall serve both pedestrian and bicycle traffic.~~
- Sidewalks, and multi-use paths, can create potential conflicts between faster moving users and slower moving users. Care should be taken by faster moving users to travel at safe speeds, to yield to slower moving users, and to choose alternative routes where

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appropriate and available. Bicycles may be used on sidewalks anywhere not explicitly prohibited (see ordinance 10.32.060).

5. The provisions of this policy that reference multi-use paths apply to the use of such facilities in lieu of sidewalks within the public right of way. The location of an off-road multi-use path behind lots or within nearby parks or open spaces does not eliminate the need for sidewalks within the right-of-way.

B. DESIGN SPECIFICATIONS

1. Sidewalks and multi-use paths shall be located as far from the traffic lane as is possible, but not closer than six inches to the right-of-way line. ~~Sidewalks and multi-use paths constructed at street intersections or within five feet of a legal crosswalk shall include provisions for curb ramping as required by Wisconsin Statutes (66.616), and in accordance with City standards.~~
 - a. Design flexibility to mitigate impact to street trees.
 - i. Narrowing the terrace, the space between the sidewalk and curb.
 - ii. Sidewalks, multi-use paths, and curb edge alignments may be adjusted to navigate around existing street trees.
 - iii. On-street parking spaces may be reduced or eliminated from the street to allow for wider terraces and new tree planting zones or to protect existing street trees.
2. Sidewalks and multi-use paths constructed to street intersections, and within five feet of a legal crosswalk, shall include provisions for curb ramping as required by PROWAG and Wisconsin Statutes (66.616), and in accordance with City standards. Crosswalks shall be established according to PROWAG, Wisconsin Statutes, Federal Manual for Uniform Traffic Control Device (MUTCD) standards, and in accordance with City standards. Where the City Engineer determines that a crosswalk needs to be closed, this closure must follow MUTCD standards for closing a crosswalk.
3. In all cases where the grades of sidewalks or multi-use paths have not been specifically fixed by ordinance, the sidewalks and multi-use paths shall be laid to the established grade of the street, consistent with Wisconsin Statutes (66.615(2)).
4. ~~Sidewalks shall be the default active transportation facility type installed within the right of way parallel to streets, roads, and boulevards, except in cases where an approved bike system plan or map(s) indicates that a multi-use path is the preferred facility type, or where the City Engineer and City Planner determine that a multi-use path is most appropriate.~~ The type of active transportation facility in the right of way, including sidewalks and multi-use paths, shall be selected based on the guidance established in this policy and established in the most current adopted Sun Prairie Active Transportation Plan, or of a facility type determined by the City Engineer and City Planner as most appropriate.

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C. CONSTRUCTION STANDARDS

1. Sidewalks shall be five feet (5') in width and constructed of concrete.
2. Multi-use paths shall be a minimum of ten feet (10') in width and constructed of bituminous pavement. Where located in areas with frequent driveway crossings, the City Engineer may require multi-use paths to be constructed of concrete. ~~Include center line striping on off-street multi-use paths and directional arrows if path is only on one side of the street, or on paths 12' and wider. All active transportation facilities shall be constructed in accordance with the current edition of the Sun Prairie Standard Specifications.~~ Multi use paths will include center line striping and may include designated pedestrian walking space and directional arrows. All active transportation facilities shall be constructed in accordance with PROWAG, MUTCD, State of Wisconsin standards, the current edition of the Sun Prairie Standard Specifications, and the most current adopted Sun Prairie Active Transportation Plan.

D. REQUIRED LOCATIONS

1. On both sides of all new public streets, excluding cul-de-sac streets, and stub streets.
2. *On both sides of all reconstructed collector and arterial streets.*
3. *On both sides of all reconstructed streets where sidewalks already exist on both sides.*
4. On one side of all other reconstructed streets, excluding cul-de-sac streets and stub streets. The public works committee shall determine the side of the street to receive the sidewalk considering the following factors:
 - a. *Sidewalks should connect in the most direct fashion to existing sidewalks and to sidewalks on adjacent blocks.*
 - b. *Sidewalks should be constructed in front of schools, childcare facilities, parks, multi-family buildings, and commercial buildings.*
 - c. The sidewalk should be constructed on the side of the street with the lesser grade.
 - d. The sidewalk should be constructed on the side of the street with the least impact on existing trees.
 - e. The sidewalk should be constructed on the side of the street with the most potential for daytime snow melt – north and east side of street.
5. On one or both sides of rehabilitated streets (pavement replacement only), when it is determined to be in the public interest by the City Engineer and City Planner.
6. Along private streets, when it is determined to be in the public interest by the City Engineer (or designee).

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E. TRIGGERING EVENTS

1. The following events will result in the construction of sidewalks or multi-use paths:
 - a. Construction of a new roadway.
 - b. Reconstruction of an existing roadway when it involves installation and/or replacement of curb and gutter.
 - c. Development or redevelopment of a property along a roadway that does not currently have sidewalks, except redevelopment involving low-density residential uses, even when this will result in a temporary dead-end sidewalk that does not connect to another sidewalk or bike path.
 - d. When determined by the City Engineer and City Planner, during the annual Capital Improvement Planning (CIP) process, a sidewalk or multi-use path installation along a roadway proposed for pavement rehabilitation will provide a key link in the City's active transportation network.
 - e. When the City Council approves construction of a sidewalk or multi-use path to fill a gap in the City's network of bike and pedestrian routes.
2. Rehabilitation (pavement replacement) of an existing roadway will trigger a review by the City Engineer and City Planner to determine if there is a compelling public interest to install a sidewalk or multi-use path.

F. EXCEPTIONS

For street reconstruction projects, the City Engineer may recommend that neither a sidewalk nor multi-use path is constructed if one or more of the following conditions exists:

1. The street abuts a limited access highway and has a sidewalk or path on the other side of the street.
2. The street is not a collector, or arterial, street and installation of a sidewalk or multi-use path would require retaining walls of excessive heights and/or driveways with unreasonably steep grades due to existing topography.
3. The street abuts an environmental corridor where a sidewalk or path may result in significant permitting requirements.
4. The right-of-way width provides insufficient space to construct sidewalks on both sides of street and still meet minimum standards set by PROWAG, MUTCD, State of Wisconsin, and City specifications.