



Updating Sidewalk Policy

November 11, 2025



SUN PRAIRIE
revolves around you

Referral to update Comprehensive Plan – Sidewalk Policy

- City Council made a referral to update the City's Sidewalk Policy, located in the City's Comprehensive Plan – Mobility and Transportation Chapter
 - Referral made on September 16, 2025 at COW
 - Discussion and confirmation of direction on October 28, 2025 at COW
- Council directed goals for updating sidewalk policy
 - Saving Trees
 - Protect Wildlife
 - Maintain Neighborhood Aesthetic
 - Cost Savings
- Staff have prepared two updates to the policy to address these goals and an additional update to reflect new federal legislation and City plans

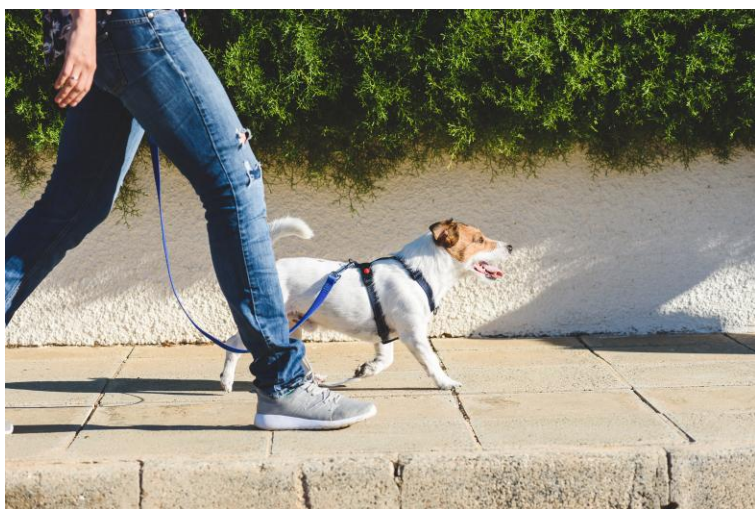
What are the purposes of sidewalks?

- Pathways for use by a person traveling by foot or using a wheelchair
- Sidewalks improve safety and mobility
 - Federal Highway Administration notes: pedestrians walking along roadways with sidewalks are 65-89% less likely to be involved in a crash*
- Sidewalk networks provide direct and connected walking routes to desired destinations without gaps or abrupt changes

*In Sun Prairie, since 2020

- 4 crashes resulted in pedestrian fatalities
- 14 crashes resulted in pedestrian serious injuries
- 17 of those crashes occurred on the street (in crosswalk or at midblock)
- 1 of those crashes occurred on a pathway

Who are sidewalks designed for?



- People with mobility issues including using wheelchairs, walkers, or white cane users
- All other people including children, families, dog walkers, seniors, etc
- Public Right-of-Way Accessibility Guidelines (PROWAG) adopted in 2024 by the US Access Board provides detailed guidelines on designing sidewalks to be "readily accessible to and usable by pedestrians with disabilities"
- All new, or repaired, sidewalk facilities must meet PROWAG guidelines

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

Sidewalks | A LIVABILITY FACT SHEET

People who live in neighborhoods with sidewalks are 47 percent more likely than residents of areas without sidewalks to be active for at least 39 minutes a day.



Good downtown sidewalks have enough room for people to walk, stop and talk, or even sit for a bit. This wide sidewalk in State College, Pa., is made of visually appealing paver stones. Care must be taken when installing paver and similar surfaces so wheelchairs and other wheeled devices can roll smoothly over them.



According to AARP, sidewalks are essential parts of livable communities for aging populations and increase walking



The Safe Routes to School Guide, a national resource funded by the federal government, identifies sidewalks as “an important piece of a walking route to school”.

They note, many parents are not willing to allow their children to walk to school if there is no place for them to walk.



Peter Lagerwey



Peter Lagerwey

History of Sun Prairie's Sidewalk Policy

- From 1958, when Sun Prairie became a City, to 1999 the public right-of-way was designed almost exclusively for automobiles
- Starting in 1999, Sun Prairie's City Council passed a resolution committing the City to providing safe, comfortable, and accessible pedestrian pathways within the public right-of-way
- 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
- 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
 - 56% of respondents said NO to sidewalks on cul-de-sac bulbs

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

- Meet the transportation needs of current and future residents
- Provide a complete, continuous, and connected walkway network with safe, comfortable accessibility facilities
- Emphasis on providing facilities for non-drivers, including aging adults, students, low-income individuals, and people with physical, mental, or intellectual/developmental disabilities
- Goal is to increase walking, improve safety, and promote equity

Since adopting the
2019 Sidewalk Policy
Sun Prairie's City
Council adopted

SUN PRAIRIE IN MOTION

ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION PLAN

FINAL DRAFT



Vision

Sun Prairie has safe walking, biking, and rolling paths that connect all residents to the places they want and need to go.

Goal 1: Increase Walking and Biking



Related Principles:

Close gaps in the sidewalk and bikeway networks

Prioritize walking, biking, and transit over motor vehicles in street design

Goal 2: Improve Safety



Related Principles:

Design for children walking and biking to school and activities

Use data to identify where safety infrastructure is most needed

Goal 3: Promote Equity



Related Principles:

Focus on equity areas where people with barriers to transportation live and work

Be inclusive: provide facilities and programs where everyone feels welcome

Building on goals from the Comprehensive Plan

Since adopting the 2019 Sidewalk Policy Sun Prairie's City Council adopted

CITY OF SUN PRAIRIE

VISION ZERO ACTION PLAN



In a 2024 community survey conducted as part of creating the Vision Zero Action Plan respondents identified a

- lack of sidewalks
- lack of safe crosswalks

as two of the top three safety concerns in Sun Prairie.



What changes are being proposed?

City Council has requested updates to accomplish goals of:

- Saving Trees
- Protect Wildlife
- Maintain Neighborhood Aesthetic
- Cost Savings

Staff are proposing:

- General updates to policy language to reflect recently adopted plans and new federal guidelines



Updates to address tree preservation, wildlife habitat, and neighborhood aesthetics

Design Considerations:

- Design flexibility to mitigate impact to street trees, wildlife habitat, and neighborhood aesthetics
 - Narrowing the terrace, the space between the sidewalk and curb.
 - Sidewalks, multi-use paths, and curb edge alignments may be adjusted to navigate around existing street trees. (Winding walkways)
 - 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.
- All of these practices are currently utilized by engineering and forestry staff
- Staff recommend adopting these updates



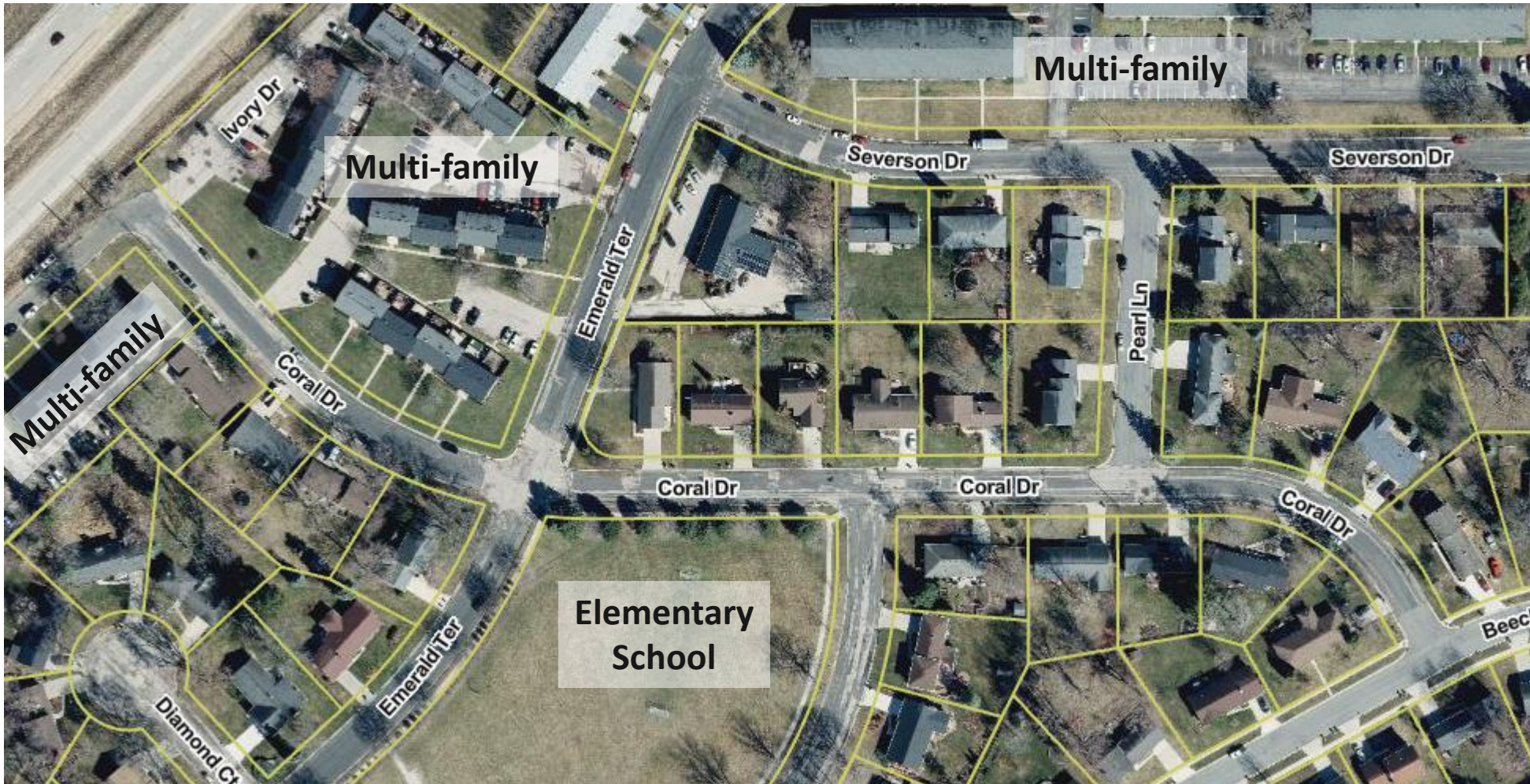
Updates to address tree preservation, wildlife habitat, and neighborhood aesthetics

Required Locations:

- On both sides of all new public streets, excluding cul-de-sac streets, and stub streets.
- *On both sides of all reconstructed collector and arterial streets.*
- *On both sides of all reconstructed streets where sidewalks already exist on both sides.*
- 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:
 - *Sidewalks should connect in the most direct fashion to existing sidewalks and to sidewalks on adjacent blocks.*
 - *Sidewalks should be constructed in front of schools, childcare facilities, parks, multi-family buildings, and commercial buildings.*
 - The sidewalk should be constructed on the side of the street with the lesser grade.
 - The sidewalk should be constructed on the side of the street with the least impact on existing trees.
 - 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.
- Staff do not recommend adopting these updates

Under a one-sided policy

Public Works will need to select where the sidewalk is installed.



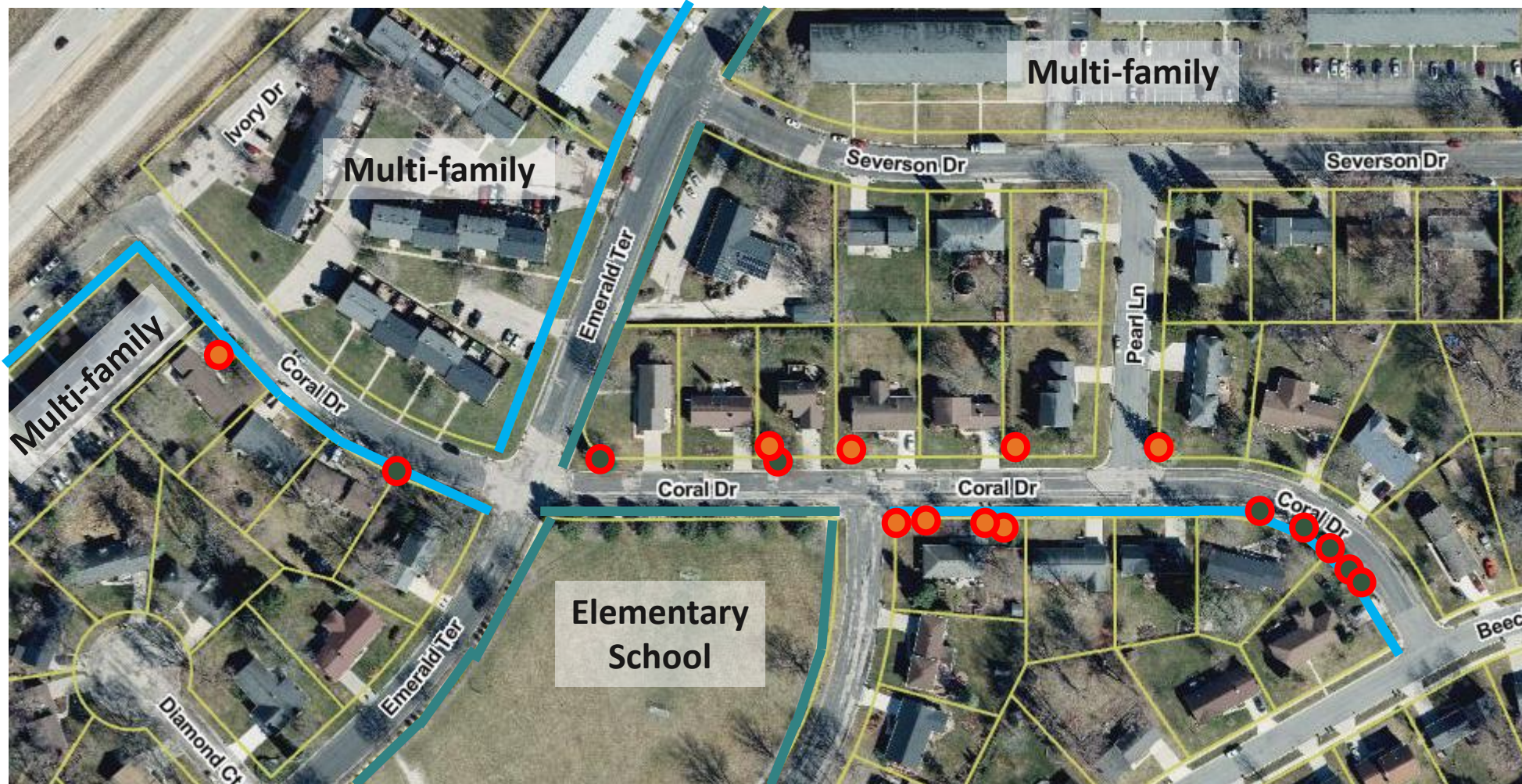
Factors

- **Connect** to existing sidewalks and to sidewalks on adjacent blocks.
- In front of **schools, childcare facilities, parks, multi-family buildings, and commercial buildings.**
- **Lesser grade**
- Least impact on existing **trees.**
- Most potential for **daytime snow melt** – north and east side of street.

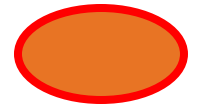
Ex. 2026 reconstruction of Emerald Terrace, Coral Drive, and Garnet Pl

Under a one-sided policy

1. A connected network with less fragmentation still has impacts to street trees, misses some preferred locations
2. Creates equity issues over which households are directly served by an ADA walkway and which households trees are preserved.



Tree in Public
Right-of-Way



Tree on private
property at edge of
Public Right-of-Way



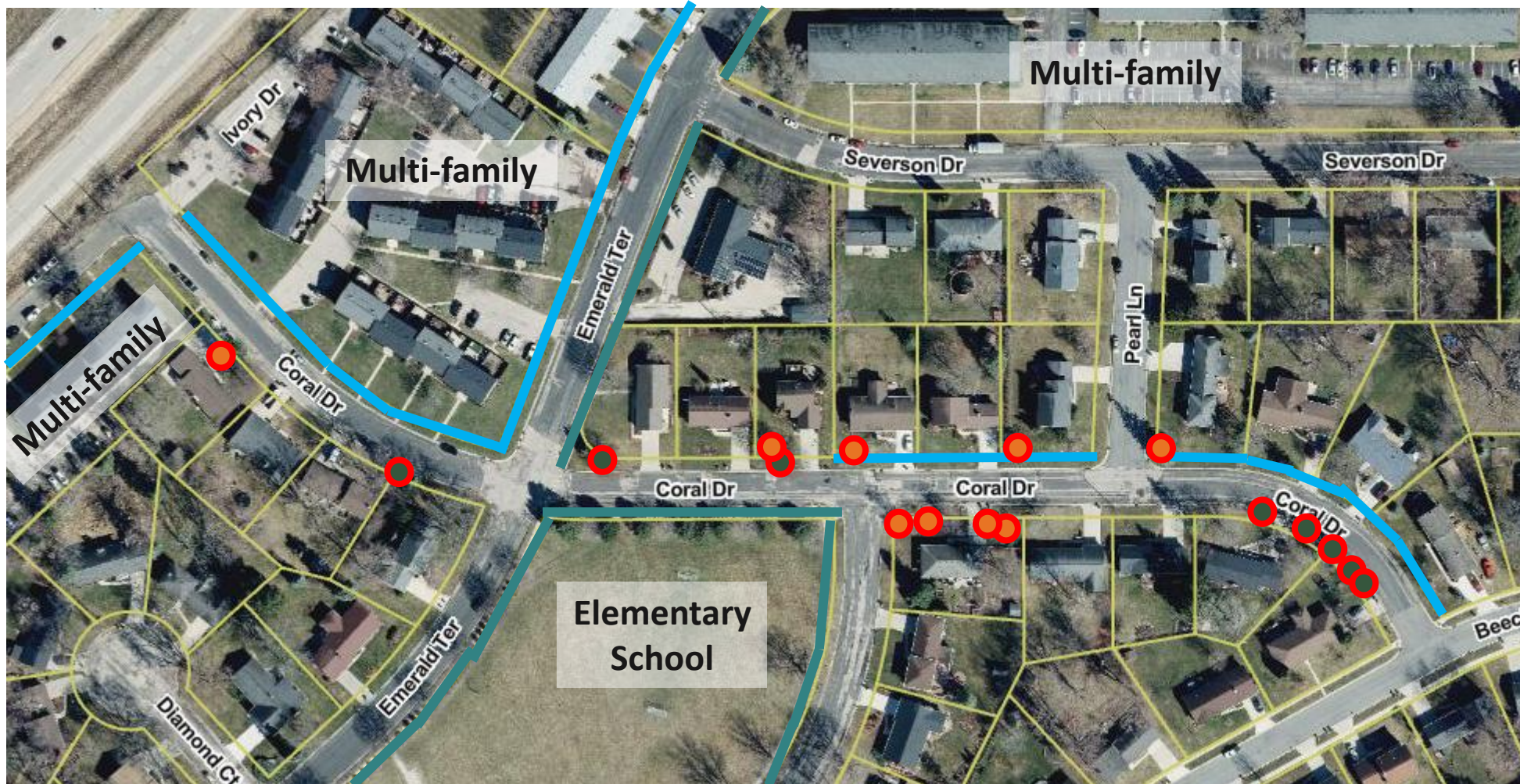
Existing Sidewalks



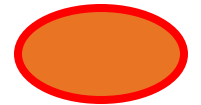
Future Sidewalks

Under a one-sided policy

1. Scenarios that avoid the most trees create fragmented network and require more street crossings when traveling along a roadway
2. Equity issues are still present related to access to ADA walkways and tree preservation



Tree in Public
Right-of-Way



Tree on private
property at edge of
Public Right-of-Way



Existing Sidewalk



Future Sidewalk

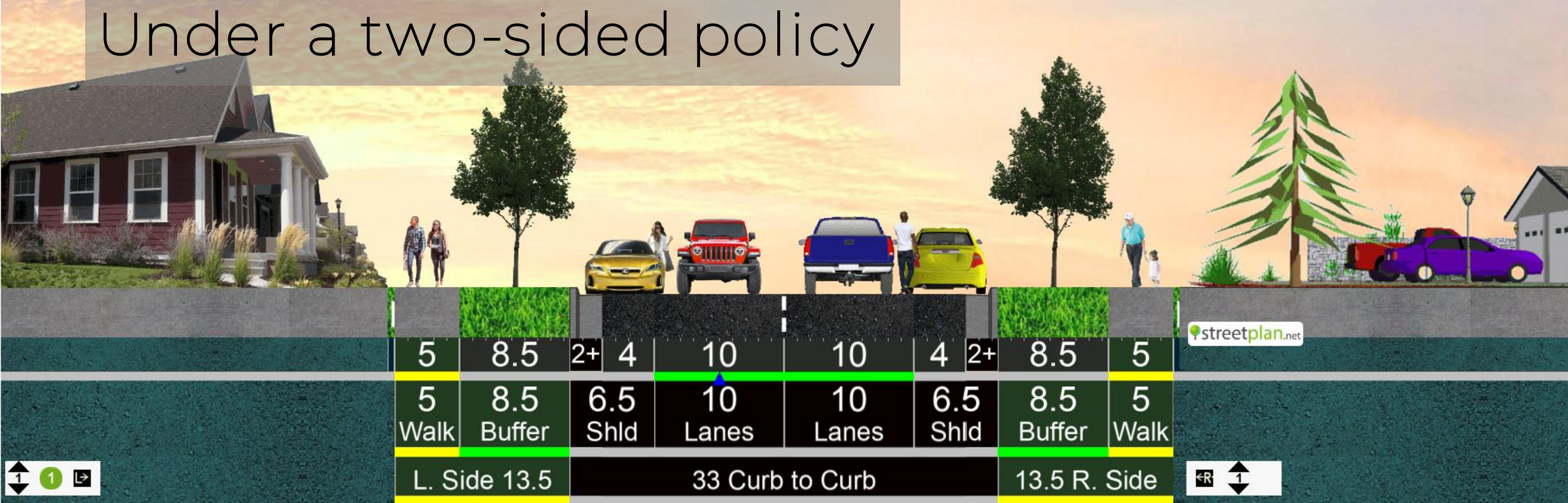
Updates to pursue cost savings

Required locations:

- On one side of all other reconstructed streets, excluding cul-de-sac streets and stub streets.
- Staff do not recommend adopting this update

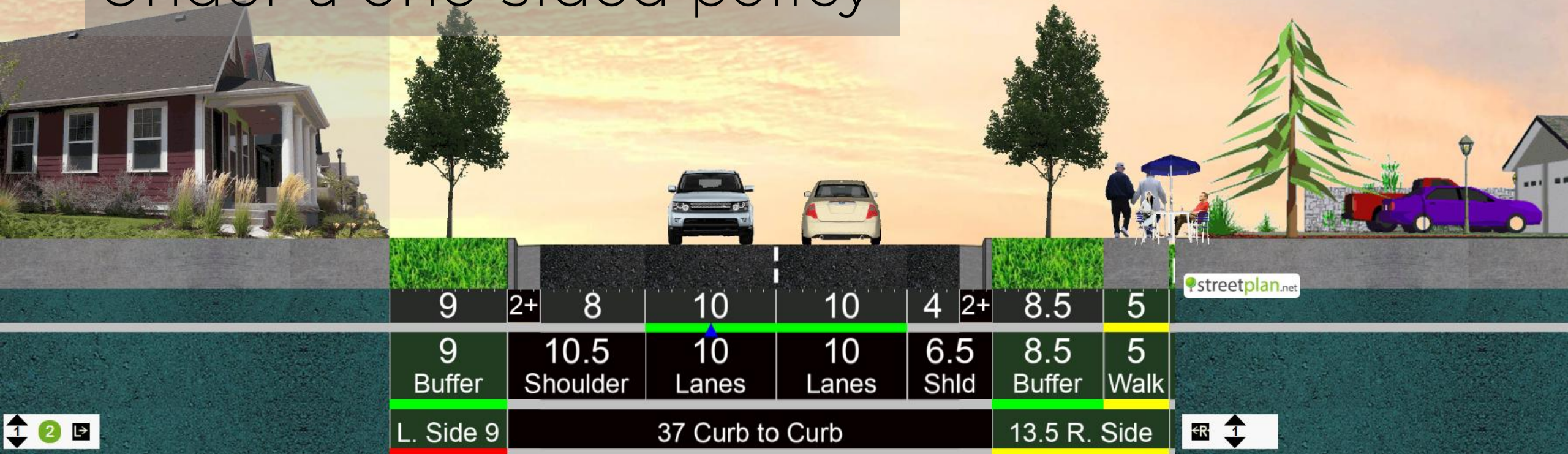


Under a two-sided policy



- City narrows overly wide roadways to calm traffic, provide space for sidewalks, and provide space to plant trees in the terrace
- Cost savings from road narrowing cover substantial amount of costs for adding sidewalks now; long-term saves maintenance, replacement costs compared to replacing street as is
- Both sides of street have access to ADA walkways

Under a one-sided policy



- City maintains some roadway as space for pedestrians in road, losing some traffic calming benefits
- Limited savings from not adding sidewalks on both sides.
- Less road narrowing increases long-term maintenance, replacement costs compared to a two-sided policy
- One side of street has access to ADA walkways

Trade-offs under a one-sided policy

Varying levels of impact to tree preservation, wildlife habitat protection, and neighborhood aesthetics depending on where sidewalks go.

Limited potential savings

Trade-offs include

1. Potential gaps and lack of connectivity to other facilities
2. Equity issues over the provision of public facilities / ADA walkways
3. Equity issues over impacts to trees in front of households
4. More intensive decision-making process around where sidewalks are located

Two-sided policy is most equitable in providing access to ADA walkways and a complete sidewalk network



General updates to policy language

- Reflect Sun Prairie in Motion – Active Transportation Plan and Vision Zero Action Plan within document
- 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)
- Includes updated purpose statements, and statements throughout the document that specifically mention ADA, design standards, facility type selection, etc.
- Does not impact Councils goals in updating policy

Staff recommend adopting these updates

Staff Recommendations

1. Staff Recommend updating Design Considerations to include additional flexibility in the design and construction process to mitigate impacts on street trees.
2. Staff Do Not Recommend updating the required locations to add sidewalks to only one side of reconstructed streets.
3. Staff Recommend updating the Transportation and Mobility Chapter – Sidewalk Policy to reflect changes in federal legislation and City plans and policies.

Next steps

- November Committee Review
 - Public Works Committee, Plan Commission, Transit Commission and Bike Subcommittee
- December Public Hearing (Dec 9th)
 - Plan Commission to review draft policy, committee input and approve an updated policy to City Council for Up / Down vote
- January City Council Action
 - City Council votes up or down on the updated policy approved by Plan Commission
- [If needed] Policy may need revisions before Plan Commission and City Council come to an agreement on updated policy*

*A feature of state law requires that the Plan Commission and City Council agree on any changes to the City's Comprehensive Plan