

Director's Report and Recommendation
**Revisions to Land Use Code
Sidewalk Requirements**
August 2007

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	2
Introduction	3
Problem Statement	3
Goals and Outcomes	4
Summary of Recommendations	4
Background	6
Citizen Interest	6
Mayoral Priorities	6
Changing Policy Framework	6
Analysis	8
Comprehensive Plan Context	8
Land Use Code Analysis	8
Existing Conditions Analysis	10
Findings and Conclusions	10
Implementation Options	12
Recommendations	14
Recommended Phase I Sidewalk Requirements	14
Future Phase II Sidewalk Requirements	15
Conclusion	15
Appendix	
Comprehensive Plan Policies Relevant to the Pedestrian Environment	16
Lake City Case Study	20

Director's Report and Recommendation
Revisions to Land Use Code
Sidewalk Requirements
August 2007

Executive Summary

Seattle's Comprehensive Plan and growth management strategy is based largely on accommodating growth in centers and villages where the provision of urban infrastructure and amenities can serve the greatest number of people. As new development occurs, new people are added to the center or village placing a greater stress on neighborhood facilities. In particular, as people are encouraged to live and work closer to home, new emphasis should be placed on a safe and accessible pedestrian infrastructure to move pedestrians to and among the goods and services, jobs, and transit facilities in a neighborhood.

The City has historically relied on the partnership between public and private construction to create a citywide street infrastructure including sidewalks. Over the last century, the majority of city streets have been built and improved with sidewalks; however, significant areas remain where sidewalks are incomplete or have not been developed. In spite of the recent strong development climate, sidewalk development has not kept pace with the need. This is of particular concern in Seattle's denser urban centers and villages where the majority of growth is occurring now and will continue to occur.

The Department of Planning and Development (DPD) is proposing revisions to sidewalk requirements as currently described in the Land Use Code to remedy the inadequate pace of sidewalk construction. Current regulations include thresholds and exceptions that exempt development projects of a certain size or type from building sidewalks. As a consequence, some multi-family and other development is occurring without the infrastructure to support the resulting increase in population density. The proposed revisions aim to correct this inequity by:

- Prioritizing development of sidewalks in areas with significant pedestrian traffic where safety and circulation is most critical;
- Creating a distinction within the Land Use Code between sidewalks and other street improvements; and
- Requiring sidewalk construction in more situations by eliminating most of the current exceptions to sidewalk requirements and lowering the thresholds at which sidewalks are required.

Current code requirements for sidewalks are based on the zone in which the project is located, the size and type of project, and the type of street upon which the project fronts. The current threshold is any development proposed to have three or more dwelling units (or platted lots). However, reduced improvement requirements exist for proposals of one or two lots or dwelling units and code exceptions for projects with ten or more units in some zones, and six or more units in others. These regulations serve to essentially increase the threshold to three, six, and ten depending upon the zone in which the project is proposed. There are also over a dozen other exceptions under which the Director may waive or modify street improvement requirements (including those for sidewalks).

In contrast, the proposed code amendments would require sidewalks of all projects—regardless of size or type—located within Urban Centers, Urban Villages, and adjacent to arterials, and would lower

the threshold to three or more dwelling units in all other locations. The only exception would be for use changes, or additions or remodels where the addition or remodel is less than 500 square feet in size.

Introduction

Seattle is known and appreciated for the character and distinctiveness of its neighborhoods, each of which offers a unique mix of housing, dining, retail, and/or employment opportunities to residents and workers. The pedestrian environment is the critical connection between these opportunities and one of the fundamental features that makes a neighborhood livable. While the majority of city streets do include sidewalks, a significant number of streets do not.

This proposal for amendments to Land Use Code (LUC) sidewalk requirements is one part of a larger project aimed at updating and revising street improvement requirements required by the Land Use Code, and related coordination with the City's recently updated Right-of-Way Improvement Manual (ROWIM). The sidewalks proposal is anticipated to be a two-phase effort focusing on requirements for pedestrian walkways citywide. This Director's Report focuses on sidewalk requirements within Urban Centers, Urban Villages, and adjacent to arterials.

Problem Statement

Seattle's Comprehensive Plan and growth management strategy is based largely on accommodating growth in centers and villages where the provision of urban infrastructure and amenities can serve the greatest number of people. As new development occurs, new people are added to the center or village placing a greater stress on neighborhood facilities. In particular, as people are encouraged to live and work closer to home, new emphasis should be placed on a safe and accessible pedestrian infrastructure to move pedestrians to and among the goods and services, jobs, and transit facilities in a neighborhood.

As vehicular traffic increases, and greater emphasis is placed upon walking among destinations within the center or village, it becomes increasingly important that new development contribute to the extension of the sidewalk or pedestrian infrastructure of the neighborhood in order to accommodate the added number of people in the new development who will be needing a safe and effective way to move within the center or village without depending upon automobiles. Over time, these increments will contribute to a well-connected system of safe and effective passage for pedestrians and the impacts of growth can be mitigated.

Through both City and private investment, progress is slowly being made to increase the inventory of sidewalks. However, current regulations include project thresholds and exceptions that exempt developments of a certain size or type from making full improvements for pedestrians, thereby impeding progress in adding to the city's pedestrian infrastructure. Specifically:

- New multi-family development, typically townhouse projects 4 to 6 units in size, is being developed without the necessary infrastructure—sidewalks—to support the resulting increase in population density;
- Infrastructure is created piecemeal, where gaps exist between segments of fully improved sidewalks; and
- Improvements are made per Land Use Code requirements that are sometimes inappropriate for the particular circumstance, such as when traditional sidewalk, curb, and gutters are constructed within a creek watershed that may otherwise be better served by a more sustainable drainage and pedestrian walkway design.

In sum, the outcome is an inconsistent and incomplete pedestrian network that is often poorly matched to local conditions and needs. In some situations, it also results in unwarranted expense for the applicant for an improvement that does not advance City policy with regard to the treatment of critical environmental areas.

Goals and Outcomes

The goal of the Sidewalk Requirements proposal is to further the creation of a safe, contiguous, and geographically-appropriate pedestrian network within Urban Centers, Urban Villages, and adjacent to arterials, with the following outcomes:

- Increased accessibility and safety for pedestrians within these areas;
- Improved streetscape and public realm, particularly within mixed-use and pedestrian-intensive areas;
- Maximized and leveraged public and private investments in right-of-way improvements for greater continuity and more facilities overall;
- A pedestrian network and Urban Village strategy that are consistent, complementary, and mutually reinforcing; and
- Pedestrian walkway requirements that encourage sustainable practices and materials, and are compatible with other City goals for addressing stormwater drainage.

In 2007, the City's Department of Transportation is embarking on the development of a Pedestrian Master Plan. It is proposed that Phase II of the sidewalk requirements work be developed in conjunction with the Pedestrian Master Plan during the 2007-2008 timeframe.

Summary of Recommendations

The sidewalk requirements proposal consists of several changes to existing code:

- Change project thresholds to ensure that more projects of various sizes—both small and large—are subject to sidewalk requirements;
- Establish sidewalk requirements based on project location, not just project size, in order to focus infrastructure in areas most targeted for growth;
- Eliminate existing exceptions to street improvement requirements as they apply to sidewalks; and
- Preserve exceptions which are reasonable and necessary for right-of-way widening and other improvements, but which are not germane to sidewalks.

Specifically, the proposal is to require construction of sidewalks in association with any project within Urban Centers and Urban Villages, and adjacent to arterials where much of the current (and projected future) population density, transit service, and community facilities are located. By focusing sidewalk construction in these areas, infrastructure will be created where the majority of pedestrians are (or will be in the future) and therefore where sidewalks are needed most. Details of the proposal are contained in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Proposed Sidewalk Requirements, Thresholds, and Exceptions

Project Location	Pedestrian-related requirement	Threshold and Exceptions
Parcels within Urban Centers and Urban Villages: All zone categories, all streets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Sidewalk 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ No threshold; applies to any number of housing units and any size of commercial space. ▪ Current exceptions for projects within environmentally critical areas and near a bridge, viaduct, or retaining wall that would make sidewalk construction impractical or undesirable would remain; other exceptions deleted. ▪ New exceptions: Changes of use, and remodels and additions where total square footage after the remodel or addition is less than 500 square feet.
Parcels adjacent to arterials in all	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Sidewalk 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ No threshold; applies to any number of housing units and any size of commercial space.

<p>zones outside urban villages, and parcels with pedestrian designations.</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Current exceptions for projects within environmentally critical areas and near a bridge, viaduct, or retaining wall that would make sidewalk construction impractical or undesirable would remain; other exceptions deleted. ▪ New exceptions: Changes of use, and remodels and additions where total square footage after the remodel or addition is less than 500 square feet.
<p>All other areas/zones (outside urban villages, not adjacent to arterial)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Sidewalk 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lower threshold to 3 units of housing or greater (from 10 units in SF, LDT, and L1 zones and 6 units in all other zones) ▪ Current exceptions for projects within environmentally critical areas and near a bridge, viaduct, or retaining wall that would make sidewalk construction impractical or undesirable would remain; other exceptions deleted.
<p>Creek watershed areas</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Sidewalk 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Threshold depends upon project location as described above. ▪ Current exceptions for projects within environmentally critical areas and near a bridge, viaduct, or retaining wall that would make sidewalk construction impractical or undesirable would remain; other exceptions depend upon the location of the project as described above.

Background

The issue of sidewalks—or lack of sidewalks—is not new. Several factors have led to the development of this sidewalk requirements proposal including citizen interest, Mayoral priorities, and the adoption of new policies and practices that render the existing Land Use Code sidewalk requirements in need of updating.

Citizen Interest

With each instance of incorporation of county land into the City of Seattle, some percentage of citizens within those areas have expressed interest in having sidewalks added where streets were originally built without them, believing this to be necessary for access and safety as well as a matter of achieving equity with other Seattle neighborhoods. Although other viewpoints also exist—some citizens appreciate the “rural quality” of streets without sidewalks—the “pro-sidewalks” contingent remains strong and vocal. Nonetheless, sidewalk construction has not proceeded in the incorporated areas—primarily north of 85th Street and in isolated spots in Southeast Seattle—in any other than a piecemeal fashion for several decades.

Several recent high-profile pedestrian accidents and fatalities have put a spotlight on pedestrian safety issues across the city, and have reinvigorated public interest in sidewalks and related pedestrian facilities. The discussion revolves around the needs of pedestrians—particularly seniors and schoolchildren—citywide. Also critical are the needs of specific areas of the city (mentioned above) that are disproportionately lacking in sidewalks. Constructing more sidewalks and creating dedicated space where pedestrians can expect to travel without conflict with vehicles is one aspect of increasing pedestrian safety.

City Priorities

The City has made a strong commitment to incorporating sustainable building materials, practices, and standards into all public work. Green infrastructure is a logical extension of this work, embodied most recently in the adoption of the Seattle Green Factor as part of the Neighborhood Business District Strategy in January 2007. The green factor applies to private development and is intended to support the creation of vibrant, pedestrian-oriented neighborhood business districts through an increase in the amount and quality of landscaping in dense urban areas. Use of larger trees, green roofs, green walls, drought-tolerant plant materials, and on-site stormwater detention are some of the tools at the developer’s disposal for meeting landscaping requirements in innovative and flexible ways. Increasing sidewalk requirements concurrent with application of the new Seattle Green Factor legislation is a sensible and efficient way to help ensure a well-integrated streetscape and pedestrian environment.

Mayor Nickels’ 10-Point Plan for Pedestrian Safety is another City priority being met through a variety of initiatives—public education, signage, school walking routes, enforcement of safety laws, and upgraded crosswalks and lights. Creating more walkable neighborhoods is similarly a key component of other City priorities and initiatives including the Center City Strategy, South Lake Union Neighborhood Plan Update, Southeast Seattle Action Agenda, and the Northgate Plan. Creating the regulatory framework to increase the city’s inventory of sidewalks is a natural companion to these efforts.

Changing Policy Framework

Current Land Use Code requirements for sidewalks are tied to overall street improvements; that is, sidewalks are one of several improvements required when development proposals meet certain size thresholds. These street improvement requirements were initially adopted in 1990—preceding the adoption of the Comprehensive Plan and subsequent neighborhood plans—and have had only minor changes since. The Comprehensive Plan, most of the neighborhood plans, and several other key documents and initiatives, have rendered the current Land Use Code sidewalk requirements out of date and in need of revision. Pedestrian-related aspects of each of these documents are briefly described below:

- The **Comprehensive Plan**, adopted in 1994, emphasizes concentrating development within pedestrian-friendly Urban Centers and Urban Villages. As development intensifies in accordance with plan objectives, the need for a complementary infrastructure to support population densities and land uses increases. Neighborhood plans reinforce Comprehensive Plan goals with respect to concentrating development and infrastructure, and go further to detail specific sidewalk and pedestrian needs by neighborhood.
- The City's **Right-of-Way Improvements Manual (ROWIM)** is integral to design, permitting, and construction of street improvements. It is used in tandem with the Land Use Code during permitting, and supports code requirements by providing specific design criteria for the design and installation of street improvements such as sidewalks. In 2005, the Department of Transportation wholly revised the 1991 Manual to reflect best practices and design standards as they have evolved over the years. The revision also identified points of confusion or contradiction between the Manual and Land Use Code, which make it difficult to apply requirements of both documents fairly and consistently to projects. The sidewalk requirements proposal is intended to resolve some of the identified points of confusion between the two documents as they relate to sidewalks.
- The **Transportation Strategic Plan (TSP)** is a 20-year work plan for managing the City's transportation resources and infrastructure. The plan was updated in 2005 to respond to both the significant growth that has occurred in Seattle since the Plan's initial publication in 1998, and to new policies and priorities, notably those of the Comprehensive Plan. The TSP outlines four themes including improving safety, preserving and maintaining transportation infrastructure, supporting the urban village land use strategy, and providing mobility and access through transportation choices. The themes are further supported by a set of transportation principles and specific strategies for each transportation mode, including several directly related to pedestrians and walking as a means of transportation. In total, the TSP provides ample support for completing the sidewalk network starting with priority areas such as those within and between urban villages, at transit stops, and along routes to schools and other community facilities.

Analysis

Comprehensive Plan Context

The City's Comprehensive Plan includes many policies that reference and support the creation of a pedestrian-friendly environment, both directly and indirectly. Starting with the Urban Village chapter, and continuing into the Land Use and Transportation chapters, there is ample evidence of policy support for a strengthened approach to sidewalk requirements. Cutting across all three chapters, the policies address pedestrians and sidewalks through a variety of topics:

- **Pedestrian access and safety** including safe and convenient access via trail networks, reinforcing walking rights and responsibilities, adjusting parking to minimize impacts on pedestrians, street standards that support safe pedestrian circulation.
- **Pedestrian-oriented neighborhoods and zones** including transforming or creating pedestrian-focused areas, facilitating development of a size and scale compatible with pedestrians, linking residential areas along transit routes and other high foot traffic areas, fostering housing in the most pedestrian-friendly areas and areas of employment, matching the degree of pedestrian-oriented features and uses to the role the neighborhood is to play in accommodating growth, and preserving or enhancing retail areas with pedestrian districts.
- **Definition and development of pedestrian-related facilities** including allocating street space among various uses including pedestrians, preserving and enhancing stairways, accelerating the development and improvement of pedestrian facilities, creating school walking routes, providing links to transit and community facilities, and creating street types to reflect specific uses (pedestrians on Green streets, Main streets, etc.).
- **Integration of pedestrians and transportation systems** including integrating pedestrian facilities, services, and programs with regional transportation; designing transportation infrastructure with pedestrians in mind, and linking neighborhood development with transportation.

A list of specific pedestrian-related Comprehensive Plan policies by chapter is included in the appendix to this report.

Land Use Code Analysis

Analysis confirms that current Land Use Code requirements do not reflect the Urban Village strategy contained within the Comprehensive Plan, nor the pedestrian-oriented policies, principles, and strategies of related documents such as the various neighborhood plans, Transportation Strategic Plan, and Right-of-Way Improvements Manual.

Land Use Code street improvement requirements are currently organized by type, size, and zoning of proposed development regardless of location within the city. This does not offer the City the opportunity to target required infrastructure where the need is greatest and where future growth is expected and desired. Sidewalk requirements are contained primarily in [Chapter 23.53 Requirements for Streets, Alleys, and Easements](#) and are listed among other street improvements such as roadway paving, drainage, and right-of-way grading. Sidewalks are also referenced in several other titles and sections of the Seattle Municipal Code including those in Table 2.

Table 2: Seattle Municipal Code Sidewalk-related Sections

Chapter	Chapter and Section
Title 11 Vehicles and Traffic	
Chapter 11.14 Definitions	11.14.175 Driveway. 11.14.450 Pedestrian zone. 11.14.475 Planting strip. 11.14.570 Sidewalk.
Chapter 11.24 Property Access Permits and Regulations	11.24.020 Parking lot barriers.
Title 15 Street and Sidewalk Use	
Chapter 15.70 Sidewalk Constr.	15.70.020 Payment of construction or reconstruction costs.
Title 23 Land Use Code	
Chapter 23.22 Subdivisions	23.22.052 Dedications required. 23.22.100 Design standards.
Chapter 23.47A Commercial	23.47A.032 Parking location and access.
Chapter 23.48 Seattle Mixed	23.48.022 Sidewalk requirements.
Chapter 23.49 Downtown Zoning	23.49.022 Minimum sidewalk and alley width.
Chapter 23.53 Requirements for Streets, Alleys, and Easements	23.53.015 Improvement requirements for existing streets in residential and commercial zones. 23.53.020. Improvement requirements for existing streets in industrial zones. 23.53.025. Access easement standards.
Chapter 23.71 Northgate Overlay District	23.71.008 Development along major pedestrian streets. 23.71.010 Green streets.

Current requirements for sidewalks are summarized in Table 3 below, taken primarily from Land Use Code Chapter 23.53. While sidewalks are included within the general street improvement requirements, frequently-used code exceptions allow many applicants to develop property without constructing sidewalks and other street improvements.

Table 3: Summary of Current Code Requirements for Sidewalks

Location	Action	Requirements	Exceptions
Citywide, all zones	Subdivision of land	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Dedication of streets, drainage, etc. Sidewalks are not mentioned specifically. ▪ Pedestrian access to every lot ▪ Sidewalk design per ROWIM 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Exceptions to access available for a variety of conditions
Downtown zones	Any new development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Minimum sidewalk widths 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Except in PMM, PSM, IDM, and IDR zones
Residential and Commercial zones	Any new lots or new development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ General requirements: Curb and sidewalk as part of general street improvements ▪ Concrete curb and sidewalk for arterials, non-arterials meeting minimum width, and non-arterials not meeting minimum width 	No sidewalks required if: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Remodeling, additions, or use changes where streets with curbs and minimum or greater r-o-w ▪ Streets with curbs and less than minimum r-o-w ▪ 1 or 2 dwelling units/lots Sidewalk requirements may be waived or modified if: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Fewer than 10 dwelling units in SF, LDT, L1 zones ▪ Fewer than 6 units in other zones ▪ Various other uses, and projects occurring under separate permits ▪ Projects in a variety of special circumstances or environmental conditions (5 listed conditions)
Industrial zones	Any new development or lots	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Same as res/comm'l, above ▪ IG1 and IG2 zones: pedestrian walkway 	Same exceptions as residential/commercial zones, above.

Existing Conditions Analysis

Existing conditions were analyzed through the use of the City's 1996 sidewalk inventory map. Due to the age of the map, targeted field visits were made including a case study of the Lake City urban village area, which confirmed that additional sidewalks have been built since 1996 that are not shown on the map. There are also likely locations citywide where sidewalks are precluded due to topography, built structures, or other physical obstacles or constraints; these cannot be determined without updating the sidewalk inventory. For the purposes of this discussion, the following three categories of sidewalk conditions from the 1996 map were combined into one category entitled "streets lacking full sidewalks:"

- Streets with no sidewalks on either side of the road;
- Streets with full or partial sidewalks on only one side of the road; and
- Streets where sidewalk conditions are unknown.

Based on this definition of streets with and without sidewalks, the following statistics were compiled:

- There are 1806 miles of streets citywide; approximately 1/3 (or 598 miles) are without sidewalks
- Approximately the same proportion (1/3) of streets within and outside of Urban Centers and Urban Villages are without sidewalks (526 total miles of streets within centers and villages of which 167 are without full sidewalks; 1280 total miles of streets outside centers and villages of which 431 are without full sidewalks).
- Streets north of N 85th comprise approximately 16% of the city's total streets (291 miles), but represent a much higher percentage of streets without sidewalks than other parts of the city—74% of streets north of 85th are without sidewalks vs. 25% of all streets south of 85th which are without sidewalks.
- Urban Centers and Urban Villages most lacking in sidewalks by number of miles include North Rainier (7 miles), MLK at Holly* (6 miles), Northgate (5 miles), South Park (4 miles), Lake City (4 miles), Columbia City (4 miles), and Bitter Lake (4 miles). *Reflects pre-redevelopment conditions.
- Expressed as a ratio of streets without sidewalks to total streets, Lake City, Bitter Lake, and Northgate are the urban villages/centers least developed with sidewalks—in Lake City 4 out of 5 miles of streets are without sidewalks; in Bitter Lake the ratio is 4 out of 7 miles, and in Northgate the ratio is 5 out of 9 miles.
- There are 477 total miles of arterials citywide; of these approximately 11% are without sidewalks.

The Lake City case study focused on 33rd Avenue Northeast between NE 120th and NE 123rd, and shows the redevelopment of former single-family, duplex, and triplex units along an entire block which has occurred without accompanying infrastructure. While the redevelopment itself is in line with Lake City Urban Village goals, the projects themselves were individually too small to meet the current threshold for requiring sidewalks. The result is an increase of approximately 30 dwelling units on the block to date (and zoning capacity for an additional 40+ units) adjacent to a street with gravel shoulders and no clear pedestrian walkway.

Findings and Conclusions

The analysis shows that current Land Use Code sidewalk requirements are out of date with respect to reflecting the goals of the Comprehensive Plan and related documents, and are inadequate to address sidewalk needs based on current conditions and development activity. Specifically:

- **Project location should be a factor in sidewalk requirements.** Current code looks solely at the proposed project and sets street and sidewalk requirements based on project type, size, and zone regardless of project location within the city. However, the location and context of the project—whether in an urban village or in a single-family neighborhood—is equally and often more important than the size or type of project in determining the need for pedestrian walkways. The greater the density (existing or planned) of the parcel and the neighborhood in which it sits, the more extensive the pedestrian-related improvements should be.
- **Too many exceptions.** Current code exceptions are numerous and liberally applied, resulting in too few projects being required to make street—and sidewalk—improvements.
- **Thresholds are too high.** Much of the current boom in townhouse development is of a size that does not meet the threshold for street or sidewalk improvements, even while adding significant numbers of residents and potential pedestrians to neighborhoods. There is speculation that some developers will deliberately build under the threshold to avoid the cost of building sidewalks and other street improvements. The current threshold also allows lots that are created through the short plat and unit lot subdivision process to proceed into development without sidewalks, often culminating in the eventual redevelopment of an entire street without accompanying infrastructure.
- **Sidewalks are tied to more complex and/or costly street improvements.** Current code includes sidewalks as one of many types of required street improvements. In theory, any combination of improvements may be required as circumstances warrant, but in practice the requirements tend to be applied in an “all or nothing” scenario. Decoupling sidewalks from the other improvements; that is, requiring them regardless of whether other street improvements are required, is a more reliable means of obtaining needed pedestrian infrastructure than relying on sidewalks coming as part of a complete street package.
- **There is little ability to fit improvements to context within the current code.** Current code uniformly requires concrete curb and sidewalk without consideration of environmental context, making it difficult to obtain approval to use alternative technologies and materials during the permitting process. Creek watersheds are a prime example of locations where the traditional concrete curb, gutter, and sidewalk may not always be the best solution to meeting both pedestrian and water quality objectives.
- **Traditional sidewalks are just one of many features of an environment that is tailored to pedestrians.** Other features include street trees and landscaping, lighting, crossing signals, street furniture, sidewalk cafes, attractive storefronts, bus shelters and related seating, public art, water fountains, kiosks, waste bins, and more. Determining where these additional features are needed is a question of context—sidewalks providing simple access along a blockfront require fewer amenities than a sidewalk which is part of a larger public realm including places for people to gather and socialize. Current code language does little to differentiate, prioritize, and/or require additional features in these varied settings.
- **Urban Centers and Urban Villages are disproportionately lacking in sidewalks** given their existing and proposed population density and the concentration of pedestrian-generators within them such as retail, transit service, and community facilities. Arterials are also high in uses and facilities that generate pedestrian traffic. Although the majority of arterials citywide do have sidewalks, gaps remain which need to be completed in order for these key pedestrian routes to function as intended.
- **Single-family areas north of 85th do not represent the highest priority for use of scarce resources.** While these areas are almost entirely devoid of sidewalks, they—and other single-family

areas of the city without sidewalks—present a particular challenge in that while large in size, the single-family zone, with a predominance of larger lot sizes north of 85th, does not have the density or the amenities to engender the pedestrian traffic volumes that are present in Urban Centers, Urban Villages, and along arterials.

Overall, the findings above suggest that arterials, Urban Centers, and Urban Villages are the strongest candidates for strengthened sidewalk requirements and a priority for the first phase of code revisions.

Implementation Options

The list below describes a variety of approaches to revising current sidewalk requirements which could be used singly or in combination; at once or in phases:

- **Eliminate some or all of the exceptions citywide**, keep all other requirements the same, and apply and enforce the requirements consistently and rigorously, requiring sidewalks where authority allows even if other street improvements are not deemed necessary. Although some increase in sidewalk construction could be expected, it is unlikely to be substantial or enough to close the gaps in the existing sidewalk network and, moreover, would not allow any ability to focus improvements in growth areas.
- **Lower the thresholds citywide**, keep all other requirements and exceptions the same. This would capture the majority of townhouse developments, but does not address those projects for which exceptions can be applied.
- **Lower the thresholds and eliminate some/all of the exceptions citywide**, keeping all other requirements the same. This would be the most rigorous approach to requiring sidewalks in nearly all types of development and locations, but would not allow the City to target requirements according to Comprehensive Plan goals and may result in more costly development even in areas where pedestrian traffic is limited.
- **Prioritize locations and situations where sidewalk improvements are most needed and/or desired**, and focus on getting those areas fully developed first. Differentiate improvement requirements based on where the project is located—whether in an Urban Center/Hub/Village or Environmentally sensitive area or along an arterial or other pedestrian connector or all other areas, while keeping current exceptions.
- **Explore alternatives to traditional sidewalk, curb, and gutter**. Develop sidewalk designs that are less expensive to develop, that can work as “interim” solutions as an area slowly redevelops, that are sensitive to environmental issues, and/or that can be developed at once but with the cost shared by multiple developers or property owners over time.
- **Develop and promote Local Improvements Districts (LIDs)** and other “self-help” mechanisms for those in single-family areas wishing to have sidewalks constructed. Would still require private funding, but may offer economies of scale and/or a simplified process in which to complete the improvements.
- **Fully articulate the scope of improvements for a variety of pedestrian environments, each set of requirements suited to a particular setting**. Sidewalks are the most critical piece of infrastructure in creating a successful pedestrian environment, but by no means the only feature. Identifying additional features and amenities and the settings in which they are desired/required, is a logical next step in achieving pedestrian-related goals.

Recommendations

The proposal is to complete Land Use Code revisions to sidewalk requirements in two phases as described below.

Phase I: Sidewalk Requirements

Phase I addresses the highest priority areas for sidewalk improvements and includes the following components:

- Sidewalk requirements would be determined initially by the location of the proposed project, providing an opportunity to **target improvements to the highest priority areas** of Urban Centers, Urban Villages, parcels within pedestrian designated zones, and parcels adjacent to arterials.
- **Project thresholds would be reduced to zero in the high priority areas listed above; and projects proposing three (3) or more dwelling units in all other areas.** Thresholds for commercial space would be eliminated, thereby requiring sidewalks of all commercial developments regardless of size.
- **Nearly all of the current exceptions for street improvements would no longer apply to sidewalks,** and would instead be replaced with an exception for additions and remodels of a specific size. Current Environmentally Critical Areas regulations would remain applicable where warranted by proposed project location.
- Minor revisions in current code language would **eliminate the requirement for “concrete curbs and sidewalks” in favor of “sidewalks”;** leaving the decision about materials and drainage systems to the specifications of the Right-of-Way Improvements Manual and the Drainage Code. This would grant more flexibility to developers in applying new and/or more appropriate materials and technologies to required sidewalks, and provide more clarity on the respective authority and scope of the Land Use Code, ROWIM, and Drainage Code to City staff and applicants.

Phase I can be accomplished with the addition of a new section to Chapter 23.53 Requirements for Streets, Alleys, and Easements, and a series of revisions to existing code within Chapter 23.53, 23.22 Subdivisions, 23.24 Short Plats, and 23.47A Commercial. The new section of code is proposed to read as follows:

23.53.006 Pedestrian access and circulation

- A. **General Requirements.** All streets in all zones are required to accommodate pedestrian access and circulation, as set forth in this Section. Pedestrian-related improvements shall meet the requirements of this chapter and the Right-of-Way Improvements Manual.
- B. **Sidewalk Requirements in all zones within Urban Centers and Urban Villages.**
1. New streets. Sidewalks and curbs are required whenever new streets are created through the platting process or are otherwise dedicated for public use.
 2. Existing streets. Sidewalks are required whenever new lots are created or development is proposed adjacent to any existing street without a sidewalk, or wherever an existing sidewalk does not meet Right-of-Way Improvements Manual standards, in any zone, except as specified in subsection D of this section.
- C. **Sidewalk Requirements in all zones outside Urban Centers and Urban Villages.**
1. New streets. Sidewalks and curbs are required whenever new streets are created through the platting process or are otherwise dedicated for public use.
 2. Existing streets.

- a. Arterials. Sidewalks are required whenever new lots are created or development is proposed adjacent to an arterial in any zone, except as specified in subsection D of this section.
- b. Streets within a pedestrian designated zone. Sidewalks are required whenever new lots are created or development is proposed in any zone with a pedestrian designation, except as specified in subsection D of this section.
- c. Non-arterials. Sidewalks are required whenever new lots are created or development is proposed that exceeds three (3) or more lots, three (3) or more dwelling units, or includes any amount of nonresidential space adjacent to a non-arterial in any zone, except as specified in subsection D of this section.

D. Exceptions. Exceptions to sidewalk requirements may be granted under one or more of the following circumstances:

- 1. Types of Projects. Sidewalks are not required for changes of use, or for remodeling and additions to existing structures where the total square footage of the remodel or addition is less than 500 square feet;
- 2. Types of Sites. The Director may waive or modify the requirement for sidewalks and curbs when it is determined that one (1) or both of the following conditions are met:
 - a. Location in an environmentally critical area or buffer, disruption of existing drainage patterns, or removal of natural features such as significant trees makes installation of a sidewalk impractical or undesirable.
 - b. The existence of a bridge, viaduct or structure such as a substantial retaining wall makes installation of a sidewalk impractical or undesirable.

Phase II: Sidewalk Requirements

Phase II will address pedestrian-related improvement requirements more broadly, and in areas of the city outside of Urban Centers and Urban Villages and adjacent to non-arterial streets. Recognizing that pedestrian-related improvements may appropriately vary in different locations, the proposal is to develop a range of allowable pedestrian walkway types tailored to geographic conditions, planning objectives, and site constraints and opportunities. Special attention will be paid to developing walkway designs appropriate for environmentally sensitive areas. Some options are likely to be less expensive than the traditional sidewalk, curb, and gutter as currently required, while still providing needed pedestrian connectivity in a manner that fits local conditions. Other aspects of the pedestrian environment—landscaping, lighting, public art, street furniture, and more—are also proposed to be addressed and explored as requirements defined by context. Lastly, Phase II would explore code incentives, funding options, and potential partnerships for completing the city's pedestrian network.

The details of Phase II work will be developed in conjunction with the City's development of a Pedestrian Master Plan for the entire city. This work will occur throughout 2007 and 2008, following the Pedestrian Master Plan schedule.

Conclusion

The sensible reforms included in this legislation for sidewalk requirements will result in safer conditions for pedestrians, and more pedestrian amenities citywide. Moreover, they are the next step in encouraging the evolution of lively urban villages and centers that are at the core of the City's plan for gracefully accommodating future growth.

Appendix

Comprehensive Plan Policies Relevant to the Pedestrian Environment

The following are excerpts from Comprehensive Plan policies within the Urban Villages, Land Use, and Transportation chapters that are particularly relevant to discussion of the pedestrian environment and provision of sidewalks and other amenities to support pedestrians. For the full text of each policy, please refer to the Comprehensive Plan.

Urban Villages Chapter

UV5 Consider suitable for urban village designation areas where:

1. Natural conditions, the existing development pattern, and current zoning are conducive to supporting denser, mixed use pedestrian environments where public amenities and services can be efficiently and effectively provided. In some instances, the urban village designation is intended to transform automobile-oriented environments into more cohesive, mixed-use pedestrian environments, or within economically distressed communities to focus economic reinvestment to benefit the existing population;

UV15 Designate as urban centers those areas of the city that are consistent with the following criteria and relevant Countywide Planning Policies:

1. Area not exceeding one and one-half square miles (960 acres).
2. Accessibility to the existing regional transportation network including access to other urban centers, with access to the regional high-capacity transit system to be provided in the future.
3. Zoning that can accommodate a broad mix of activities, including commercial and residential activities, as appropriate to the planned balance of uses in the center.
4. The area is already connected to surrounding neighborhoods by bicycle and/or pedestrian facilities or can be connected through planned extensions of existing facilities.

UV25 Designate as hub urban villages areas that are consistent with the following criteria:

7. A strategic location in relation to both the local and regional transportation network, including:
 - a. Transit service with a frequency of 15 minutes or less during peak hours, and 30-minute transit headways in the off-peak hours, with direct access to at least one urban center, with the possibility of improved connections to future high capacity transit stations
 - b. Located on the principal arterial network, with connections to regional transportation facilities
 - c. Routes accommodating goods movement
 - d. Convenient and direct, connections to adjacent areas by pedestrians and bicyclists

UVG28 Promote the development of residential urban villages, which function primarily as compact residential neighborhoods providing opportunities for a wide range of housing types and a mix of activities that support the residential population. Support densities in residential urban villages that support transit use.

5. The area has the opportunity to be connected by bicycle and/or pedestrian facilities to adjacent areas and nearby public amenities.

Land Use Chapter

LU50 In urban centers and urban villages, consider removing minimum parking requirements and setting parking maximums in recognition of the increased pedestrian, bicycle and transit accessibility these areas already provide or have planned. Parking requirements for urban centers and villages should account for local conditions and planning objectives.

LU52 In order to maintain an attractive street level environment, to facilitate pedestrian and vehicular traffic circulation, to minimize adverse impacts of parking on adjacent areas and structures, to sustain on-street parking, and, where appropriate, to maintain or create a continuity of street fronts, generally prohibit street level parking between buildings and the street, restrict the number and size of curbcuts, and require alley access to parking when a surfaced alley is accessible to the rear of a building, and not prevented by topography.

LU100 Use a range of high-density multifamily zones in desirable pedestrian-oriented urban neighborhoods with access to regional transit, a broad range of services and amenities and access to employment to:

- Encourage housing development of a medium to large scale with heights greater than those in lowrise zones;
- Accommodate larger scale structures while maintaining the livability of these communities, including measures which minimize the appearance of bulk; or
- Allow high-density residential development in urban centers and hub urban villages.

LU104 Consistent with the urban village strategy, prefer the development of compact concentrated commercial areas, or nodes, in which many businesses can be easily accessed by pedestrians, to the designation of diffuse, sprawling commercial areas along arterials, which often require driving from one business to another.

LU106 Provide a range of commercial zone classifications, which provide different mixes and intensities of activity, varying scales of development, varying degrees of residential or commercial orientation, and varying degrees of pedestrian or auto orientation and relationship to surrounding areas depending on their role in the urban village strategy and community goals as voiced in adopted neighborhood plans.

LU107 Distinguish between pedestrian-oriented commercial zones which are compatible with and easily accessible to their surrounding neighborhoods, and general commercial zones which are intended to accommodate commercial uses dependent on automobile or truck access.

LU117 Generally permit a greater intensity of development in pedestrian and transit supportive environments found in pedestrian-oriented commercial areas within urban villages than is permitted in general commercial areas or outside of urban villages.

LU127 Seek to limit impacts on pedestrian and traffic circulation and on surrounding areas when locating access to off-street parking. Generally encourage alley access to off-street parking, except when an alley is used for loading.

LU128 Use pedestrian-oriented zones to promote commercial areas with a development pattern, mix of uses, and intensity of activity generally oriented to pedestrian and transit use by maintaining areas that already possess these characteristics and encouraging the transition necessary in other areas to achieve these conditions:

5. An active, attractive, accessible pedestrian environment.

LU129 Apply pedestrian-oriented commercial zones both inside and outside of urban villages where residential uses either exist or are in close proximity and where the intensity of development allowed under the particular zone designation conforms in size and scale to the community it serves.

LU130 Generally allow pedestrian-oriented commercial zones in urban villages to accommodate densities of development and mixes of uses that support pedestrian activity and transit use.

LU131 Provide use and development standards for pedestrian-oriented commercial zones, which promote environments conducive to walking and a mix of commercial and residential uses that further the goals for these zones.

LU133 Establish special pedestrian districts that may vary to reflect different characteristics and conditions of pedestrian-oriented commercial zones in order to preserve or encourage intensely retail and pedestrian-oriented shopping districts where non-auto modes of transportation to and within the district are strongly favored.

LU154 Maintain minimum and maximum standards for curbcuts and street driveways in order to balance the need to provide adequate maneuvering and loading areas with the goal of maintaining some onstreet parking and safe pedestrian access.

LU178 Promote the integration of high capacity transit stations into the neighborhoods surrounding them and foster development appropriate to significant increases in pedestrian activity and transit ridership. Use overlay districts or other adjustments to zoning to cultivate transit-oriented communities.

LUG5 Regulate the location of off-street parking and the size and location of curbcuts to reduce parking and vehicle traffic impacts on pedestrians and residential and commercial streetscapes, and to prevent obstacles to commerce and traffic flow.

LG16 Accommodate the greatest concentration of housing in desirable, pedestrian-oriented urban neighborhoods having convenient access to regional transit stations, where the mix of activity provides convenient access to a full range of residential services and amenities, and opportunities for people to live within walking distance of employment.

Transportation Chapter

Building Urban Villages: Land Use & Transportation discussion

The development pattern described in the Urban Village Element of this Plan will shape the city's transportation facilities. In particular, transportation facility design will reflect the intended pedestrian nature of the urban centers and villages and the desire to connect these places with transit service. Because Seattle is a fully built city with a mature street system, the City uses a full range of non-single occupant vehicle transportation facilities to support the desired redevelopment pattern within Urban Villages. These facilities can help create the mixed-use, walkable, transit and bike-friendly centers that this Plan envisions. However, the City recognizes that auto and service access to property will remain important for accommodating growth in centers and villages.

T1 Design transportation infrastructure in urban villages to support land use goals for compact, accessible, walkable neighborhoods.

T6 Allocate street space among various uses (e.g., traffic, transit, trucks, carpools, bicycles, parking, and pedestrians) to enhance the key function(s) of a street as described in the Transportation Strategic Plan.

T13 Designate, in the Transportation Strategic Plan, a Street Type overlay to define street use and design features that support adjacent land uses, generally, as follows:

Main Street: Main activity center in urban villages for pedestrians and transit. This Street Type encourages and supports pedestrian and bicycle activity as well as transit. Streets in this type may include high capacity transit stops and are distinguished by compact, mixed land uses, and high densities.

Mixed Use Street: Streets within neighborhood commercial areas of the city. This Street Type supports all modes with an emphasis on pedestrian access.

Local Connector Street: This Street Type supports pedestrian access along Collector Arterials to and from key pedestrian generators and destinations (e.g. schools, community centers, transit stops). May also be non-arterial streets that provide direct connection to high capacity transit stops.

Industrial Access Street: This Street Type supports freight access to manufacturing and industrial land uses.

Green Street: This Street Type on certain downtown streets provides exceptional pedestrian environments and may include wider sidewalks, street trees, landscaping, and appropriate street furniture emphasizing pedestrian movement.

Neighborhood Green Street: May be on any non-arterial street adjacent to residential and commercial land uses. This Street Type supports all modes with an emphasis on pedestrian amenities, street trees, and landscaping.

T31 Integrate pedestrian and bicycle facilities, services, and programs into City and regional transportation and transit systems. Encourage transit providers, the Washington State Ferry System, and others to provide safe and convenient pedestrian and bicycle access to and onto transit systems, covered and secure bicycle storage at stations, and especially for persons with disabilities and special needs.

T32 Recognize that stairways located within Seattle's public rights-of-way serve as a unique and valuable pedestrian resource in some areas of the City. Discourage the vacation of public rights-of-way occupied by stairways, and protect publicly-owned stairways from private encroachment.

T33 Accelerate the maintenance, development, and improvement of existing pedestrian facilities, including public stairways. Give special consideration to access to recommended school walking routes; access to transit, public facilities, social services and community centers; and access within and between urban villages for people with disabilities and special needs.

T36 Promote safe walking, bicycling, and driving behavior so as to provide public health benefits and to reinforce pedestrian, bicycle and motorists' rights and responsibilities.

T39 Restrict on-street parking when necessary to address safety, operational or mobility problems. In urban centers and urban villages where such restriction is being considered, the pedestrian environment and transit operations are of primary concern, but decisions should also balance the use of the street by high-occupancy vehicles, bicycles and motor vehicles; access to local businesses; control of parking spillover into residential areas; and truck access and loading.

TG3 Promote safe and convenient bicycle and pedestrian access throughout the transportation system.

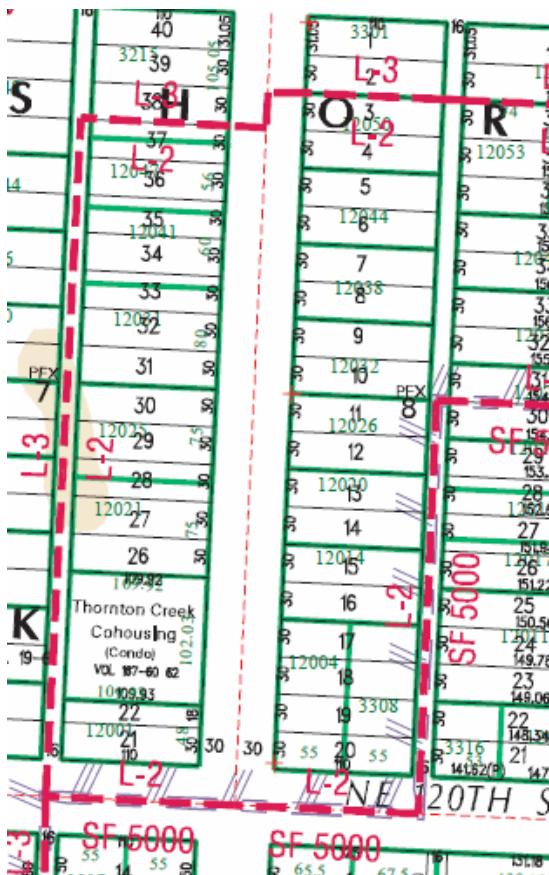
TG16 Create and enhance safe, accessible, attractive and convenient street and trail networks that are desirable for walking and bicycling.

Lake City Urban Village Case Study

A field check of the Lake City neighborhood revealed a significant lack of fully improved streets within Urban Village boundaries. Out of five total miles of streets, four miles are without sidewalks on both sides of the street as per the City sidewalk inventory map. Although some sidewalks have been added since 1996 when the map was created, largely in association with commercial development and large residential development projects, many gaps still exist between these areas. 33rd Avenue NE was selected for a closer look due to extensive recent redevelopment activity along the street and its proximity to the core of the urban village.

One block of 33rd NE—NE 120th to NE 123rd

- 30 units prior to recent (2002+) redevelopment
- 61 units currently built
- 109 units total development capacity (estimate)



West side of street

- 12001: triplex, built 1960, 5280sf lot/possible 4 units under L2
- 12005-15: Thornton Creek Co-Housing, 2 triplexes, built 1960/possible 9 units under L2
- 12021: triplex, built 1965, 8250 sf lot/possible 6 units under L2
- 12025: 4-plex, built by SHA 1984, 8250 sf lot/possible 6 units under L2
- 12031: triplex, built 1959, 8800 sf lot/possible 7 units under L2
- 12041: 1 lot subdivided into 6 in 2005, 6650 sf lot
- 12047: 1 lot subdivided into 5 in 2006, 6101 sf lot
- 3215: currently small office building, 10,100 sf lot/possible 12 units under L3

East side of street

- 3308: sf house, 6600 sf lot/possible 5 units under L2
- 12004: duplex, built 1958, 6600 sf lot/possible 5 units under L2
- 12014: sf house, built 1958, 6600 sf lot/possible 5 units under L2
- 12020: 1 lot subdivided into 5 in 2002
- 12026: 1 lot subdivided into 5 in 2005
- 12032: 1 lot subdivided into 5 in 2002
- 12038: sf house, built 1949, 6600 sf lot/[possible 5 units under L2
- 12044: 1 lot subdivided into 5 (3 thns, 2 sf) in 2006
- 12050: 1 lot subdivided into 6 in 2006
- 3301: 6600 sf lot/possible 8 units under L3

At full redevelopment and assuming an average household size of 1 to 3 persons, the population on this single block would range from 109 to 327 people. The photos on the next page show current street conditions, including the gravel shoulders and recent redevelopment.

Lake City Urban Village
Existing Conditions along 33rd Avenue Northeast between NE 120th & NE 123rd



33rd Ave NE looking south and slightly east



33rd Ave NE looking south and slightly west



New townhouse development at 12020 & 12026



Detail of gravel shoulder at property edge



New townhouse development on west side of street



New townhouse development on east side of street



Remnant of old sidewalk at 3215



Looking north to NE 125th



Striped pedestrian path north of 125th