

# Queen Anne Blvd Improvements

## Email Comments

*August – September 2006*

The following are emails that include comments about the direction of this project. Emails with general questions about the project were not included. The names and emails are omitted from this record.

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I wanted to reiterate my concerns regarding the Parks Department proposal for the Bigelow portion of the boulevard.

My concerns are threefold:

1) Trees - I am extremely concerned that the Parks Department is putting the trees on Bigelow in jeopardy by proposing sidewalks. The majestic 80 year old trees are a unique element of this part of the boulevard and create a wonderful "parklike" feeling attracting people from all over Queen Anne and the City. At a time when the mayor is proposing more trees it seems incongruous for the Parks Department to be putting trees at risk. When asked privately in front of a group of Bigelow residents if you would be willing to remove trees to facilitate sidewalks, you indicated that you would, but that you would replace them. While you have publicly backed away from this statement and somewhat soft-pedaled the issue, you will have to do a great deal to convince me and many other neighbors that you will not put any trees in jeopardy. These trees have been here for 80 years. If you remove and replace them it will take 80 years for them to return to their current state. I will most certainly be dead by then and it is likely that my children will not enjoy the beautiful quality that exists on Bigelow today in their lifetime either.

2) Openspace - Bigelow has a open, green and parklike feel as it exists today. Placing sidewalks on this part of the Boulevard would jeopardize that open, green and parklike feeling. As our city gets more and more congested I believe it is important to retain as much open space, green space, and parklike space as possible both from an aesthetic and an environmental standpoint. Increasing impervious surfaces by up to 40% is simply environmentally irresponsible.

3) Sidewalk Maintenance - The City of Seattle is unable to maintain the sidewalks as they exist on the Boulevard today. In areas all along the boulevard where large, old trees meet sidewalks there are issues with the quality of those sidewalks. In many areas the sidewalks are buckling creating a pedestrian hazard rather than an amenity. It is a completely irresponsible use of taxpayers dollars put in any type of capital improvement when you can show now way in which to maintain it. That is exactly what you are proposing here.

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In the community meeting on September 19th, I said that I was opposed to spending limited project dollars on creating an identity and wayfinding signage for Queen Anne Boulevard. I want to provide a bit more justification for my point of view.

As your map poster so clearly showed, Queen Anne Boulevard is not a continuous loop or route; it's a series of interconnected/differently named streets at odd angles to one another, and which vary tremendously in character--some are quiet residential streets, others are arterials with considerable car traffic. I, and others with whom I run, walk, and bike, seldom circumnavigate the entire boulevard at once. When running, I cut back across on Crockett from 7th West. When biking, I ride past the cemetery and along 10th West to cut down the hill at Gilman. When walking, I typically walk a section of it, and then meander through other neighborhood streets.

My point is that Queen Anne Boulevard is not a boulevard in the traditional sense; it's not analogous to Lake Washington Boulevard, a single road, which travels along the lake, seems park-like, and attracts people from other neighborhoods who walk, run, and bike it.

Signage identifying QA Boulevard as park space has an artificiality about it that's out of character with our neighborhood and the streets that constitute the Boulevard. It seems unlikely that wayfinding signage would increase usage by folks from outside the neighborhood (if this is a goal of your signage program)--walking, running, biking (and even driving) the route means crossing busy streets and endless intersections--not something to drive across town to do, but wonderful for those of us who live here. And we know our way around, and when we're on and off the Boulevard.

So instead of signs, focus on the TREES which make the boulevards what they are and IDENTIFY THE BOULEVARDS far more effectively than any signs would. They are the Park Department's and the neighborhood's greatest asset (the major reason I moved to Queen Anne from Ballard). Spend the \$500,000 to prune the trees, promote their health and longevity, and plant new trees. The city must do more than remove "hazardous" trees/limbs to preserve and care for our living treasure.

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I spoke with you last Sunday, when I was out running with my son in his stroller on Queen Anne Boulevard. Sorry I could not attend the meeting on the 19<sup>th</sup>.

As I told you on Sunday, I am very much in favor of the addition of a sidewalk along the Boulevard on the "diagonal" street (McGraw Pl?) between McGraw and Smith Streets.

This section has fairly high traffic volumes and the addition of a sidewalk here along the east side of the street would be welcome. I am a frequent runner along this stretch and having the option to get further away from the traffic would be great, particularly in the winter months when I am often running in darkness.

I do not think that the addition of the sidewalk along Bigelow is as high of a priority. The traffic volumes along this stretch are much lower. Given a choice, I would prioritize safety improvements at the crosswalk across Queen Anne Blvd at Highland. A pedestrian activated stop light or a flashing crosswalk would be welcome there.

I also wonder if landscaping improvements could be made on some of the islands along the Boulevard. An example of such an island is at McGraw and Nob Hill. There is also a piece of property at Smith near the start of the diagonal I described above (though I do not know if that is public or private property).

Thank you for the opportunity to comment. Please keep me informed of other opportunities to comment on this project.

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I'm a Queen Anne resident, and I've always loved the old trees on Bigelow Avenue. I'm concerned about plans to replace them with sidewalks. Please leave them be! I was under the impression that Mayor Nickels is planning to plant a bunch of new trees in Seattle--why not leave those in place, and save the city some money?

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I would LOVE to see a stop sign at the 5 way intersection of Bigelow, 3<sup>rd</sup> N and Highland.

My bias is to advocate heavily for sidewalks. Don't care about the material necessarily, just want my 10 and 12 year old kids off of Bigelow when they walk to school or trick or treat or just walk to the Ave. I also want the joggers, dog walkers and chestnut pickers off of Bigelow too because I live in fear that one day, I will actually hit one of them with my car since they appear to be oblivious to the fact that they are in fact, doing their stroll in the middle of a busy street. Don't think speed bumps are really necessary to slow traffic because you can't speed on that road. All of the dogs and joggers are in effect moving speed bumps. Tested it today on my way home from school. Impossible to go faster than 30 MPH without feeling like you might kill someone. And I'm from Boston which means I know a lot about aggressive driving!

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I couldn't make the recent public meeting that was held on the 19th. As a regular user, I strongly support the construction of sidewalks along the entire route. I feel like I am taking a chance every time I walk the boulevard after dark - especially the portion of the walk that is a mass of tree roots. I stumble at that spot every time!

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This message is in response to your invitation of last night to send additional comments regarding improvements to the Queen Anne Boulevard (Boulevard). As you know, I have been a Queen Anne resident for 23 years and have lived on the Boulevard for 20. The section in front of my house does not have sidewalks.

My youngest son is now 17. I pushed him in a stroller along the Boulevard; I taught him to ride his bike in the street; and I do not feel the lack of sidewalks makes sections of the Boulevard unsafe. I do, however, feel that the lack of maintenance of the large trees along sections of the Boulevard is unsafe for pedestrians, whether they are walking in the street or walking on sidewalks. I also believe that in many stretches, the condition of the sidewalks is hazardous to pedestrians who use them; and that the placement of sidewalks alongside vaulted garages, where drivers who are backing out have NO visibility, is a safety concern. The number of pedestrians who opt to use the street, even along sections of the Boulevard with sidewalks, speaks to these issues.

The character of the Boulevard is defined by its magnificent trees and, in places, the open green spaces on either side of the street. It is this very character that attracts people to the Boulevard, in the first place. Those of us who walk (or run or ride bikes) along the Boulevard daily have a myriad of alternate routes to choose from (of

equivalent distance), both on Queen Anne Hill and elsewhere--routes that would allow us to use sidewalks the entire distance. We choose the Boulevard because of its beauty.

I am not unsympathetic to the (hypothetical) father who feels unsafe pushing his child down the street in a stroller; I simply don't believe that the character of the Boulevard should be compromised because of an unwillingness on that father's part to alter his route by a block in order to stay within his threshold for safety. Indeed, I can only conclude that if he chooses the path he feels is unsafe, he does so because he values the beauty of that path over safety. (What other logical conclusion is there, when safety--by his definition--is just a block away?)

Although not initially disclosed at last night's meeting, you have stated publicly that your internal recommendation for improving the Boulevard is to add 6' concrete sidewalks along Parks property boundaries, effectively bracketing the trees with concrete on one side and paved streets on the other. I am highly opposed to your recommendation for a number of reasons, chief among them the health of the large species trees, both those that exist and their (planned) replacements. Let us learn from the errors of our past, rather than repeat them.

In at least one conversation with me and some of my neighbors, you mentioned that the Parks Department is willing to remove some of the large trees along Bigelow to facilitate the placement of sidewalks. I find this appalling. Moreover, I am skeptical that any width of concrete or hard-surface could be placed alongside mature trees without compromising their life spans. Finally, the buckling sidewalks in evidence throughout sections of the Boulevard provide ample proof that sidewalks and large trees are fundamentally incompatible. (And raise questions about the Parks Department's ability to maintain them.)

Beyond the technical aspects of incompatibility, I find it disheartening that, in this day and age, we are contemplating removing green space in favor of hardscape. Where do environmental sensibilities enter into the Parks Department's planning process?

Drainage is also of concern to me. Perhaps some sections of the Boulevard have sufficient drainage to withstand additional hard surface; Bigelow does not. Moreover, sections of Bigelow are considered Environmentally Critical Areas. I feel strongly that any plan developed by the Parks Department needs to reflect careful research of and budgetary allowances for adequate solutions to these important problems.

Sadly, I also feel compelled to note that the record of the Parks Department in following through with promises to Queen Anne residents is checkered. (A recent example of this is the lack of re-establishing the number of trees agreed to in lower Kerry Park as compensation for tree removal.) For this reason, I am asking that you seek specific, rather than general, input from the public on this project and share your plans in specific, rather than general terms. Many of the residents present at last night's meeting stated that lighting of the Boulevard was high on their list of priorities. From comments overheard in the crowd, I believe this was lighting of a specific quality, like that found along 8th West. (Additional street lighting of the kind already present along Bigelow might be viewed as a poor use of levy funds.)

Similarly, if discussions of sidewalks, pathways, etc., continue (if there is sufficient

support for this use of funds to warrant further discussion), it will be critical for distinctions to be made and agreed to concerning the material, placement, and size of walkways being proposed. Varying these aspects of the plan would likely result in dramatically different levels of support from the public. To say, for example, that you will "do your best to save the trees" or that you will "consider permeable surfaces" -- and then to ask the public to trust your judgment in the final decisions -- is insufficient collaboration, in my opinion. If the Parks Department commits to full and detailed disclosure; and genuine collaboration with all key stakeholders, then perhaps this project will serve to improve the level of respect and trust between community residents and the Parks Department. I certainly hope that will be the case.

In summary, I am in favor of the trees and maximizing their lifespans; I am in favor of maintaining the woodland character of the Boulevard, where it still exists. I am against adding sidewalks of any kind as replacement for green space along the Boulevard. I would rather see Parks funds used to remove hardscape (in order to re-establish open green space) than for replacement of existing green space with new hardscape. Queen Anne has a bounty of walking routes and sidewalks; however, we have only one Park Boulevard. Let's keep it green!

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I am a 34 year resident of Queen Anne and currently live on the Queen Anne Boulevard (the "Boulevard"). My suggestions and priorities for spending the levy funds are as follows:

### General Philosophy

The Boulevard is a valued asset in the Seattle park system, often described as a "jewel" or a "treasure." Its appeal derives from two aspects of the Boulevard – its **whole** and its various **parts**.

The Boulevard as a whole is attractive because it is an integrated, closed loop circling Queen Anne hill, and unified by its characteristic trees. As such it presents a unique urban recreational space for walking, jogging, and other activities. Portions of the levy funds should be spent to further improve and consolidate the Boulevard's identity as a single unified recreational element.

The individual parts of the Boulevard have their own distinct characteristics and attractions. These include the ornamental brickwork, cantilevered sidewalks and splendid views along the Wilcox wall; the quiet wooded residential areas along 10<sup>th</sup> Avenue West and Fulton Streets; the busier tree-lined stretches along the West McGraw Place arterial; and the park-like wooded areas with grassy banks along the southern stretches of Bigelow Avenue North. Each of these areas has its own special needs and priorities.

### PRIORITIES – UNIFYING ELEMENTS

#### **Tree Enhancement program**

The most definitive characteristic of the Boulevard as a whole is its tree canopy. A number of the larger trees are approaching the end of their life. Maintenance is reduced to an "urgent needs" basis because of a lack of funding. The levy funds offer a one-time opportunity to invest in a significant upgrade to the Boulevard's trees. The focus should

be a program to selectively replace and to expand the number of trees (in accordance with the Mayor's goals), making an investment that will preserve and enhance the Boulevard's tree-lined identity for future generations.

### **Signage**

A further way to solidify the Boulevard's identity is by installing uniform signage. A proposal presented at the September 19 public meeting suggested incorporating a distinctive logo on street signs along the Boulevard. This appears preferable to proliferating still more stand-alone signs, which would in turn generate maintenance needs.

### **Pedestrian Lighting**

Lighting levels around the Boulevard vary widely. Some areas need improved lighting directed at pedestrian uses. Improving lighting in these areas offers another opportunity to reinforce the unified identity of the Boulevard by using a consistent and distinctive design.

### **Small-scale improvements /“Eyesore” elimination**

The park-like quality of the Boulevard varies widely from area to area. Some are uniformly drab and would benefit from small-scale, low-cost improvements such as adding benches, small plantings, mini “plazas,” and other such features. By using consistent design elements, these can help to unify the whole Boulevard space. A portion of levy funds should be set aside for this purpose.

In some areas, the ambience of the park is destroyed by localized eyesores. One such area is on the west side of Bigelow Avenue North between Garfield and Galer streets. Here, tree roots push through a wide expanse of buckled asphalt flanking the roadway, while blackberry bushes have seeded against the retaining walls. The result looks more like an urban slum than a park. These isolated eyesores should be cleaned up and beautified, using a small amount of levy funds.

## **PRIORITIES – SPECIFIC AREAS**

### **Pedestrian safety – West McGraw Place**

The most dangerous section of the Boulevard is West McGraw Place. There are no sidewalks along an arterial that carries a high level of traffic. Vehicle speeds are consistently at or above the posted limit. Given the lack of pedestrian crossing points along this stretch, some form of ADA-compliant pedestrian pathway should be provided on *both* sides of the Boulevard. I endorse the QACC proposal to give this stretch of the Boulevard a high priority.

### **Pedestrian safety – McGraw Place/ Smith Street**

This stretch, running west from the bridge to 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue North, also lacks sidewalks. While traffic volumes are lower than West McGraw Place, they are not insignificant. In addition, there are limited opportunities for “casual” pathways beside the roadway because of the topography and tree roots. Consideration should be given to “striping” a pedestrian lane on one side of the roadway. This has the advantages of being low cost and easily reversible. It lends itself ideally to a test program, which could monitor effectiveness over a trial period of a few months.

### **Drainage – Bigelow Avenue North**

As expressed at the public meeting, drainage is a recurring problem along this length of the boulevard. Storm sewers are consistently plugged by leaves. Even when cleaned, the sewers appear inadequate for the run-off flows. As a consequence, small rivers run along each side of the road during heavy rains, carrying debris down the street and eroding the edges of the roadway. A portion of levy funds should be spent on capital improvements to the drainage system in this area.

### **Pedestrian Safety – Bigelow Avenue North**

This stretch of the Boulevard presents special issues. It is the most park-like area of the Boulevard and it is used in a way that differs from all other areas. Perhaps because of lighter traffic, perhaps because of the trees and grassy banks, pedestrians treat this area much more as a true park than an urban street. They assert their rights to the space by preferring to walk in the roadway, even when there are sidewalks on one or both sides of the road. The local “culture” says that this is a park space, that pedestrians have a right to use the entire space (including the roadway), and that vehicles may co-exist provided they slow and maneuver to accommodate pedestrian needs.

Attempts to battle and change this culture by installing additional sidewalks are likely to be unsuccessful and a waste of limited funds. It will be more productive to accept this culture and seek alternative ways to improve pedestrian safety. ***Make the street more like a park, rather than trying to turn the park into a street.*** The most pressing need identified at the public meeting is to reduce vehicle speed (and possibly volume, by reducing the street’s attraction as a “cut through” route). Whether done by speed bumps, stop signs, or other means, this should be the highest priority in this area.

A more innovative solution (and less expensive), would be to reinforce the “joint use” culture by dedicating part of the existing roadway to pedestrian use. This would further enhance pedestrian safety by slowing vehicle speeds and reducing cut through traffic. As a low-cost model, consider the bike lanes installed along Dexter Avenue North and many other Seattle arterials. As discussed for McGraw Place above, this technique has the merit of being easily reversible, and thus ideal for a test project. I should emphasize that under this proposal, on-street parking would *not* be reduced. The intent is to reduce vehicle lanes, not create additional parking problems.

A more expensive variant would be to install concrete sidewalks on the existing roadway surface, on the street side of the trees. This would enhance safety by reducing and slowing traffic, but is unlikely to attract pedestrian use for the “cultural” reasons described above.

The least attractive option is to install rigid sidewalks on existing grassy spaces. My objections are based on destroying the park-like character of the Boulevard and potential damage to trees. If some form of off-road pathway is desired, it should be crushed rock or another material that would require less excavation and tree damage, and would be more in keeping with a park.

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### Comments on Queen Anne Boulevard

- **Sidewalks:** It appears that concrete sidewalks are very expensive. Moreover, unless they are well maintained – especially around large trees – they are

hazardous – it is very easy to trip. Along the Boulevard now – especially at night when lighting is poor – I'd prefer to take my risks by walking or running in the street even in those areas where sidewalks are available. Consequently, generally speaking I think that I am opposed to sidewalks.

- **Lighting:** Light fixtures that are under the tree canopy would be desirable.
- **Notice of Public Ownership:** I'd like to see some mechanism to let the general public know the boundaries of the public park land. Even though I've lived on Queen Anne Hill for close to 30 years, it was only last night that I learned that land that I used to think was private property is in fact public property. The public ought to be able to learn that Boulevard land is public land and that they are free to use it.
- **Automobile speeds:** I would like to see speed bumps placed on the non-arterial portions of the Boulevard. I don't care for traffic circles. Moreover, if they are placed only at intersections, they aren't sufficient.
- **Pricing:** General cost estimates of the various proposals ought to be available by the next meeting. People ought to be able to understand which options get them more for their buck.
- **Drainage:** The Engineering Department ought to pay for fixing drainage problems on their own dollar. Park money ought not to have to be used for that.
- **Off-Street Parking:** If it isn't already required, garages should be required if a house on the Boulevard is undergoing a major remodel. I believe that someone at the Sep 19 meeting said that that was the case.

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I attended the public meeting last night and I thought you should know that there is also a level of ignorance about the boulevard, although that was not apparent from the meeting.

I bought a house on Bigelow with my husband just under a year ago. We had no idea that the boulevard existed, much less that we had bought a property that adjoins it. I was certainly surprised to learn that we do not own over half of our front garden.

I was planning doing some work in the front garden and I would have had no idea that this would be invading publicly owned space. I thought you should know this because I expect if the system allows us to be ignorant of this, many other people are in the same situation.

Having said that, we are not opposed to the idea of adding sidewalks. Our overall priority though is to maintain the health and continuity of the tree coverage.

We live in one of a number of properties where the gardens seamlessly join the public space (you are probably aware of them; we are 1715 Bigelow) and so the addition of sidewalks would have a huge impact on our home. We would assume that the sidewalks, if added, would be done tastefully and in keeping with the gracious character of the road.

Please could you clarify - they city owns the first 16 feet of our garden? Is this the case on both sides of the road?

I'd also like to add that I appreciate the clarity of your presentations and the orderly manner the meeting was conducted.

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I didn't sign in tonight so want to give you my email in order to get the summary. I don't need the hard copy. There were many good comments: taking care of trees planted, lighting for safety and a comment that wasn't given much discussion was the need to consider the views. People enjoy living here for many reasons but the views are important and that is why many other people visit Queen Anne hill.

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I got the flier about the meeting in our mail box. Unfortunately, I won't be able to make this first meeting, but I've spread the word to a few of my neighbors. I walk and run Bigelow regularly and when we lived on 5th N, I walked my daughter along this section of Bigelow to school. While cars are generally pretty good along the road, visibility isn't. Sidewalks would be great.

As a neighbor involved with volunteers who work on Trolley Hill Park and the NE Queen Anne Greenbelt (just down from Bigelow off of Garfield or the Howe St stairs), I am also really interested in the green connections up and down the Hill. The unimproved Howe street right of way between 4th North and 5th North in particular could be a great pedestrian connection to Bigelow and to the trails in the NE Queen Anne Greenbelt. The stairs from Bigelow could really use improving and signs, though, and neighbors have co-opted or let laurels take over the right of way between Bigelow and 4th N. I realize pedestrian connections are probably outside of the scope of the project, but it would be nice to make people aware of additional possibilities.

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I also wanted to mention an idea that was suggested by several people after you had left the meeting. That was to stripe a pedestrian lane on the pavement, perhaps 10 feet out from the curb. The best example would be the stripe that designates a bike lane on 8th Ave. NW in Ballard. Although clearly not a perfect solution, it would have several advantages.

- it would increase pedestrian safety in two ways, both by narrowing the roadway for drivers and forcing slower speeds, and by channeling pedestrians into one corridor. Currently they tend to roam all over the street. And as you heard, the majority walk in the street already.
- as in the Ballard example, parking would still be allowed. That means the lane would vary from 10' in width to perhaps 4' where cars were parked. But currently pedestrians are used to weaving their way in and out where cars are parked.
- it would dramatically reduce construction costs, freeing up funds for other improvements. There would be no concrete to pour, the pavement is already at a smooth grade suitable for wheelchairs, no curb cuts are needed, no tree or drainage issues. Just transferring part of the right-of-way from vehicles to pedestrians -- surely a park goal!

I'm sure there are many difficulties and bureaucratic hurdles, but it's one more suggestion to be thrown into the hopper.

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I am a lifelong Queen Anne resident and grew up on the Blvd on 8th Ave. W. and now reside on Bigelow Ave. N.

I run or bike the Blvd. daily and have often observed that even where there are sidewalks, a majority of the people still walk in the street. Perhaps over time if the entire Blvd had a continuous sidewalk it would be used, but personally I doubt that would happen.

My first preference is to leave things as they are, mark the Blvd., remove encroachments, and spent funds maintaining the park dept. property. I cannot recall there ever being a pedestrian/auto accident, however speed bumps or a reduced speed limit would increase foot traffic safety.

The trees in my opinion are the priority, they give the Blvd character and identify it especially where the old concrete walls and old street lamps are not present. Replace trees that have been removed, many young trees that were planted toward Highland and Prospect were killed several years ago. I hope the park dept. will carefully choose the species as root issues, leaves and maintenance of them are a big factor. I'm sure you are well aware of the attempt to kill trees on 8th W., protection of the trees should also be addressed.

If sidewalks are installed, I think it makes more sense to construct them on the view side of Bigelow, I often observe people walking on the East side of the street to get peeks between houses to see Lake Union and the mountains.

I did not know that parking is not permitted on the Blvd. Is that true? If enforced, where are people supposed to park their cars?

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It's nice to know that the 'boulevard' will become more picturesque. I'm all for it. And under "pedestrian amenities" (I noticed the sign on McGraw Place today), is their room for pedestrian protection from speeding boulevard traffic?

I live on what is probably the most dangerous strip of the boulevard, at least we are told that it is part of the boulevard. What will be done to protect pedestrians trying to cross the street near the blind curve at First west and McGraw Place? Today I noticed two women with strollers in the middle of the street crossing McGraw, cars still whizzing by. Are these conditions going to be changed? Or is this project a matter of visual enhancements only?

We've struggled over the years with Parks & Engineering over this problem, and have always been stonewalled. One Engineering rep. told me on the phone that "traffic flow" must always take priority over pedestrian safety, despite the blind curve and the speeding traffic that begins around 5:30 a.m. and continues throughout the day.

A four year old boy was concussed by a car a few years ago, in front of my house on West Smith as he tried to cross to his family's car, a little ahead of them. (family's name on request.) Children on their way home from McClure and Saint Anne's regularly cross Smith from the alley between First West and Queen Anne Avenue--an extremely hazardous point.

Please don't stonewall us again. We're trying to live here. We yell at our neighbors across the street rather than try and cross to have a conversation. One neighbor has proposed making our own speed bump--risky business from several points of view.

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I just met you as I was running along Bigelow.

New sidewalks on Bigelow and McGraw Place? YES, PLEASE!

Too often drivers treat both of those streets, especially McGraw, as the Queen Anne Autobahn. Without a safe place to jog, one is at the mercy of these people and can only hope they are not mid-phone call as they barrel down the street.

A safe place to walk (especially given the number of strollers I see being pushed there) and jog would be welcome—as would the landscaping. It would be a nice addition to a beautiful setting.

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