

Sidewalk Repair Task Force

Searching for solutions for a better sidewalk system

In November 2006, Mayor Taylor and the Salem City Council created a citizen task force with the mission to develop a course of action that would improve the community's deteriorating sidewalks. The Task Force is comprised of 19 members that represent Salem's neighborhood associations, businesses, and local Realtors. City Councilors Bruce Rogers, Laura Tesler, TJ Sullivan, and Rick Stucky also serve on the Task Force.



After a series of meetings, the Sidewalk Repair Task Force has developed a set of recommendations designed to address the sidewalk repair problem. City staff is presenting these recommendations to neighborhood associations, business groups, City boards and commissions, and other groups during April and early May 2007 to gain public input on the proposed recommendations. City Council will hold a work session on May 14, 2007, and will hold a public hearing on the Task Force's recommendations in late June or early July 2007.

Some Facts About Salem's Sidewalks:

- The City of Salem has an estimated 800 miles of sidewalks.
- Prior to 1989, property owners were largely responsible for repairing public sidewalks abutting their properties.
- In 1989, responding to citizen complaints about the damage caused by public street trees, City Council directed that the City be responsible for sidewalk repair, making it the only City in Oregon to take on that responsibility.
- Over the last 18 years the City has spent an average of \$30,000 per year on sidewalk repairs, leaving a substantial backlog of reported defects. The current Fiscal Year 2006/2007 budget for sidewalk repair and replacement is \$43,000.
- Currently, there are 3,302 damaged sidewalk locations reported to the City awaiting repairs. Most of the repairs made by City crews are grinding and patching of the worst repair locations, based on proximity to schools and other high pedestrian areas.
- The average cost to replace a sidewalk is \$7 per square foot, not including the costs of pruning the roots or removal of street trees, which can vary greatly.
- It is estimated that it would cost between \$3 to \$5 million to repair the City's sidewalks and bring them up to acceptable condition.
- City Council has set aside up to \$1 million in one-time Qwest Reserve Franchise funds to address the sidewalk repair issue, either through a loan program to property owners or to be spent directly on sidewalk repairs.

Recommendations of the Sidewalk Repair Task Force:

- Property owners should be responsible for maintaining the public sidewalks that abut their properties in good repair and condition.
- Recognizing that the sidewalk system is not currently in good condition, the City should assist property owners with their repair responsibility with a program of long-term, low or no-interest loans. At least \$100,000 per year should be made available for sidewalk repair loans.
- The City should be responsible for 100 percent of the costs of repairing sidewalks damaged by city street trees, including the cost of root pruning or tree removal. At least \$150,000 per year should be made available for the City to make these repairs.
- The City should allocate up to \$250,000 per year of the \$1 million in currently available Qwest Reserve Funds to fund the sidewalk repair loan assistance program and the City's costs of repairing sidewalks damaged by city street trees. The City should continue to operate its in-house grind and patch program comparable to the amount currently funded.
- The City Council should require property owners to disclose the need and responsibility for sidewalk repairs at the time of sale of real estate within the City limits, and that adopted standards for acceptable sidewalk conditions be included in the disclosure notice.
- Property owners located within the boundaries of the Downtown Urban Renewal District should be exempt from the sidewalk repair and disclosure requirements until such time as the issue of sidewalk repair is addressed by a future, potential downtown improvement district, other similar entity, or as directed by the City Council.
- The City should explore using some or all of future Federal Community Development Block Grant funds to address sidewalk repair issues in neighborhoods that are eligible to use those funds.

Other Options Considered but not Supported by the Task Force:

- A utility fee surcharge that would be placed on the water bill to directly pay for the cost of streetlights (\$1.70/month) and the care of street trees and right-of-way landscaping (\$1.12/month). This would have allowed \$2.5 million in existing State Gas Taxes be redirected to sidewalk maintenance loans and increased street system maintenance and operations.
- A utility fee surcharge that would be placed on the water bill to directly pay for sidewalk repairs in the City. The fee would have been approximately \$0.50 to \$1.00 per month and would have raised approximately \$450,000 to \$890,000 per year.
- Spending the \$1 million in Qwest Reserve funds on four years of sidewalk repair contracts, then revisiting whether to return repair responsibility to property owners.

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