

Walkable Communities Study Session: Answers to Preliminary Study Session Questions

What is the process for getting new sidewalks in the community?

The City of Renton currently has a Walkway Program that provides for the design and construction of sidewalks throughout the City. This program has an annual budget of \$250,000, which comes from the City's budget, and is supplemented with grant funding, if available. Sidewalk construction costs can range from about \$133 per linear foot to as high as \$705 per linear foot, based on the design and construction requirements. As a result, the annual budget provides for the construction of about 400 to 1900 linear feet of new sidewalks per year.

The city is currently designing the sidewalks to be constructed in 2008 and 2009. Later this year, planning staff will be selecting the projects to be constructed in 2010. This may include projects in the Highlands study area located along Monroe, Edmonds and/or 7th. Projects will be selected based on the criteria shown on Table 1 of the Comprehensive Walkway Study 2008 Final Report.

Other opportunities for the construction of sidewalks, and other infrastructural improvements, include:

- Add a Highlands sidewalk improvement program as its own item in the budget, or Capital Improvement Plan (CIP). Items in the proposed CIP compete for funding with many other projects throughout the City, such as sewer system upgrades, parks and recreation facility development, or road projects.
- LID, or Limited Improvement District, which is a special taxing district where those within the district tax themselves, and then the money is used to construct the desired improvements.
- New development is required to contribute its share of improvements. Currently, new development either constructs sidewalks or pays a fee to the City in lieu of sidewalk construction. The fee is most often collected in areas where it doesn't make sense to build a small section of sidewalk without connection to other sidewalks.

What is the process for getting sidewalks repaired?

The City's Street Maintenance staff repairs sidewalks as requested. Residents wishing to report sidewalks that are in need of repair, especially those that pose a potential trip hazard should contact the Public Works Department at (425) 430-7400.

The City Maintenance Division will also be proposing a new program in 2009 for a Sidewalk and Rehabilitation Replacement program that will focus on repairing and replacing sidewalks which have deteriorated over time. They will be asking the City Council to provide \$250,000 annually to fund this new program. The City Maintenance Division is still working on how this new program will prioritize these expenditures. Since this is a maintenance and rehabilitation program, not new

construction, we expect the cost to be substantial less than constructing new sidewalks.

What is the process for getting pedestrian safety concerns addressed (e.g. overgrown vegetation cut back, lights added, safety markings)?

Overgrown vegetation that interferes with driver's sight distance or obstructs walkway is a City Code violation. Residents wishing to report overgrown vegetation, especially those that pose a potential hazard, should contact Code Compliance at (425) 430-7373. The City Transportation Operations Section investigates all requests for street lights and traffic markings and will install the needed lights and/or markings pending the outcome of a traffic engineering study. This is similar process to getting a traffic study for speeding but generally takes only two to three weeks to complete. Residents wishing to request a street light or traffic markings should contact the Transportation Division at (425) 430-7380.

How does the level of service provided to the Highlands compare to other neighborhoods?

The sidewalk program focuses on high priority projects city wide. Projects are ranked using a project priority evaluation system as shown in Table 1 from the Comprehensive Walkway Study 2008 Final Report. Twelve of the recommended project segments from the study, out 29 total, include locations within the Highlands study area.

Which improvements are scheduled in the next six years?

It takes about two years for projects to make it from planning to construction. Projects identified in the Comprehensive Walkway Study 2008 will start to be built in 2010. Once a project is selected for funding engineers must design the project and get it approved, then it gets scheduled for construction. The estimated cost of completing the improvements in the Walkway Study is about \$4 million. Given the current annual budget of \$250,000 it will take well beyond the six years to complete the recommended projects based on this budget allocation alone. Projects are scheduled for completion based on the ranking given in the Walkway Study, but consideration is also given to factors such as the timing of construction and utility projects and availability of grant funding. Each year, the City submits projects for grant funding from state and federal agencies and that is used to supplement the annual budget.

Are there safe walking paths for kids who walk to school?

Yes, the City of Renton, the Renton School District and the Highlands Elementary School Parent/Teachers Association partnered to develop a recommended Walk to School Route Map. A copy of the map is available in the Comprehensive Walkway Study (see below).

Are there safe walking paths in and out of the commercial areas?

There are sidewalks along both sides of Sunset Boulevard through the Commercial area and sidewalks along many of the streets leading to and from the neighborhood.

Are there safe walking paths to and from the community centers?

Both the North Highlands Neighborhood Center and the Highlands Neighborhood Center are accessible via paved sidewalks.

Note: these are Neighborhood Centers not Community Centers. The only Community Center the City has is the Renton Community Center located Cedar River Park. Neighborhood Centers are smaller in size and have a much smaller service area and focus on pedestrian access (although parking is available).

What is the feasibility of a pedestrian overpass on Sunset?

There are potential obstacles to creating a pedestrian overpass on Sunset:

- There is no use data to indicate that an overpass would be used by pedestrians. Studies from other communities indicate that most people will cross at the surface level, even if an overpass is available.
- Design of the overpass would need to accommodate all people (under the Americans with Disabilities Act), which requires dedication of additional property and special design considerations.
- The project would need approval from the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) because Sunset is part of a state highway.
- The project would likely be very expensive to construct. Such an overpass could cost between \$750,000 to \$4,000,000 based on the costs in other communities.

Is it possible to build upon the original system of paths and open spaces to create a coherent trail system?

An updated inventory would first be required to ascertain what remains in public ownership. At one time it appears that a network of open spaces connected the North Highlands Neighborhood Center south to the Highlands Library, south to Sunset Court Park, and south to the Highlands Neighborhood Center. Over time, some of the public spaces have been transferred to private ownership. There is still an excellent opportunity to connect the North Highlands Neighborhood Center to the Highlands Library via the open space system currently in place. Partnering with the Renton School District would increase opportunities for improved connectivity.

A preliminary look at the system of public spaces, connecting sidewalks, and community destinations (neighborhood centers, schools, shopping, parks) shows stronger pedestrian connections in some parts of the study area than others. However, not all of the connections are usable where they do exist. Some connections have been physically blocked, or may not be in safe condition. Other areas may not be well supported by lighting or other necessities to make

the pedestrian connections functional. Further information needs to be gathered to consider this question.

Public opinion about what to do with the network of existing open spaces has been divided. Some feel the spaces will do nothing more than attract problems, and should be eliminated. Others feel the spaces may have potential as pathways, gardens, alleys, or other civic uses. Broad community support and direction is needed to resolve this issue.

What are the benefits of creating a healthy/walking community?

There are multiple benefits to creating a healthy/walking community including: improved health, reduced congestion, reduced car emissions, economic revitalization, socialization, air quality improvements, and crime prevention. Several agencies have documented the multiple benefits in publications like *Achieving Sustainability through Healthy Community Design* and *The Economic Benefits of Walkable Communities*. King County conducted studies (HealthScape I & II) about community health and lifestyle. They found that transit oriented, pedestrian friendly, mixed use development had numerous health and economic benefits. Based on these results, the County is implementing a system that will prioritize these features in planning efforts and service delivery.

In a King County study of community health indicators, Renton scored high in several risk factors. Out of 30 communities, Renton ranked 6th highest in both percentage of smokers and percentage of overweight adults. Renton also ranked 7th highest in both overall obesity and lack of physical activity. In response to this type of information, the City has been looking for ways to make the community healthier.

Renton, in partnership with the cities of Burien, SeaTac, Tukwila and Seattle and King County Public Health put together a walking and bicycling map reflecting existing trail and park facilities to promote physical activity and connectivity. This project won an award from the Washington Recreation and Park Association in 2008. One trail in particular touches the north highlands area - Honey Creek and extends down to Lake Washington Blvd and the Lake Washington Loop Trail System.

Are there grants or other funds available to fund sidewalk or trail improvements?

Funding is available through King County to map community resources in order to support the achievement of HealthScape objectives. There is also funding available for acquisition and development of trails from the State of Washington Resource and Conservation Funding Office. However, the process of receiving these grants is very competitive, and typically go to projects with a regional orientation, like the Cedar River Trail. Federal Funding (through the SAFETEA-LU transportation bill) is available through the Puget Sound Regional Council for regional trail connections also. State Transportation Improvement Board funds

are available to construct sidewalks on major (arterial) streets. City of Renton neighborhood grants have been used to fund sidewalks and trails in some neighborhoods, but these have been very limited in scope and scale and are only available to officially recognized neighborhood groups.

How can the City better connect the Highlands and the Landing?

As part of the current public planning process for the Trails and Bicycle Master Plan a possible bicycle corridor has been identified along NE 10th to Sunset Blvd. to Grandey Way NE to NE 3rd to Logan which extends to the Landing. This route was identified after public input as well as input from the City's Non-motorized Transportation Advisory Committee.

When the Highlands was constructed during WWII, residents walked from the Highlands to Boeing and Paccar to work. The distance is about a mile, so it would take about 20 minutes to walk that distance, a bit more on the return in order to walk up the hill. (The original trail was partially cut off by construction of I-405, and by private development in some sections.) Although Sunset Boulevard, SR 900, provides a direct connection between the Highlands and the Landing for vehicles (including regularly schedule transit service), this route poses a challenge for bicyclists and pedestrians. While there is a wide shoulder to walk along on both sides of the street, there is no separated sidewalk or planting buffer between the pedestrians and the high speed and high volume street. However, the biggest obstruction is I-405 which has no facilities for pedestrians to walk across.

Future plans for I-405 widening include sidewalks that would help improve the pedestrian connection between the Highlands and the Landing. Grant funding to construct sidewalks is also available for Sunset Boulevard. The process for the City to receive the grant funding is very competitive, and not guaranteed. However, in the long term a better pedestrian connection could be made along this corridor.

Where can I find more information on the Comprehensive Walkway Study 2008 Final Report?

The City's Comprehensive Walkway Study which can be viewed on the City Web site at:

http://rentonwa.gov/uploadedFiles/Living/PBPW/TRANSPOR/Comprehensive%20Walkway%202008_final.pdf or by contacting Dan Hasty at (425) 430-7246