



CITY OF FALLS CHURCH

DATE: May 2021
TO: City Council
FROM: Citizens' Advisory Committee on Transportation
SUBJECT: Guiding principles for neighborhood sidewalk and accessibility program

“[Mobility for All Modes](#),” the transportation chapter of Falls Church’s Comprehensive Plan that was adopted in 2014, includes a planned policy action to adopt a pedestrian facilities program and Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) transition plan that includes:

1. a system for responding to requests for pedestrian safety and accessibility, such as crosswalks and signage
2. a system by which residents can monitor individual requests, such as a tracking number
3. annual funding for maintenance of pedestrian facilities
4. an ADA Transition Plan to address known ADA deficiencies in the pedestrian network

To help the City achieve those goals, the CACT recommends the following guiding principles for the creation of a neighborhood sidewalk and accessibility program.

Like the Neighborhood Traffic Calming (NTC) Program, a Neighborhood Sidewalk and Accessibility Program should be citizen-led, though City staff should still have avenues to build necessary sidewalks and implement accessibility improvements.

Citizens should submit applications during a certain period each year before funding decisions are made for the City’s Capital Improvements Program (CIP). Rather than accepting applications on a rolling basis, this will enable City staff to prepare for reviewing and responding requests during one period each year. This will also ensure equal consideration of all requests. This process should provide transparency and consistency to citizens, City Council, and staff.

Critical framing questions

All requested sidewalk projects should be analyzed using a scoring and prioritization system that considers:

- What street characteristics are leading to a request (street width, traffic volume/speed, obstacles, poor sightlines due to topography)?
- Would the requested sidewalk project remove or adversely impact mature trees or other mature vegetation? Would the project require voluntary easements? Would it require relocation or installation/removal of other infrastructure?

- Who has been engaged already and is supportive of the project?
- If upgrading an existing sidewalk, what are the potential benefits, such as improved ADA compliance, obstacle removal, or narrower crossings?
- ...what else...?

Prioritization matrix

Guides recommendation by CACT to Council on which projects to prioritize for the coming year. CACT must score each project (1-5) on a relative basis to other projects and agree on the specific weighting used for that year, but has some discretion to adjust the weights within the provided range year-to-year.

Criterion	Questions to assess when rating	Weight
Construction complexity (Cost)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How many feet of sidewalk are required? • Are non-voluntary easements required? • Would relocation of items such as utility poles, hydrants, fences, stairs, etc. be required? • Is additional infrastructure required (e.g., new stairs, railings/fences, retaining walls, stormwater management, refuge islands)? 	15-25%
Maintenance drivers (Cost)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is additional maintenance beyond a standard sidewalk required (e.g., public plantings, raised crosswalk)? 	5-15%
Stakeholder complexity (Cost and likelihood of approval)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the project require voluntary easements from a small number of property owners that have not come out as supportive? • Would the ideal version of the project require easements from many property owners? • Does the project negatively impact other stakeholder groups (e.g., environmental, students, road users)? 	0-10%
Local benefits (Impact)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the request on a street that completely lacks sidewalks? • Will the project bring the sidewalk into ADA compliance, add width, remove tripping hazards, or remove obstacles? • Will a sidewalk project provide safer street crossings: more reasonable distance between crossings, shorter crossing distances, painted or implied crosswalks reach a sidewalk at both ends? • Would the project improve road safety or support neighborhood traffic calming goals? • Have there been safety issues or is the area perceived as being unsafe for pedestrians? • Are local sidewalks used by bicyclists (including children)? • Does the project improve stormwater management or add trees? 	25-35%

Local downsides (Impact)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can the increase in impervious surface be mitigated locally? • Would the project require removal of mature trees or other mature vegetation? • Would the project impair local character (e.g., historical properties)? 	10-20%
Equity and inclusion (Impacts)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the request in a neighborhood that the City considers underserved? • Will the project help people who use mobility devices move more safely? • Will the project improve the safety of more vulnerable people (e.g., children, elderly)? • Does the project provide a more equitable use of space for all modes of mobility (e.g., considering transportation for those who cannot afford a private automobile)? 	10-15%
Connectivity and integration (Impacts)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will the requested sidewalk complete a missing pedestrian link or improve access to community destinations (e.g., parks, schools)? • Does available data suggest latent demand for a sidewalk (e.g., worn paths in grass, high density of users tracked by fitness apps)? • Does this project support a broader City plan or project (e.g., Bicycle Master Plan)? 	10-15%
Urgency and lack of alternatives (Alternatives)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the consequence if this project is delayed a year? • If the project is not built, what is the consequence? • Is there a lower cost alternative (e.g., another route, converting part of the street to a “walking lane”)? • Is there likelihood of another project that would accomplish the goals in the next 5 years (e.g., private development)? 	5-10%
Funding availability (Cost)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there a funding source available to this project that is not available to many others (e.g., a state grant)? • Would this project “round out” a budget of projects for the year (e.g., a smaller project among larger, high-priority ones)? 	0-10%

Decision making

Prioritized projects can be approved if:

- X% of residents are supportive (as measured by polling system like NTC)
- Required minimum of voluntary easements have been granted by property owners
- Funding is available

Please let CACT know if you would like any more details about any of these recommendations.

CACT May 2021 discussion starters:

- Should CACT send project prioritization recommendations each year to Council?
- How will citizens monitor requests — a [map or list on the City website](#) like NTC? Do neighborhoods need a designated point of contact and backup? Are mailings needed?
- How do street parking and right of way considerations factor in?
- What level of neighborhood support is appropriate before applying? How does potential opposition factor in?

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