

## 2008 Sidewalk Repair Program Evaluation/Recommended improvements

Communications Concerns: Overall, citizens did not understand the need for the program, the rationale for the approach and comparability to other communities. In addition the communication approach in 2007 provided incremental information to property owners resulting in observations that property owners did not understand the overall timing of requirements with the initial contact, causing confusion and program management problems. In addition, some residents experienced difficulties with the timeliness of return calls.

### Communications Improvements:

- Initial communication to residents to be expanded from a one-page tri-fold letter to a seven-page information packet. The packet includes a comprehensive overview of the program and procedures, as well as a neighborhood meeting schedule and agenda.
- Diagrams and descriptions of repair criteria are included in the initial packet to establish better understanding of the inspection process and repair markings prior to the markings occurring. Individual notification of work required for a property follows markings in neighborhoods.
- Two scheduled neighborhood meetings per area replaces the previous approach of neighborhood meetings by request.
- Web updates including a quick link to all program information, contacts, American with Disabilities Accessibility (ADAAG) Guidelines and e-mail link to the Sidewalk Repair Program
- Increased staff support from Administrative Support Specialists in Field Operations including:
  1. Phone coverage for Sidewalk Office main number during all open business hours to answer questions, trouble-shoot, schedule inspection appointments, and ensure proper call tracking in Cityworks
  2. Increased training for A.S.S. staff to improve their knowledge of the program, providing more responsive and effective support to residents, contractors, and Sidewalk Program staff

Affordability Concerns: Several residents identified issues associated with being able to afford their identified sidewalk repairs/replacements. Council has expressed continued interest in providing affordability options.

Affordability Response: Chapter 49 (Sidewalks) of the City Code provides policy direction for financial hardship situations (installments, reductions or cancellations). In addition, Council Resolution R-07-544 adopted 11/5/07 more specifically provides grants for sidewalk obligations where the resident demonstrates eligibility based on affordability criteria (30% AMI).

- In FY 2008 Council allocated \$25,000 to the Community Development Ann Arbor Housing Trust Fund to provide grants to qualified homeowners (30%

AMI). The proposed budget for FY 2009 includes a transfer of \$25,000 from the Sidewalk revolving fund to the Ann Arbor Housing Trust Fund for the FY 2009 programs

- In 2007, Public Services provided deferrals for repairs, where possible, to assist homeowners with timing concerns related to other property work and/or affordability.

Technical Concerns: Residents identified issues with inconsistency in marking of sidewalk sections relating to both the need for repair as well as options for repair.

Response: Staff reviewed those instances where a marking was questioned or disputed and confirmed that less than 3% of the markings so identified were adjusted. In some instances, the question was related to whether a slab had to be replaced or could be adjusted through a leveling method. In conclusion, additional information relative to repair options and the circumstances appropriate to each will be expanded in the informational material

Contractor/Quality Assurance Concerns: Residents identified issues associated with the selection of contractors, program compliance by contractors and assurance that homeowners will receive quality work for competitive pricing.

Contractor/Quality Assurance Improvements: The committee noted that in some instances, homeowners that were unaware of the program requirements for contractors blamed the City for contractor work performance issues. Issues and proposed improvements are as follows:

- Permits are not being pulled prior to the start of work making the work difficult to track and monitor. The permit charge of \$6 includes free inspections. No penalty applies if work starts without a permit.

Improvement: Amend the ordinance to provide that if work starts without a permit, the free inspection is void and the inspection is at full cost (\$90-130). Include this information in homeowner information materials and meetings as well as emphasize during contractor prequalification training.

- Poor quality work by contractors results in multiple form inspections. The current \$6 permit fee covers any number of return inspections at no additional cost to the contractor, minimizing the incentive to properly construct forms for the initial inspection.

Improvement: Amend the ordinance to provide for only one free inspection. All subsequent inspections will be at full cost (\$90 - \$130/per inspection) to the contractor. Include this information in homeowner materials and meetings and emphasize during contractor prequalification training.

- The quality of the concrete has been problematic for some homeowners who are experiencing premature failure and may not have a warranty for the work, making them financially liable for rework.

Improvement: Beginning in 2008, the City will perform random testing on concrete being used in ROW sidewalk work performed for residents. Failure to pass any of the concrete tests would require removal and replacement. Testing will be in accordance with the standards from the American Concrete Institute (ACI). In addition, staff will evaluate with Legal, the ability to require a 1-year warranty for any work performed under the permit.

- Contractors using dumpsters for disposal of concrete are moving unsecured loads up and down residential streets, creating both a public hazard as well as a mess. Dumpsters have also been overloaded and in hot weather have damaged road surfaces. Concrete placed in dumpsters has the least likelihood of being recycled.

Improvements: Using the tracking that is available with online tracking of the permits to improve monitoring and enforcement, but not eliminate the use of dumpsters. Also, share this information with homeowners during the neighborhood meetings as an item to consider in contractor selection.

- Homeowners want more assistance in selection of contractors.

Improvements: Strengthen contractor prequalification process. When a contractor is removed from the list for any issue, they are removed for a minimum of 12 months. In the event a contractor defaults by not meeting standards or warranty issues, they are removed for a minimum of 3 years.

Maintain the prequalification list of contractors on an ongoing basis throughout the program year. Make the list available on line. Advise homeowners in printed information and during information meetings to check the online listing or call in to assure the most current listing at the time they are selecting their contractor.

Make available the homeowner survey information about contractor satisfaction in printed materials and on-line.

- In several areas, there were problems with contractors removing sidewalk sections and leaving open holes or framed sections for extended periods of time, whereas the requirement is that they must be restored in 48 hours. Infrequent exceptions may occur due to weather or other extenuating circumstances.

Improvements: Increase public awareness of the 48-hour requirement through printed materials, online information and in discussion at public meetings. Emphasize during contractor prequalification training.

Change the process for follow up on permits to provide follow-up inspections. Enforce and apply penalties as warranted.

Amend the ordinance to permit Civil Engineering Specialists to take enforcement actions.

- Restoration was poor in some areas and or by some contractors.

Improvements: Focus additional attention on restoration during the inspection follow-up on permits. Emphasize as a performance standard related to pre-qualification.