

Cambridge Pedestrian Committee
July 27, 2023
Meeting Minutes

Members: Liza Paden, Sandy Goldberg, Brooke Williams, Debby Galef, Sean Peirce, Jeannine Powers, Jenine Turner-Trauring, Robin Bonner
CDD Staff: Mike Mantello, Cara Seiderman, Erik Thorkildsen
Guests: Rachel Tanenhaus, City ADA Coordinator; Emily Scarfe and Mark Klopfer, KMDG
Attendees: Amy Flax (Bike Committee), Eitan Normand (Bike Committee), Marlees Owayda (CDD)

- June minutes: approved.
- Discussion of sidewalk materials
 - Previous discussion points: furnishing zones, outdoor dining locations, materials, overall sidewalk guidelines
 - City of Cambridge Five Year Street and Sidewalk Reconstruction Plan 2022
 - 68% of sidewalks in the city are concrete.
 - 25% of sidewalks in the city are brick.
 - Brick presents challenges for accessibility, as well as tripping hazards due to heaving.
 - 7% of sidewalks in the city are asphalt or other materials.
 - Finding: Cambridge has eclectic color palettes, materials and street zone proportions that frequently differ between neighborhoods.
 - Existing problems: discombobulated brick sidewalks due to tree roots/inappropriately sized tree pits; discombobulated concrete and asphalt sidewalks.
 - Erik Thorkildsen: what are the existing conditions today?
 - City policy: for relatively small sections of sidewalk that require repair, materials are replaced in kind; for larger sections, sidewalks are replaced with wire-cut brick on an asphalt base with tight joints (see Brattle Square, lower section of JFK St, Mass Ave & Main Street intersection furnishing zone).
 - Committee question: are alternative methods of feedback (tactile, visual) being considered in the street plan?
 - Raised bumps/detectable warnings are required for places where streets meet.
 - There can be confusion over the “meanings” of tactile warnings; is it Braille? Do different patterns mean different things? No! But it can be confusing for those who are unfamiliar.
 - Conflicting access needs: detectable warnings are great for visually impaired users, but not great for those using wheelchairs/scooters/strollers.

- Universal design principle: use multiple methods of conveying information.
- CDD question: for detectable warnings, is one material or color better than another?
 - Higher contrast is always better.
 - United States Access Board has done extensive research on materials.
- Attendee question: Is there information/history in terms of how the sidewalk meets the curb and thus, curb “warping”?
 - Keeping curbs in alignment is dependent on the material that forms the base.
 - Problems can form when new work meets old work.
- Committee question: will asphalt and bluestone continue to be used?
 - Need information from DPW.
 - Bluestone specifically is rare.
- Committee question: as tree roots grow over time, they impact the sidewalk. What are some recommendations for combatting this?
 - Tree cover is important to mitigating urban heat island effect.
 - In a new project with a new tree, the best option is to excavate three feet below grade, add a new material and plant the tree in such a way that it has a larger root zone and therefore a healthier root system.
 - Existing trees are a more difficult problem, and are addressed on a case-by-case basis.
- Committee question: some storefronts have steps down to the sidewalk, which pose a tripping hazard as well as an accessibility challenge. How do the design guidelines address that?
 - Current building code requires that building entrances are at grade (with some exceptions), but historic buildings pose a challenge.
 - Cambridge [Storefront Improvement Program](#): city will subsidize improving storefronts and increasing accessibility. More business owners/building owners need to know!
- Committee question: will the city change its policy about mismatching sidewalk materials? Currently, individual building owners can pay to have their sidewalk changed to brick, but it looks terrible to have inconsistent materials on a sidewalk, and is not accessible.
 - As DPW are working on large sections of street, their preference is for consistency (concrete, or concrete with a brick accent).
 - Cambridge Commission for Persons with Disabilities is a strong advocate for ending the option of individuals choosing to change to brick as a matter of accessibility and equity.
- Committee comment: on narrow residential streets where trees have taken over the sidewalk, the sidewalk bump-out into the street works well and breaks up the grid.

- If you can't think of any questions or comments right now, you can always email Cara and Mike. Images are helpful if you're noting something that does or does not work well!
- Project updates
 - Mass Ave Partial Construction Working Group Site Walk #1: August 3, 3-5pm (Porter Square to Waterhouse Street)
 - Mass Ave Partial Construction Working Group Site Walk #2: August 7, 5-7 (Porter Square to Rice Street)
- DPW updates
- Planning upcoming meetings
 - August 24: no specific topic or agenda; many people will be away. Decision is to cancel the August meeting.
 - September 28: Inman Square site walk.
- Public comment: no public comment.