

To: **Mayor and City Council**  
Through: **Ryan Schroeder, City Manager**  
From: **Ross Beckwith, Public Works & Parks Director/City Engineer**  
Date: **July 27, 2020**

## Pedestrian Plan Update and Sidewalk and Trail Gaps

### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION:**

In 2011, the City endeavored to study its pedestrian and bicyclist facilities to provide a long term plan to improve from the existing condition. It contracted with the planning firm of Hoisington Koegler Group. The citizen participation portion of the planning project was from April to October after which the City Council accepted the Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan dated December 5, 2011. The plan is a “tool to guide the long term efforts (25 years or more) to physical projects, programs and policies that will support walking and biking in West St. Paul.”

The priorities identified within the plan are the following routes with status as:

- NURT (AKA River to River Regional Trail way)
  - Segment from Wentworth to Wentworth including Robert Street Underpass is scheduled for 2020 and 2021 construction
  - Segment through Thompson Oaks conceptually designed
  - Segment through Marthaler Park conceptually designed as a future joint County project
  - Segment north of Oakdale/Thompson currently in concept design for a future grant request
- Charlton from Annapolis to Marie
  - Walkway exists on at least one side of the road, some areas both sides (Emerson to Butler and Arion to just north of Bernard)
- Robert Street from Annapolis to Mendota Road
  - Completed as part of the 2014-2017 Robert Street Reconstruction
- Livingston from Wentworth to Mendota Road
  - Completed in 2019
- Oakdale from Bernard to Emerson and from Thompson to Mendota Road
  - Segment from Mendota Road to Wentworth completed in 2019
  - Segment from Bernard to Emerson:
    - Emerson to West Chester Place no walk
    - West Chester Place to Conver walk on west side
    - Conver to Bernard walk on both sides

- Bidwell from Butler to Thompson  
Annual Safe Routes to School Grant funding request; not yet funded
- Marie from Delaware to Oakdale  
Final segment completed in 2019
- Butler from Delaware to Highway 52  
Delaware to Smith no walk  
Smith to Manomin walk on one side  
Manomin to Stassen walk on both sides  
Stassen to Hwy 52 no walk

Additionally, main routes were identified as:

- Delaware from Annapolis to Marie  
Included in 2020-2029 City CIP as 2025 project; requires County and Mendota Heights approval
- Wentworth from Delaware to South St. Paul  
Segment from Delaware to Robert completed in 2019  
Pedestrian Crossing at Marthaler Lane completed in 2020  
Marthaler to Oakdale existing trail  
Oakdale to Meadows trail through Sports Complex  
Meadows to TH 52 trail on south side
- Mendota Road from Delaware to South St. Paul  
Delaware to Charlton no walk  
TH 62 intersection to Robert walk on north side  
Robert to Oakdale walk on south side (IGH)  
Oakdale to TH 52 walk on both sides

In addition to Priority and Main Routes, the plan identifies lower priority local and access routes. On May 24, 2019, Engineering estimated that completion of gaps within the entire Bike/Pedestrian plan could be accomplished at a cost of \$15 million plus the cost of any necessary right of way or easement acquisition. Some segments will be constructed as part of development and redevelopment projects. Others would be coordinated with roadway reconstruction projects. Third party/grant funding of Priority and Main routes are continuously sought.

The City has been collaborating with Dakota County to facilitate construction of the final leg of the Regional River to River Trail by 2021. As part of this bikeway/walkway, the City is collaborating with Dakota County to construct an underpass of Robert Street just north of Wentworth. The County Board awarded this \$4,654,634 project on July 14, 2020. Construction of the trail connections is scheduled for 2020 while the underpass itself will be constructed in 2021. The partners are also working on securing grant funding for additional legs of this important regional asset.

On December 9, 2019, Council adopted its 2020-2029 CEP-CIP. This plan followed a prior change in policy to eliminate benefit assessments for sidewalk and trail improvements in favor of a tax levy to fund these projects commencing in 2021. The plan projected an annual \$500,000 property tax levy without allocations to specific projects. The intent, however, is toward completion of sidewalk and trail gaps as identified within the Pedestrian and Bicycle Master Plan. This \$500,000 budget allocation is included in the staff recommended 2021-2022 budgets. Within the other elements of the CEP-CIP reserve targets are established. A similar target has not yet been established for this element of the CIP. However, as with all other elements of the CEP-CIP, but for Sanitary Sewer lift stations and forcemain

projects, the Sidewalk/Trail element will provide project funding on a “pay as you go” basis. In other words, when cash is sufficient to complete a project it may proceed such that additional debt is not required to construct any of the improvements proposed going forward.

**Future projects for allocation from future budgets are discussed below.**

The 2021 Moreland Avenue Street Improvement Project offers the opportunity to close the sidewalk gap between Smith Avenue and Delaware Avenue. The feasibility study currently underway will evaluate in detail the impacts and associated costs of closing this sidewalk gap. Based on the existing steep side slopes, construction of this 1,000-foot stretch of concrete walk is probably in the range of \$130k - \$180k.

The 2022 Street Improvement Project on Crusader Avenue lends the perfect opportunity to connect the sidewalk from Bidwell Street to Robert Street. There is currently concrete walk on the south side of Crusader Avenue from Robert Street to 300 feet west. Adding 2,250 feet of new sidewalk on one side of the street would cost around \$300k-\$400k. A feasibility study with some preliminary engineering will dissect the options and costs. Between Stryker Avenue and Bidwell Avenue, there are utility poles in the south boulevard that may dictate where a sidewalk fits. Moving private utilities is one of the most difficult/time consuming part of any sidewalk/trail project.

The 2022 Crusader Avenue Project is adjacent to the 1,350-foot sidewalk gap on Bidwell Avenue from Marie Avenue to Crusader Avenue. This section in conjunction with new walk on Crusader Avenue would create a loop from Marie Avenue to Robert Street. Back in 2017 when Bidwell Avenue from Marie Avenue to Crusader Avenue was reconstructed, there were discussions about adding concrete walk. However, the final decision was to just narrow Bidwell Avenue by 4 feet by bringing the western curb line in. This eliminated parking from the west side of the street and set up Bidwell Avenue for a future sidewalk where property acquisition would be reduced. This segment would cost \$175k-\$250k if it were part of the Crusader Avenue project and higher if it were a standalone project.

In 2023 and 2024, all of Annapolis Street is scheduled for reconstruction in partnership with the City of St. Paul. Most of the south side (WSP side) currently has concrete walk. However, the current widths vary from four to five feet and it is all in poor condition. All of the concrete walk will be replaced as part of the project cost and widened to five feet where it currently is narrower.

Delaware Avenue is scheduled for reconstruction in 2025 from Marie Avenue to Dodd Road. Like the recent reconstruction of Wentworth Avenue, the County would look at adding multiuse trails along Delaware Avenue. West St. Paul’s share of this \$10M project is estimated at \$1.45M including trails.

Dakota County is interested in a turn back of Thompson Avenue from Robert Street to South St. Paul. Sidewalks and trails are part of those discussions at this point. Without a turn back, a City/County project to construct trail on one side and a sidewalk on the other would require about a \$300k contribution from the City.

The City recently applied for Regional Solicitation grant for sidewalks and trails on Oakdale Avenue from Wentworth Avenue to Butler Avenue. If successful, there would still be some cost sharing required by the City but it would be less than a standalone City/County project, which would require about a \$410k contribution from the City.

The City recently applied for a Safe Routes to School (SRTS) Grant for a sidewalk on Bidwell Street from Thompson Avenue to Butler Avenue. Construction of this project is estimated at \$800k of which \$160k would be the City’s portion. The City would also be required to pay for design and construction

administration/inspection/testing for about another \$100k. A feasibility report and preliminary engineering study was done on this section in order to get more accurate estimated cost required for the SRTS application. That study shows narrowing the roadway by about 5 feet would be the most cost effective way to install a sidewalk along this corridor as it minimizes property impacts and pulls the walk further away from the very steep side slopes. Without a grant this project would not likely move forward.

Two trail gaps exist on the County owned Butler Avenue. The Dodd Road to Smith Avenue trail gap is about a \$900k project of which the City would be responsible for \$135k. The Sperl Street to Trunk Highway 52 trail gap is about a \$1M project of which the City would be responsible for \$150k.

Emerson Avenue from Delaware Avenue to Robert Street is a long east/west corridor with no bicycle or pedestrian facilities. A bicycle and pedestrian connection on Emerson would be evaluated as part of the feasibility study for reconstructing the roadway, which is currently scheduled for 2026. This 7,000-foot stretch will have significant tree and grade challenges. A five-foot sidewalk would cost \$1M-\$1.5M to construct as part of a reconstruction project. An 8' or 10' multiuse trail would increase costs over \$2M due to the additional easement areas needed. Pairing a sidewalk or trail with a reconstruction project would significantly help with costs on the design, construction administration/inspection/testing. There are also options to explore like roadway width that could significantly reduce easement costs. A standalone project on Emerson would increase costs and disrupt the same residents with two projects over a short timeframe. Standalone sidewalk/trail projects of this magnitude require a year of design, a year of property acquisition and a year of construction.

Lothenbach Avenue is another street that is not in the first five years of the CIP, but is projected within the 2026-2030 out years. Sidewalk installation at the time of reconstruction would be the most cost effective project approach. With steep grades on the south side and utility poles on the north side this would take some analysis to figure out the path of least resistance (and cost) of this half mile stretch. An estimated construction cost for sidewalk is around \$350k-\$470k when paired with a street reconstruction.

Mendota Road between Delaware Avenue and Charlton Street is similar to Lothenbach Avenue in that it is in need of a reconstruction. That would be the opportune time to install a 1,630-foot sidewalk for \$200k-\$300k.

The installation of an asphalt trail (8 to 10 feet wide) on any of these projects, will guarantee the need for property acquisition, driving up costs and adding a year to project design timelines. Five-foot concrete sidewalks where limits can remain in the existing right of way, like those recently built on Livingston Avenue, substantially reduces construction costs. Side slopes quickly turn into expensive retaining walls or property acquisition. By pairing up trail/sidewalk connections with street improvement projects, costs for design, construction, inspection and testing will be reduced. From a property owner's perspective, it is also favorable to get in and out of a particular street with one large project versus multiple smaller projects.

## **FISCAL IMPACT:**

Costs associated with standalone trail and sidewalk construction include property acquisition, tree removal, driveway and apron replacement, hydrant relocations, restoration and retaining walls. Private utility relocation, while not a direct cost, can increase project costs through delays. When you combine a street and trail/walk project some of those costs are now not associated directly with the new trail or sidewalk like trees, hydrants and driveway aprons. The recommendation to keep sidewalk projects tied to street reconstruction projects will extend the dollars allocated to this important program. Even so, the

projects identified above will take 10-12 years to complete. As stand-alone projects, absent efficiencies gained by street project coordination, completion dates would be extended further.

**STAFF RECOMMENDATION:**

Provide feedback on the future network of trails/sidewalk.