

Sidewalk Committee Recommendations

By Paulina Knibbe, Sidewalk Committee Chair

In July 2007, the Board of Selectman responded to the growing desire for more sidewalks in Acton by created a Sidewalk Committee. The committee has spent the last year defining criteria and using those criteria to rank potential sidewalk projects. The Sidewalk Committee will be presenting its recommendations to the Board of Selectmen at the June 9th meeting.

The Sidewalk Committee divided the criteria into two pieces: need and viability.

The Need Criteria were designed to determine which streets in town are the most dangerous for pedestrians. The criteria include the nature and speed of traffic, the physical characteristics of the road and the likely number of pedestrians at risk.

The Sidewalk Committee analyzed over 50 streets in town using the Need Criteria. The Committee also conducted two public input meetings to gather input. Using this data, the committee selected 21 projects for further consideration.

The Viability Criteria were designed to assess how difficult it would be to build a given stretch of sidewalk. The criteria include neighborhood support or opposition, financial considerations and legal / procedural issues.

The Sidewalk Committee has gathered up all of the hard and soft data that has been accumulated over the last year and used this data to produce a priority list for sidewalk construction projects. This list consists of 6 projects which are listed in priority order. Projects which did not make this list are still under consideration for later construction.

Recommended Priority List for Sidewalk Construction Projects

Central Street (near Mt Hope Cemetery). This section of Central Street is a busy connector street with multiple factors increasing the danger for pedestrians including limited sight distances and no room to get off of the street in some sections. A sidewalk on this section of Central Street will complete a stretch of existing sidewalk which connects South Acton and West Acton. This project has strong neighborhood support.

Lower Prospect. This section of Prospect is a small scale residential neighborhood with a lot of cut-through high speed traffic. This is a dangerous combination. In addition to the local residents, Prospect is used by pedestrians to access the train station. This project has strong neighborhood support and should be a relatively straightforward sidewalk to construct.

Route 2A (Davis Road to Main Street). This section of Great Road has no sidewalk on either side but has a large number of pedestrians. It is used by people who live in the apartments and condominiums along Great Road to allow them to reach the grocery store (traveling east) and the drug store (traveling west). Cars travel quickly on this major town artery and do not expect to see pedestrians. This sidewalk will

connect to the baseball diamonds at Veteran's Field. This sidewalk also intersects the future route of the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail which will provide a pedestrian path to NARA Park.

High Street (#30 – #46). The combination of high speed car and truck traffic, poor visibility and a narrow road makes High Street very dangerous for pedestrians. A local developer is currently constructing a sidewalk along High Street from Main Street to the emergency entrance to Audubon Hill. Completing this section of sidewalk will connect that stretch with the existing sidewalk that runs from Faulkner Hill toward Conant Road. This sidewalk will provide pedestrian access to the train station and other South Acton destinations for some High Street residents including the Faulkner Hill neighborhood and the Audubon Hill senior community.

Main Street (Post Office Square to Route 2A). This stretch of Main Street is the primary route connecting North Acton with the rest of the town. Completing this section of sidewalk will permit pedestrian access for North Acton residents to the Post Office, Town Hall, the Library and other destinations further south. Traffic moves quickly and it is currently a very dangerous road for pedestrians. A layout has been completed and easements have been granted by the landowners but not yet accepted by Town Meeting. This is a relatively easy sidewalk to construct. There is money in the sidewalk gift fund that is dedicated to this project.

High Street (#77 to Parker). This center section of High Street is also quite important for the reasons mentioned above. However, High Street is a scenic road. Adding sidewalks here is likely to change the character of the road and to be both difficult and expensive. It may be difficult to get easements from landowners for portions of this road due to the need to move stone walls, remove trees, build retaining walls, etc. The sidewalk committee supports the construction of this sidewalk but rated this lower than the others for those reasons.

The Sidewalk Committee Report and supporting materials has been posted on the town's website: <http://www.acton-ma.gov/>.