

SELECTED COMPREHENSIVE PLAN POLICIES RELATED TO SIDEWALK DESIGN AND STREET TREES

(November 2002)

The City of Spokane's Comprehensive Plan was adopted by the City Council on May 21, 2001. The overall transportation goal for the City is to "*Develop and implement a transportation system and a healthy balance of transportation choices that improve the mobility and quality of life of all residents.*" The plan recognizes how individual design features, such as pedestrian buffer strips, influence the availability, appeal, and use of transportation choices. The following comprehensive plan policies which relate to sidewalk design establish a clear direction for both City staff and the public to follow when considering the design of improvements within the city.

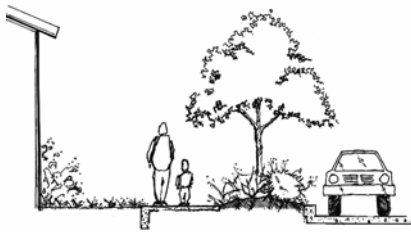
TRANSPORTATION POLICY 2.7 Safe Sidewalks

Provide for safe pedestrian circulation within the city; wherever possible, this should be in the form of sidewalks with a pedestrian buffer strip or other separation from the street.

Discussion: It is essential that pedestrians be able to walk safely and easily within the city. Besides being safe, the pedestrian environment should feel safe.

Providing a separation between streets and sidewalks has many benefits for creating safe, usable sidewalks. Separation creates a buffer for a feeling of safety from automobiles, reduces the amount of water and gravel and other debris thrown on sidewalks from passing automobiles, and prevents curbcuts and driveway aprons from protruding onto sidewalks. A separation also provides a place for fire hydrants, poles, signs, trashcans, recycling bins, and other obstacles.

A separation additionally provides places to store snow, plant trees, and absorb runoff.



The preferred separation is a pedestrian buffer strip. Pedestrian buffer strips, also known as planting strips, can be landscaped with a variety of treatments, not just grass (see policy TR 7.4, "Pedestrian Buffer Strips").

In some cases, some other type of pedestrian pathway, such as a trail or staircase, may be preferred to the separated sidewalk. The type of pedestrian circulation provided may differ according to the type of street, topography, or unique

circumstances.

In situations where a separation from the street is constrained, such as by topography or existing development, deviations from this policy can be granted by the Design Review Committee upon a finding that an alternative design is necessary to achieve the spirit and intent of the Comprehensive Plan. The potential additional cost to achieve separation is not, in itself, justification for a policy deviation. The separation between sidewalks and streets is the preferred, *expected* form of sidewalk design. Deviations from the separation design are to be for truly exceptional cases—the exception, not the rule.

NEIGHBORHOOD POLICY 4.12 Pedestrian Buffer Strips

Require that sidewalks be separated from the street by a pedestrian buffer strip on all new or redeveloped streets to provide a safe place to walk.

Discussion: New or redeveloped neighborhoods should be required to incorporate pedestrian buffer strips along sidewalks in order to provide a buffer between the sidewalk and street. Buffer strips protect pedestrians from street traffic and also serve as areas where snow can be plowed during the winter months rather than being plowed directly onto sidewalks, which impedes walking. The city will work with neighborhoods that do not have separated sidewalks to help them develop a sidewalk snow removal program.

TRANSPORTATION POLICY 7.4 Pedestrian Buffer Strips

Develop pedestrian buffer strips in a way that is appropriate to the surrounding area and desired outcomes.

Discussion: Treatments of pedestrian buffer strips, also known as planting strips, vary greatly, from completely covered with hard surfaces to completely landscaped with soft surfaces and street trees. “Hard surfaces” include concrete, bricks, and other pavers; “soft surfaces” include sod, drought tolerant grass, and ground covers. Street trees can vary from small ornamental trees to large trees that provide overhanging canopies for streets.

How the pedestrian buffer strip is treated should relate to the surrounding environment and desired outcomes for that area. For example, grass should continue to be used in historic areas where grass is the traditional treatment. Where traffic calming is desired, large street trees are preferred. In commercial areas, street trees with a hardscape treatment or tree grates may be appropriate. Sand-set pavers, cobbles, “grassblocks,” and similar pervious materials are encouraged wherever hardscape is incorporated. Complete coverage of the pedestrian buffer strip with an impervious surface and no trees or ground cover is discouraged.

Pedestrian buffer strips are crucial to creating safe, useable sidewalks (see policy TR 2.7, “Safe Sidewalks”). They should be designed with care to enhance the pedestrian environment, relate to the surrounding environment, and achieve desired outcomes. For example, in planning for pedestrian buffer strip width, one factor that should be considered is whether or not on-street parking is provided. Areas without on-street parking and the associated buffering it provides should feature a wider pedestrian buffer strip than areas with on-street parking. The ultimate driver in designing pedestrian buffer strips for particular locations is to ensure that the pedestrian buffer strip provides for safe pedestrian circulation while also being appropriate to the surrounding area.



TRANSPORTATION POLICY 7.3 Street Trees

Plant street trees wherever possible to enhance the transportation environment.

Discussion: A healthy “urban forest” is one of the greatest assets a city can have. It is also one of the few infrastructure elements that appreciate in value with age. For transportation purposes, street trees have many benefits; they provide a traffic calming

effect, help orient motorists, provide shade and habitat, reduce glare, noise, erosion, and wind, and absorb carbon monoxide. Large trees with overhanging canopies of branches are especially desirable. Streets with a cathedral of trees overhead are an important aesthetic element that fosters community pride and identity.

One concern in planning for street trees is to ensure that public safety is protected by preventing sidewalks and curbs from being damaged by tree roots. This problem can be addressed through the design of the pedestrian buffer strip and the selection of the appropriate tree type for the planting site. In addition, planting techniques such as root barriers, “structural soil,” and irrigation practices are helpful mechanisms in preventing tree roots from damaging sidewalks and curbs.

Poorly selected or poorly maintained trees can present other problems, including interfering with overhead utility lines, underground utilities, neighboring properties, and other plants and minimizing sight distances. Due to these potential problems, it is important that the appropriate type of tree be selected for each location and that trees be properly maintained. This is particularly true since trees are living organisms that grow larger each year, increasing in height, canopy width, and size of root system. It is important to consider what the size and shape of trees will be when they are mature. The Parks and Recreation Department’s urban forestry program maintains a list of appropriate trees for planting in different environments. A permit is required to plant a tree in the right-of-way.

The potential problems caused by street trees should not be used to override their fundamental importance and overall value. It is imperative to remember that a city without trees isn’t fit for a dog.



NATURAL ENVIRONMENT POLICY 12.1 Street Trees

Plant trees along all streets.

Discussion: Installing street trees along all residential and arterial streets is the easiest and most cost effective way to secure the environmental benefits of urban forestry. Street trees planted in buffer strips between the curb and sidewalk

should be included in every street project or private development.

DESIGN/PRESERVATION POLICY 1.3 Urban Trees and Landscape Areas

Maintain, improve, and increase the amount of landscaped area in the urban environment and, at a minimum, replace any tree that needs to be removed from publicly owned property.

Discussion: The public urban cityscape with its pavement, automobiles, and pollution can be a harsh environment for landscape vegetation and can create less than optimal growing conditions for the plants and trees. This situation can often be tolerated, for it is the well-being and pleasure of the human occupants of the city that these landscaped areas and trees are provided.

The City of Spokane must establish a no-net-loss position for the existing quantity of urban trees and develop a mechanism to require tree replacement on public lands. The City of Spokane also needs to develop incentives to encourage tree replacement on privately owned property. Consideration should be given to the creation of a system to grant a credit or bonus for trees retained and incentives to encourage new tree planting. While it is impractical to require replacement trees to be of like size, the existing character, site, and the desired effect should be considered in determining the minimum size and species. Tree plantings should be coordinated with, and meet the minimum standards of, the Urban Forestry Program.



Loc: Planning Share/Handouts/Sidewalk design and street trees policies