



Legislation Text

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City of Alexandria, Virginia

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MEMORANDUM

**DATE:** NOVEMBER 6, 2013

**TO:** THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

**FROM:** RASHAD M. YOUNG, CITY MANAGER/s/

**DOCKET TITLE:**

Consideration of Receipt of a Report on Brick Sidewalk Update.

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**ISSUE:** Proposed revision to City policies as it relates to the application of brick sidewalks

**RECOMMENDATION:** That City Council receives a report on proposed new sidewalk materials and construction standards.

**BACKGROUND:** Earlier this year, City Council directed staff to research and develop proposed new options for sidewalk design in regards to future new brick sidewalk construction outside of the Old and Historic District and specifically within the Eisenhower Small Area Plan for Eisenhower Avenue reconstruction. Alexandria Commissions on Aging and Persons with Disabilities, the Alexandria Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee as well as some in the community voiced concerns regarding the safety, accessibility and installation of more brick sidewalks, stating that they are difficult to traverse, particularly for the elderly and disabled. Brick sidewalks are also twice as costly to install and require more frequent and expensive maintenance than concrete sidewalks.

The development of new sidewalk material and standards is consistent with the Council Strategic Plan, and directly supports Goal Three, which calls for a... "multimodal transportation network that supports sustainable land use and provides internal mobility and regional connectivity for Alexandrians." The new practice is also consistent with the Complete Streets Policy adopted by Council, stating that... "the City of Alexandria shall incorporate Complete Streets infrastructure into existing public streets to improve the safety and convenience of users and construct and enhance the transportation network for all users." Additionally, it is also consistent with the 2008 Transportation Master Plan's, goal to... "make walking a part of people's everyday lives by providing pleasant, safe and accessible connections that encourage and reward the choice to walk".

**DISCUSSION:** Under the current practices, the City has just two standards for new sidewalks - all concrete or all brick. Based on a joint effort between the Departments of Transportation and Environmental Services and Planning and Zoning, staff developed an additional standard for sidewalk construction. The new “brick/concrete hybrid” design allows brick banding between tree pits but maintains a minimum of a five foot concrete pathway for more accessible sidewalks with lower maintenance needs and costs. See Attachment 1 for detailed drawings. The new standard is recommended for use on the upcoming Eisenhower Avenue construction project. As a result, the Eisenhower East Small Area Plan which currently requires all brick sidewalks, will be presented to Council for amendment to the new brick/concrete hybrid standards in December.

Additionally, staff has developed new design and construction standards for brick, and brick & concrete hybrid sidewalks, and tree pit dimensions that will provide continuous, clear, and unobstructed way of pedestrian passage to provide stable, firm, and slip resistant “floor and ground surfaces” for people with disabilities and vision impairment. The construction standards will reduce buckling, heaving, and unequal settlement in sidewalks so as not to adversely impact the accessibility for people with disabilities especially with vision impairment, or require the assistance of a cane, walker, or wheelchair. The standards will reduce maintenance needs and provide a more contiguous surface for walking. (Attachment 2).

The recommendations were developed in conjunction with the Alexandria Commission on Persons with Disabilities, the Alexandria Commission on Aging, and the Alexandria Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee. A site visit was conducted with staff and representatives of these groups to determine the impact on walking and riding in a wheelchair when traversing different sidewalk materials. A number of follow up meetings occurred where discussions led to the proposals currently under consideration.

Staff presented and sought public comment concerning the proposed changes to the application of brick, concrete or brick/concrete hybrid sidewalks, the new construction standards for installing brick sidewalks and the amendment to the City Code at the following meetings:

- Alexandria Commission on Persons with Disabilities - September 11, 2013
- Alexandria Commission on Aging - September 19, 2013
- Alexandria Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee on October 21, 2013
- Public Meeting - October 23, 2013.

Speakers at all meetings spoke in support of installing more hybrid or concrete sidewalks throughout the city and providing better maintenance for existing brick sidewalks. Letters of support from these organizations can be found in Attachment 4.

The following outlines the process that staff will undertake in order to formalize the use of alternate sidewalk material citywide:

- City Council Update - November 12, 2013
- Planning Commission Update and Recommendation to amend Eisenhower East Small Area Plan - December 3, 2013
- City Council: Amend Eisenhower East Small Area Plan - December 14, 2013

Further reinforcement of the new policy will be formalized as part of the Complete Streets Guidelines that will be developed in conjunction with the Bicycle Master Plan Update and will be presented to Council for endorsement upon completion.

**FISCAL IMPACT:** Because brick sidewalks require a higher level of skill and are more costly to install and maintain, it is estimated that brick nearly doubles the cost of installation and maintenance when compared to concrete.

**ATTACHMENTS:**

Attachment 1: Brick/Concrete Hybrid Sidewalk Design Guidelines

Attachment 2: Letter of Support - Commission on Aging

Attachment 3: Proposed Construction Standards

Attachment 4: Brick Sidewalk PowerPoint Presentation

**STAFF:**

Mark Jinks, Deputy City Manager

Richard J. Baier, P.E., LEED AP, Director, T&ES

Joel Marcuson, Deputy Director, Transportation, T&ES

Jerome Fletcher, Special Assistant to the City Manager

Antonio Baxter, Division Chief, Strategic Management Services, T&ES

Hillary Poole, Complete Streets Coordinator, Transportation Planning, T&ES

Faroll Hamer, Director, Planning and Zoning

Jeffrey Farner, Deputy Direction, Planning & Zoning