

ED GAINNEY
MAYOR



KIMBERLY LUCAS
DIRECTOR

CITY OF PITTSBURGH
DEPARTMENT OF MOBILITY & INFRASTRUCTURE
CITY-COUNTY BUILDING

The Honorable President and Members of Council

City County Building, 5th Floor

Pittsburgh, PA 15219

Dear Council President and Members of Council:

The Sidewalk and Curb Repair program is a joint initiative led by the Department of Mobility and Infrastructure (DOMI) and supported by the Department of Public Works (DPW) and the Office of the Mayor. The pilot program was created to allow the City to overcome obstacles standing in the way of our ability to create safe sidewalks, specifically the challenge of getting individual property owners to repair the part of the sidewalk for which they are responsible. Through the program, the City is permitted to coordinate the repair and replacement of sidewalks for private property owners in lieu of citation and at a much lower cost than if the property owner were to arrange for the work themselves. Property owners can finance the repairs and repay the City, avoiding the inconvenience and cost of obtaining permits. Our goal with this program is to achieve accessible sidewalks in every neighborhood within the City and to ensure they do not fall into disrepair in the future.

The City has over 1,300 miles of sidewalk infrastructure, in varying condition, along with numerous gaps where sidewalks abruptly end. Since the creation of DOMI's Critical Sidewalk Gaps Program in 2020, the department has completed about 2 miles of new or repaired sidewalk each year. Getting to an ideal state of zero broken sidewalks and curbs, with no gaps in sidewalk infrastructure, would require getting on a repair schedule of approximately every 25 years, ensuring that we fix sidewalks before they fall into disrepair. To do this, we need to ensure the program is being sustainably funded so that its funding increases each year, through residents utilizing the program and paying us back for the work we have done, along with budgeting an annual line item for this program. By investing a base level of \$1 million each year, which is currently around the annual level of funding, we can begin to ramp up to the \$50 million needed annually to get sidewalks on a regular repair schedule. Assuming 50% of residents pay into the program, the ramp up will take around 10-11 years.

For the first iteration of the pilot program in 2023, we identified two locations near schools to repair sidewalks and enter into cost-sharing agreements with property owners. DPW completed work on N Braddock Ave, on the route to Pittsburgh Faison in Homewood, as well as Zephyr Ave, along the

route to Pittsburgh Langley in Sheraden. In 2024, we merged the pilot program with DOMI's pre-existing Critical Sidewalk Gaps Program. N Mathilda Street and Schenley Manor Drive in Garfield were the two applicable projects completed under the pilot program and work was done by contractors.

According to Pittsburgh's City Code, property owners are responsible for the maintenance and upkeep of the sidewalk in front of their property. Our research showed that many cities around the United States are addressing a challenge similar to ours by implementing a sidewalk repair program in which they share 50% of the cost of work with property owners, regardless of income. This includes places like St. Louis, MO; Topeka, KS; Mesquite, TX; and San Diego, CA. Other cities, like Amarillo TX; Lawrence KS; and Carlisle, PA have a sliding scale approach to repairs to enable a more equitable payment plan for property owners. The City departments feel that a sliding scale is most appropriate to ensure that property owners who may not otherwise be able to afford sidewalk repairs are able to access them and help create safe, walkable neighborhoods around the city.

Through the program, all property owners were eligible for an up-to-five-year interest-free payment plan, while only owner occupants were eligible for income-based discounts, outlined as follows:

- Property owner will pay 25% of the cost of work if their income is 50% AMI or lower
- Property owner will pay 50% of the cost of work if their income is 50-80% AMI
- Property owner will pay 75% of the cost of work if their income is 80-120% AMI
- Property owner will pay 100% of the cost of work if their income is 120% AMI or higher

The total cost of work for both years was \$382,502.66, replacing a total of 2,061 feet of sidewalk. Of those we reached, 20% qualified for and opted into the financial assistance, while 100% opted into the payment plan. After all discounts are accounted for, we will receive \$13,415.98 in reimbursements. In both years, we were charging \$75/sq yd, while the actual cost of work was closer to \$200/sq yd, which will be in the fee schedule. Increasing the fee will allow us to recuperate the actual cost of work, improving our ability to scale the program.

Some of the issues we identified and plan to address moving forward include lack of response from residents, inability to cite to create an incentive for the program, as well as location selection. We know that our program is financially beneficial for residents, but uptake is not where we would want it to be. Residents benefit from the program by not having to pay permitting fees, not having to deal with a contractor, and by being eligible for income-based discounts, as well as a payment plan. This was enough for some people to respond positively to the program. However, others failed to respond. To improve processes, we are implementing a policy for inspectors to follow to ensure they are citing all non-compliant sidewalks in a standard fashion, while following ADA standards. We believe this will encourage response to our outreach as the program is clearly a preferable alternative to paying the full amount at the order of a court.

In terms of location selection, we have created a prioritization rubric to ensure the sidewalks we repair result in the most safety and convenience for residents who rely on them for mobility (<https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/58772ecf2c9f447eb45561fabf713465>). We take into account a number of factors, including proximity to schools, parks, transit stops, and more. One issue

that we are working to address is adequate sidewalk data. We know where our sidewalks are and aren't but we have condition data for only a small portion of the city. To tackle this, we are partnering with our advocacy community in an initiative that allows residents to be trained and deployed to perform sidewalk audits, allowing us to have a complete initial assessment of this asset. We plan to launch this initiative in the spring. With improved data, the rubric we have created will allow for the equitable distribution of projects in areas where they are most needed and will have the most positive impact.

We know that through investment, we can achieve a program that gets all sidewalks within the City of Pittsburgh on a regular maintenance schedule, so that residents can get around with ease, no matter how they travel. Currently sidewalk repair is largely performed by an outside contractor; our goal is to expand this program over the next few years to allow us to hire an internal sidewalk construction crew. A dedicated sidewalk crew will be able to get even more sidewalk completed each year because they will not be competing with other jobs, as contractors have to juggle multiple projects at once. We believe a permanent sidewalk repair program can help us get to our goal of safe, accessible sidewalks for all.

Thank you for your consideration,



Kimberly Lucas (Feb 21, 2025 11:00 EST)

Kim Lucas

Director






Memo on Sidewalk Repair Program

Final Audit Report

2025-02-21

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