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# The Times

## No concrete answers for township's sidewalk woes

West Windsor aiming for a more walkable township

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BY JOYCE J. PERSICO

WEST WINDSOR -- In this township that once was dominated by farmland, sidewalks usually fall into one of three categories: They buckle, they're not connected to a nearby street or they don't even exist.

Just how much township council is willing to spend in order to address the issue of sidewalks will surface this month as budget discussions begin for the new year.

Currently, \$80,000 is budgeted every two years to repair buckling sidewalks. Last year, an additional \$200,000 was earmarked for a six-year plan to build sidewalks where there are none to connect neighborhoods.

"We may need to make that \$80,000 a year," said council President Will Anklowitz of the sidewalk repairs program. "That's a lot of money for not a lot of sidewalks. The list we have now for repairs is on a first-come, first-served basis."

A big part of the sidewalk repair problem is the result of old landscaping rules that called for developers to plant trees between the curb and the sidewalk. Now some of those sidewalks are buckling and homeowners don't want to pay for what they think is a township-created problem.

"It's the homeowners' responsibility to make those repairs," Anklowitz said. "Kids walking home from school or walking from one house to another can fall. Their bicycles can get damaged. It's an expensive and dangerous problem. People have been complaining about this since my first campaign (in 2006) when I went door to door."

According to Business Administrator Chris Marion, the township maintains it is the homeowner's responsibility to make those repairs but no fine has ever been determined or imposed.

Homeowners who ask the township for repairs to sidewalks damaged by tree roots are put on a list. Although Marion could not say how many residents are on the list, he acknowledged it could take "a couple of cycles" -- more than a year -- before an individual problem is addressed.

For homeowners facing a bill of more than \$500, which can be about what one concrete segment costs, it could be worth the wait.

Anklowitz said another approach to the problem would be exploring new techniques for sidewalk installation.

Last year, council member Heidi Kleinman suggested recycled rubber sidewalks.

In a number of recent planning board approvals, applicants such as the Schlumberger firm and Rite Aid, in the vicinity of the Princeton Junction Train Station, were asked to build or extend sidewalks on the Route 571 sides of their properties. In applying to build a campus on Clarksville Road, The United Jewish Federation of Princeton Mercer Bucks won approval after agreeing to build a sidewalk along its front once future construction is completed.

"We are really promoting sidewalks to increase pedestrian safety and to create a walkable town," said planning board chairman Marvin Gardner.

"As applicants come before us, I insist sidewalks be a part of development approval. Legally, we can do this. It helps reduce traffic and pollution. It conserves energy and encourages fuel conservation. It provides pedestrian safety and contributes to the economy when people walk to stores. Our master plan encourages sidewalks to improve connectivity."

Council member Charles Morgan, while acknowledging the efforts of the West Windsor Bicycle- Pedestrian Alliance, said it may be time for township council to become "a little bit more aggressive" and to "set priorities."

"It will be part of the budget process and allocating funds," Morgan said. "These are issues of connectivity and sidewalks that are dangerous."

Marion pointed out that the sidewalk extension program, which includes right-of-way installation, engineering inspection, signs, striping and drainage improvements, will include a number of problem spots through 2012.

Among those areas scheduled for expansion are Conover Road between Ginnie Lane and Alrich Way; North Mill Road between Clarksville Road and Route 571; Village Road East between Old Trenton and Southland roads; North Post Road between Clarksville and Village Road West; Rabbit Hill Road between Route 571 and Bennington Drive and Old Trenton Road.

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