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## Burlington Sidewalk Study Committee Report September 14, 2019

### Sections:

- I. Introduction and Committee Charter
- II. Background
- III. Results from survey
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*The Burlington Sidewalk Study Committee would like to thank all of the Burlington residents who responded to the sidewalk survey, Town Meeting Moderator Bill Beyer, DPW Engineer Tom Hayes, Planning Department Director Kristin Kassner, State Representative Ken Gordon, Burlington residents John and Bud Larson, School Committee Chairman Martha Simon, former Board of Selectmen Chairman Chris Hartling, former Town Administrator John Petrin and Town Administrator Paul Sagarino, Town Meeting member David Van Camp and everyone in Burlington who has supported this project.*



## **Burlington Sidewalk Study Committee Report September 14, 2019**

### **I. Introduction and Committee Charter**

- Sidewalks have become an increasingly significant theme discussed by Town Meeting
- Every year Town Meeting votes to fund the existing sidewalk replacement program
- The Town of Burlington’s current sidewalk replacement program does not include provisions for the creation of new sidewalks
- An extended discussion occurred at Town Meeting of May 2018 related the expansion of sidewalk infrastructure on Terrace Hall Ave related to a pair of private and public sector infrastructure projects, which created an ad-hoc solution to the creation of sidewalks in this area.
- These projects occurred outside of the context of replacement and involved expansion
- Town Meeting members agreed that it is worth exploring the possibility of expanding sidewalk infrastructure beyond ad-hoc solutions and the current policy
- Town Meeting passed a resolution calling on the Moderator to appoint a committee tasked with exploring a comprehensive sidewalk policy
- Moderator Bill Beyer appointed this committee for purposes of studying the possibility of program expansion
- The committee was tasked with reviewing a “big picture” approach that required a rollout of 10 to 20 years with ideas of where funding may be available



## **Burlington Sidewalk Study Committee Report September 14, 2019**

### **II. Background**

**What the committee learned, what the committee did...**

**First meeting held October 15, 2018 with Burlington Town Administrator John Petrin, Town Meeting Moderator Bill Beyer; and Tom Hayes, DPW Town Engineer.**

Petrin and Hayes provided the committee with background information on Burlington's current sidewalk policy, as follows:

- the current town policy is to repair existing sidewalks but not to build new ones
- Up until 5 years ago, nothing was done to repair existing sidewalks
- The current sidewalk policy, as promulgated by the Board of Selectmen, includes the goal of having concrete sidewalks with granite curbing for existing gateway road sidewalks (defined as road that come from or lead to other towns) and asphalt sidewalks for sidewalks that exist on connector streets.
- Currently, some of the gateway roads have mixed material sidewalks
- The current sidewalk policy also defines sidewalks with upgrades stay that way (i.e. connector roads that currently have concrete sidewalks).

### **Meeting held November 19, 2018 with Board of Selectmen Chairman Chris Hartling**

Hartling informed the committee about the new Complete Street Policy that was adopted by the Board of Selectmen the previous month.

- The new policy states that the town encourages the development and maintenance of safe and efficient modes of transportation, including pedestrians, bicycles, transit riders, motorists, commercial and emergency vehicles.
- There are limits to this policy, where the type of transportation would be prohibited by law (interstate freeways for example), when cost is excessively disproportionate to the need or probable use, or other policies or regulations.

Hartling provided guidance and suggestions on how to identify a strategic goal and how to solicit feedback from the community at large.

Hartling suggested a strategic goal could be "where are people trying to go, where would they walk if to there were better sidewalks."



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### Meeting held Thursday, Dec. 27, 2018 with Burlington Planning Director Kristin Kassner

Kassner provided committee members with a map of the Town of Burlington that shows where current sidewalks are located (Exhibit A)

Kassner stated overall Planning Department/Board goals:

- Every major thoroughfare in Burlington should have sidewalks on both sides of the street
- Continue to make sidewalk connections where there are some sidewalks but not continuous
- There should be sidewalks located around places large numbers of people congregate, such as schools, parks, shopping centers, town center, etc.
- Accept new piecemeal sidewalks that can be connected to other sidewalks in the future

Per Kassner, new residential subdivisions that come before the Planning Board are required to build sidewalks on both sides of the street; many developers negotiate to have sidewalks on one side of the street and mitigate lack of sidewalk on the other side in another area of Burlington.

### February and March 2019: Design and dissemination of survey:

The committee created a Google Form survey consisting of the following questions:

- **Contact Information:**
- **Are you aware of any streets in Burlington that impact a large number of people that need sidewalks to improve public safety? \* [Multiple Choice] Yes No**
- **If Yes, Please name the street(s) and describe the current public safety issues that would be alleviated if sidewalks were in place:**
- **Other comments**

The survey was distributed to electronically to all Town Meeting Members (through the Town Clerk's office) and through the Burlington Residents Network and Burlington Parents Network Facebook pages. We also left paper copies in the library for people to fill out. The survey was available to residents for a period of six weeks.



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### Reference Materials and Documents Reviewed:

The committee reviewed the following documentation that was provided to us:

#### [Complete Streets Program](#)

- [Town Policy](#) as adopted by Board of Selectman
- [Town Project Prioritization](#) submitted by Thomas Hayes, P.E.

#### [Safe Route to Schools Program](#)

#### [Town of Burlington Master Plan Draft](#)

Town of Burlington Sidewalk Inventory Map (2016)

Town of Burlington Sidewalk Restoration and Replacement Policy (adopted by Board of Selectman, (3/27/2017)

Meeting Minutes from the Staff Traffic Advisory Council

Conversation with Ken Gordon, Representative, 21<sup>st</sup> Middlesex District, Massachusetts State House of Representatives

### III. **Survey Results**

The sidewalk committee survey received 206 responses through the Google Form, and additional submissions from the paper form left in the library, through electronic email, and via public participation in our committee meetings.

The results are not scientific and represent only those folks who took the time to complete the survey. Of the 206 responses, 185 respondents (89.8 percent) said “Yes” to the need for new sidewalks and named one or more streets. If the response contained a subsection of a street, the whole street was counted. Table 1 shows the number of mentions per street.

The long form responses provided an opportunity to residents to voice their sidewalk and traffic concerns. When reading through the responses, six themes emerged:



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- **Pedestrian safety**  
Nearly half of the respondents voiced pedestrian safety concerns, due to speeding drivers, large volume of traffic, narrow streets, or being forced to walk on a busy street due to lack of and/or poor condition of sidewalks
- **School bus stops**  
Safe places for children to wait for the school bus are top of mind for about a quarter of those who responded to the survey. One specific example is the intersection of Chestnut Avenue and Alma Road. This portion of Chestnut Avenue is a cut-through between Wilmington Road and 3A, with many vehicles on the road to avoid the traffic light. The intersection has no sidewalk for children to stand on.
- **Obstacles in sidewalks**  
Telephone poles (and in many cases double poles) are planted in the middle of the sidewalk. The poles force pedestrians to maneuver around the pole with limited space to do so. For pedestrians in wheelchairs, it is impossible to detour at the pole due to steep curbing. Bedford Street and Francis Wyman Road are prime examples of where telephone poles obstruct the sidewalk. American with Disabilities Act requires sidewalks to be clear of obstacles so that people using wheelchairs can navigate as easily as someone without a disability.
- **Maintenance of existing sidewalks**  
Residents voiced a desire to keep the existing sidewalks in good condition. The town has a program where sidewalks on specific streets are replaced when that street is repaved, but the policy doesn't cover all streets. In some locations, where an immediate repair is needed, the details should be brought to the attention of the DPW for a repair.
- **Snow removal**  
In the wintertime, sidewalks become impassable after a snowstorm. The town has a program to clear the sidewalk, but the equipment doesn't always clear snow down to the surface, leaving one or two inches that turns to ice over time. Cleared snow from streets and driveways is often stored on sidewalks which blocks pedestrian access. The roads become narrower and leave less room for children to wait for their bus especially where there are no sidewalks.
- **Crossing the street to continue**  
On streets where a sidewalk was built on one side of the street, residents voiced safety concerns of having to cross the street where the sidewalk transitions to the other side. Residents would like to see sidewalks built on the same side to avoid unnecessary crossing. Others specified roads should have sidewalks on both sides. One specific example was Middlesex Turnpike.



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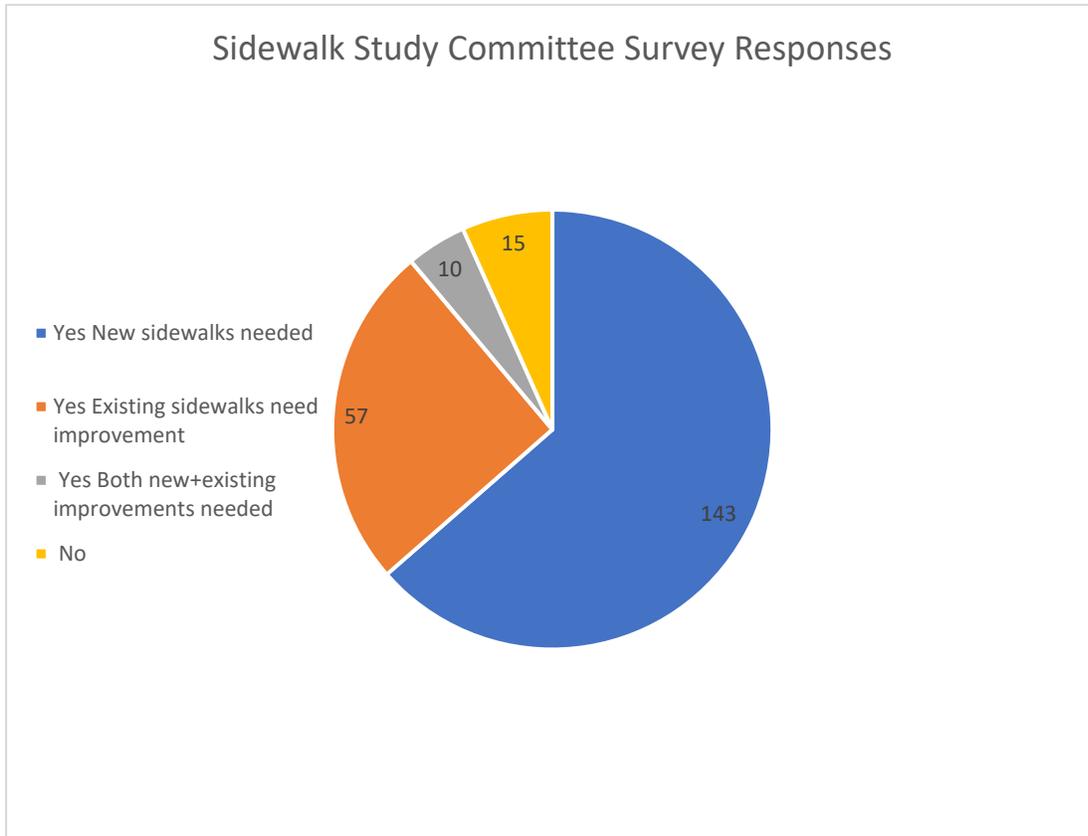
Street	Mentions	Street	Mentions	Street	Mentions
Allison	1	Jonathan	1	Seven Springs	1
Beaverbrook	3	Keans	2	Skilton	3
Bedford	11	Leroy	1	South Bedford	1
Blanchard *	36	Lexington	4	Spruce Hill	1
Brown	4	Locust	16	Stonehill	1
Cambridge	21	Lowell	1	Stony Brook	18
Cathy	1	Mall	7	Terrace Hall	7
Chestnut	1	Meadowvale	3	Thistle	2
Church	1	Michelle	1	Tinkham	1
County	1	Middlesex	11	Upland	6
Crowley	1	Middlesex Turnpike	2	Victor	1
Donald	11	Middlesex Turnpike Extension	1	Vincent	2
Fieldstone	1	Mill	5	Westwood	3
Forbes	1	Moss	2	Wheeler *	18
Foster	1	Muller *	44	Wilmington	4
Francis Wyman	15	Pathwood	1	Winn	4
Fred	1	Paula	1	Woodhill	1
Great Pine	1	Peach Orchard	7		
Hart	4	Pearson	1		
Hearthstone	2	Rolling	1		
Humboldt	1	Sears	1		

*Table 1. Street Names with at least 1 mention*

Streets with “\*” denote streets for which survey responses greatly increased due to the advocacy of a Precinct 7 TMM who communicated with her constituents and made them aware of the survey.



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### **Notable quotes from Burlington residents from comment section of survey:**

“In general, the sidewalks in Burlington are terrible. As a runner, I rarely run in Burlington for this reason. Either they are non-existent (most of the town), they are in extremely poor condition (3A, much of Francis Wyman), or they are only on 1 side of the street, requiring multiple road crossings along the same road just to stay on the sidewalk (the entire length 62)”

“Many side roads are walkable even without sidewalks but would be nice to have them where feasible. With the buildup of the town common area, there definitely needs to be new/better sidewalks as well as more opportunities to safely cross the street. I realize that some roads like Cambridge Street are state roads, but that can’t be an excuse to do nothing.”

“The design of our town discourages people from walking and biking, which are both activities that would help alleviate traffic and improve overall health. Burlington should look into programs such as Complete Streets, Safe Routes to School and Vision Zero.”



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### IV. Sidewalk Committee Recommendations

The Sidewalk Study Committee has determined a need for investment in our sidewalks, both existing and new sidewalks. The committee understands that sidewalk investment is expensive, and is recommending taking an iterative approach to reduce the amount of sidewalk debt the town had accrued over the years. The committee also recommends that town leverage state and federal funding.

With regards to the towns existing sidewalks:

- Continue the Sidewalk Restoration and Replacement policy as adopted by the Board of Selectman on March 27, 2017
- Lobby the Massachusetts Department of Transportation to repair/replace the existing sidewalks on Cambridge street through with support from state legislatures
- Recommend the DPW to establish the priority of sidewalk repair based on the evaluation of the sidewalk condition after each winter season, and to perform spot repairs where safety is jeopardized
- Request the DPW fix the large pothole in the sidewalk on Francis Wyman Road near the Cambridge Street intersection due to public safety risk
- Spoke with the Planning Board to ask if its possible to require cell phone companies who want to deploy 5G cell sites move poles that are in the sidewalk right of way. The Planning Department has also put restrictions in place which would prevent companies from putting small cell sites on these poles

With regards to new sidewalks:

- Submit a request for a state appropriation to fund sidewalk construction on Muller Road, Stony Brook, or Blanchard (in priority) through our state legislatures
- Appropriate \$300,000 annually from free cash (when available) for construction of new sidewalks based on the following prioritization
  - Streets should be identified by
    - Need to increase pedestrian safety and welfare
    - Streets which enable students to walk or bicycle to school
    - Streets which enable pedestrians to walk to/from commercial districts (Mall, the District, 3<sup>rd</sup> avenue, town center)

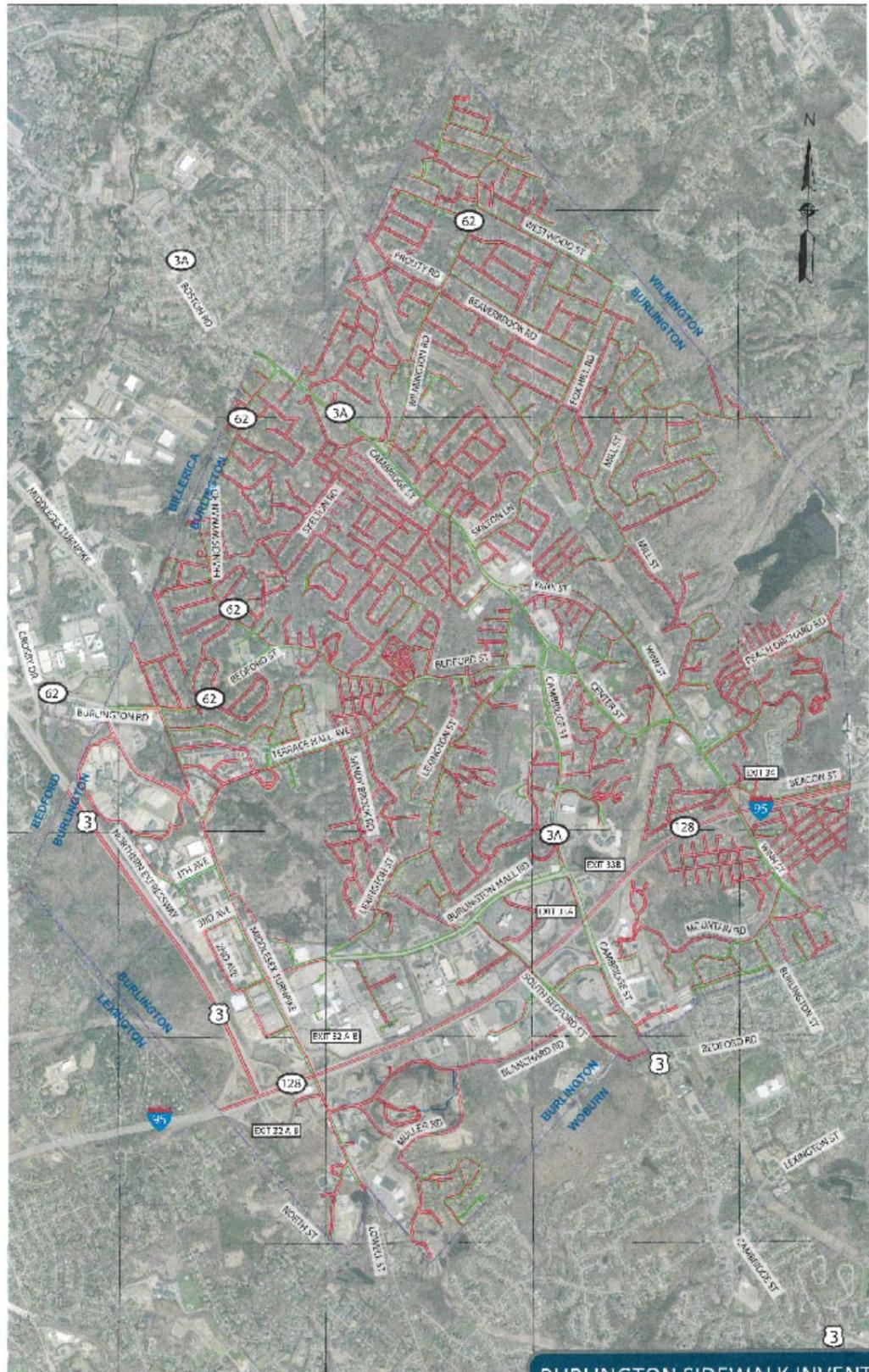


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- Streets which enable pedestrians to travel to parks and recreational areas
- Recommend to the school committee to join the Safe Routes to Schools program. This program encourages students to actively commute to school, either through walking or biking. Participation in this program would enable us to submit for grants to build sidewalks, bicycles, and other projects around the town's elementary and middle schools. The program is federally funded.

### Other Recommendations:

- Recommend the formation of permanent sidewalk committee to provide future direction on sidewalks in town
- Recommend the formation of a committee to work with the state on Cambridge Street infrastructure issues
- Recommend the petitioning of Google to prevent Waze from routing through traffic on specific streets, similar to action taken by Medford for the purpose of decreasing cut-through commuter traffic and associated public safety risk:
  - College Road
  - Foster Road
  - Crowley Road
  - Corcoran Road
  - Sandy Brook Road
  - Brown Avenue.



**BURLINGTON SIDEWALK INVENTORY**

**BURLINGTON MASTER PLAN  
BURLINGTON, MA**

**TEC** SCALE 1" = 1000'  
 June 3, 2015

- New Sidewalk
- Previous Sidewalk
- Town Border

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