Organization
City of Seattle, Department of Transportation (SDOT) - Sidewalk Repair Program

Project Title
Sidewalk Repair in Seattle: Examining Sidewalk Maintenance Practices, Policies, and Program Options to Advance Accessibility & Equity

Organizational Background
The Seattle Department of Transportation’s mission is to deliver a transportation system that provides safe and affordable access to places and opportunities. We envision a thriving, equitable community with dependable transportation options.

About 27% of Seattle’s land is made up of streets, sidewalks, and other transportation-related public space. This is a large amount of land to manage, but it’s still a limited amount of space to move a growing amount of people and goods. Our portfolio of work is vast, from filling potholes to paving streets, tweaking traffic signals and helping buses and freight deliveries run on time, creating enjoyable public spaces, and building out and maintaining a network of bike lanes and sidewalks to serve all ages and abilities. In our quickly growing city, how we get around – how safe it is, how much it costs, how much time it takes, and how reliable it is – is top of mind for SDOT staff every day. Our core values drive our work toward creating a safe, connected, vibrant, affordable, and innovative city for all.

SDOT’s Sidewalk Repair Program oversees the maintenance of the City's sidewalks and curbs. The Sidewalk Repair Program ensures safe and accessible sidewalks by:

- Investigating complaints of unsafe or ADA inaccessible sidewalks.
- Implementing temporary measures as needed. These include painting the sidewalks to alert users to existing issues, placing asphalt shims, beveling sidewalk uplifts, or closing sidewalks if needed.
- Determining repair responsibility (i.e. adjacent property owner, City, utility, or other entity with permitted infrastructure in the public right-of-way).
- Permanently repairing sidewalks when it is determined to be the City’s responsibility.
- Issuing notice to property owners or other entities when it is their responsibility.

More information about the Sidewalk Repair Program can be found here: https://www.seattle.gov/transportation/projects-and-programs/programs/maintenance-and-paving/sidewalk-repair-program
Project Description

Seattle and many cities across the country face the task of repairing existing sidewalks and maintaining accessible and safe pedestrian infrastructure. This Evans student consulting project will compare sidewalk repair policies in major American cities and research equitable approaches to sidewalk maintenance funding and code enforcement. Students will analyze Seattle Municipal Code and Washington State law to understand limitations or opportunities that exist within our current legal, policy, and permitting frameworks, then draft specific sidewalk repair policy recommendations that SDOT staff can implement directly or provide to City Council for further action. We want to ensure that our sidewalks are accessible to all, well maintained for future generations, and provide the backbone of an equitable, climate-conscious, and resilient multimodal network.

Travel Required?

No

Deliverables

• Policy report and specific recommendations that SDOT can directly implement or take to City Council for further consideration

• A summary of changes to Seattle Municipal Code (and possibly state law) that would be needed to enact a more equitable approach to sidewalk repair

• A strategic framework for SDOT Sidewalk Repair Program staffing, funding, and homeowner/contractor/City coordination, including recommended strategies for community outreach

Depending on timeline, the consultant students should get the opportunity to present directly to Seattle City Councilmembers and build their experience interacting directly with elected officials and senior-level City staff.

Key Tasks for Consultants

We envision the student consultants will perform the following key tasks:

• A review of sidewalk repair policies and funding practices in major American cities (and possibly Canadian cities, as time and resources allow) – including equitable cost sharing strategies pursued by other cities, such as the City of Denver’s Neighborhood Sidewalk Repair Affordability Program (https://www.denvergov.org/content/denvergov/en/denver-pedestrians/sidewalks/neighborhood-repair/affordability.html)
• Direct outreach (phone interviews or email correspondence) to municipal staff in select cities to better understand how other cities fund, prioritize, and enforce responsibility for sidewalk maintenance

• An analysis of Washington State law and Seattle Municipal Code related to the regulation of sidewalk repair and what limitations or opportunities our legal, policy, and permitting frameworks may present for changes to Seattle’s approach to sidewalk repair funding, enforcement, and prioritization

• An evaluation of funding options for sidewalk repair, including point of sale and lien options

• Develop a policy report. Some of the key points this report would address are:
  - Options/recommendations on how the City should enforce the property owner’s repair responsibility. Options should consider equity and the political reality that code enforcement for a specific property currently requires City Council level action (to place a lien).
  - Options/recommendations on whether the City should assume greater responsibility for sidewalk maintenance and expand dedicated SDOT funding for sidewalk repair.
  - Make recommendations on how the City should balance repairs between code enforcement of private property owners and direct repair by City staff.
  - Recommend necessary changes to law/code and funding necessary for the recommended policy direction.

• Presentation to City Councilmembers and/or senior-level City staff of report findings and recommendations