

SIDEWALK GUIDELINES

April 14, 2008

I. Introduction

The issue of sidewalks represents a delicate balance that must be considered carefully. On the one hand, in certain circumstances, sidewalks are needed to provide safe passage for children, the elderly and others to and from activity centers such as schools, social and commercial services, parks and open space, etc. Sidewalks may also provide recreation opportunities and promote healthy lifestyles by encouraging and facilitating walking as an alternative to automobile trips. This can also reduce energy use as well as air pollution.

On the other hand, Dover's rural character is what makes it special. Constructing sidewalks along roadways, especially scenic roads, can detract from the rural character of the Town. In addition, constructing the sidewalks may result in loss of trees and disruption to the natural topography. Also, sidewalks can represent a significant capital expense for construction plus an ongoing cost for maintenance.

The 2004 Master Plan recognizes these factors and states that that "the layout of the Town is too dispersed and irregular for sidewalks to be a safe or efficient means of transportation." However, the Master Plan does include a recommendation for a circulation plan that

Establishes a connected system of paths/sidewalks in and around the Town Center to promote pedestrian access to and from Town offices, recreational facilities and schools, as well as the commercial services available in the Town Center. The first priority of the Plan should be to complete the sidewalk network in the Town Center area. The Plan should then identify other areas where existing sidewalks, other amenities or neighborhood interest present opportunities to create or connect Paths/sidewalks. In addition, the Circulation Plan should evaluate design criteria for sidewalks and paths, and associated landscaping, to ensure new sidewalks do not unnecessarily create additional impervious area, affect sensitive resource areas (like vernal pools) or conflict with the rural character of the Town.

Therefore, this document is intended to provide a process by which the Planning Board will consider whether or not to support a sidewalk project by:

- establishing guidelines for determining appropriate locations for sidewalks and prioritizing them;
- identifying factors to be considered in evaluating potential sidewalk locations;
- addressing design features that should be considered; and
- establishing procedures by which sidewalk projects may be presented to the Planning Board.

It should be noted that these are guidelines to be considered as part of the decision process but that each proposed sidewalk may involve unique circumstances and should be considered on a case-by-case basis.

II. Existing Sidewalk Network

With one exception, the present sidewalk network is concentrated in the area of the Town Center. This makes sense since this area has the highest concentration of population as well as commercial, institutional, municipal, educational, and recreational facilities. The existing sidewalk network provides connections among these facilities at the crossroads of the Town's busiest streets. The sidewalks provide for pedestrian activity and social interaction, which is a hallmark of a Town Center.

As illustrated on the attached map, the primary sidewalk network is located on Centre, Dedham, Springdale and Walpole Streets. It provides pedestrian connections among such facilities as the Town House, Library, Chickering and Charles River Schools, Caryl Park, commercial businesses, churches, etc.

The sidewalk network extends about 3.6 miles. In addition to the facilities mentioned above, it serves a population of 1359 within census tracts that abut the network or are in close proximity to it. This is a liberal estimate as some of the census tracts extend well beyond the sidewalks. Moreover, the pedestrian activity generated by the facilities served by the sidewalk network is likely to dwarf that generated by the residences.

Some traffic count data is available for the streets within the sidewalk network. A 2002 MassHighway count on Dedham Street ("East of Church Street," which presumably means in the Town Center) indicated a count of 3500 vehicles. There is no indication of the day the count was taken. A series of counts taken by the Town Engineering Department in August, 2005 at the intersection of Centre and Dedham Streets ranged from 5731 on a Sunday to 16,792 on a Wednesday. The weekday traffic averaged 15,741. Another count taken somewhere on Dedham Street in May, 2005 resulted in a weekday average of 8221.

The Engineering Department also conducted a traffic count on Springdale Avenue in May/June, 2006. It was done at Farm Street (beyond the sidewalk network), but does provide an indication of the traffic on Springdale. The weekday average there was 8132. A traffic count done on Centre Street near the Charles River Bridge (again, beyond the sidewalk network, but providing an indication of the traffic on Centre Street) found a weekday average of 14,099.

The one isolated sidewalk not connected to this network is along Glen Street. It is approximately 2200 feet long and it serves a population of 590 (2000 U.S. Census) within census tracts that abut the sidewalk (including the census tract(s) across Glen Street from the sidewalk and ones that extend well beyond the sidewalk itself). There are no commercial or institutional facilities served by this sidewalk. A separate map illustrates this sidewalk.

III. Location Priorities

In order to balance the need for pedestrian access and safety with the preservation of Dover's character, it is essential that sidewalks be limited to where their presence is necessary for the safety of pedestrians. It should be noted that the Planning Board Rules and Regulations for subdivisions prohibit sidewalks, but instead require pedestrian pathways and bridle paths that are off-road. Similarly, this document places the highest priority on the creation of off-road paths over sidewalks when possible.

When an off-road path is not possible, then a sidewalk should be considered. However, a sidewalk should only be considered, as stated above, when necessary for pedestrian safety, and only when they meet one or more of the following criteria:

- It expands the existing sidewalk network by creating a link to a facility or neighborhood that attracts or generates significant pedestrian activity; or
- It creates a link between two off-road paths; and
- It is located on a road with average daily traffic in excess of 5000 vehicles; or.
- It is needed for safe passage of children or the elderly.

Once these threshold criteria are met, the following considerations should be evaluated prior to a decision to move forward with a sidewalk:

- The availability of land within the street right-of-way or an easement on which the sidewalk may be located;
- The extent of disturbance, in the form of tree removal and topographic changes, necessary to construct the sidewalk;
- The level of neighborhood support for the sidewalk.

IV. Design Considerations

The design of any new sidewalk shall be dependent on the context in which it is located. In all cases, the design objective shall be to minimize disturbance to the existing topography and to minimize tree removal. Drainage impacts should be minimized, particularly with Low Impact Development techniques where feasible.

Generally, new sidewalks should be 4 to 5 feet wide. They should be located away from the edge of the road pavement, preferably 4 to 8 feet away where possible. They need not be strictly parallel with the road and shall meander to minimize tree removal and topography changes, wetlands impacts, stone wall impacts and any other impacts that may alter the character of a Scenic Road.

Sidewalks should have a minimum of 6 inches of gravel base. Generally, they should be paved, but this is not essential. In particular, if a sidewalk is designed to link 2 off road paths that are not paved, it need not be paved either. Conversely, if a sidewalk abuts a wetland or other sensitive area and there is a concern about erosion, then it should be paved, or otherwise constructed pursuant to a Conservation Commission Order of Conditions.

V. Review Process

There is no State statute or local bylaw that confers regulatory authority over sidewalks to the Planning Board. However, the Planning Board does have regulatory authority over the removal

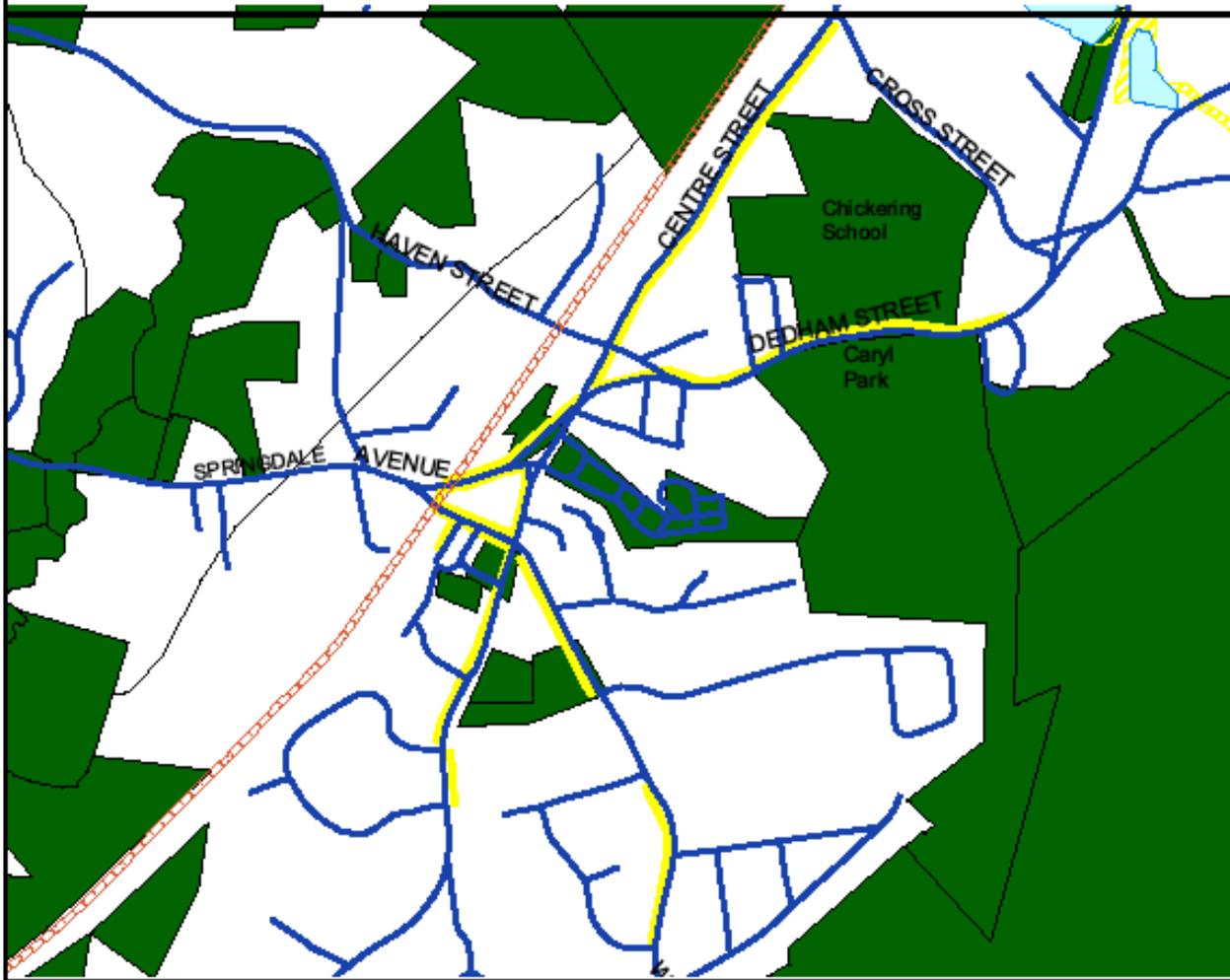
of trees and stone walls from scenic roads. Therefore, it shall be the policy of the Planning Board to adhere to these guidelines in evaluating any scenic road application associated with construction of a new sidewalk.

Furthermore, these guidelines will also be followed prior to Planning Board support for any sidewalk proposal for which a Town Meeting vote is required or is otherwise proposed. The review process for such proposals shall be as follows:

1. A Sidewalk Proposal shall be submitted to the Planning Board at least 90 days prior to Town Meeting or the date by which a decision is desired.[Please note that to get the sidewalk project on the Town Meeting warrant, it will need to be presented to Selectmen further in advance than 90 days].
2. The Sidewalk Proposal shall include the following information:
 - A sketch indicating the proposed location of the sidewalk;
 - A narrative statement indicating why the sidewalk is necessary and how it meets the guidelines outlined in Sections III and IV above;
 - Identification of any trees that need to be removed, including location, species and caliper;
 - Identification of the topographical/grading changes that will be needed to construct the sidewalk;
 - Proposed mitigation measures such as replacement trees and retaining walls;
 - A drainage plan that relies on Low Impact Development techniques to the maximum extent feasible;
 - Proposed construction specifications;
 - Photographs of the proposed route.
3. The Planning Board shall be notified of any Sidewalk Proposal by Selectmen for any sidewalk that is placed on a Town Meeting warrant within one week of the close of the warrant. Upon receipt of a sidewalk proposal and verification by the Planning Board that it is complete, the Board shall schedule a public hearing within 30 days. The hearing shall be duly advertised twice in a newspaper of general circulation within the Town as to time, date, place and purpose. The last publication shall be at least 7 days prior to the date of the hearing. Notice shall also be sent to abutters on both sides of the street along which the sidewalk is proposed.
4. Copies of the proposal shall be sent to the Selectmen with a cover letter requesting comments from relevant Town departments including but not limited to the following, Tree Warden, Consulting Engineer, and Highway Department. Copies shall also be sent to the Historical Commission and Conservation Commission with a request for comments prior to the scheduled hearing. The Town Engineer shall also develop a cost estimate. No sidewalk will be approved unless both the Town Engineer and Highway Department agree that the location is appropriate and feasible.

5. The Planning Board shall issue a recommendation regarding the proposed sidewalk within 30 days after the public hearing, or prior to the date of the Town Meeting at which the sidewalk is to be considered, whichever is earlier.
6. The proponent of the sidewalk shall be responsible for the cost of the legal advertisement and the mailing of the hearing notice to the abutter

Existing Town Center Sidewalks



Existing Glen Street Sidewalk

