

powered by feet first



feet first policy

taking a stance to advance walkability

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Feet First policies

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Street Trees and Sidewalks

Policy

where we stand

Advocacy is a major component of the work Feet First does. These policy papers, prepared by our Policy Committee, convey Feet First's position on key issues of interest to increase safe and easy ways for people to choose to go by foot.



background

Street trees and sidewalks play valuable roles in enhancing livability for a community. Trees can be an ideal complement to sidewalks in the design of what is considered a "good street." Both enhance the appearance of a street, create a feeling of walking friendliness and have a positive impact on traffic calming. Sidewalks or equivalent facilities are essential for walking safety. In addition to their natural beauty, trees have significant environmental benefits including shade, stormwater run-off mitigation, carbon sequestration and energy savings. As such, both trees and sidewalks should be considered valuable community assets.

It also needs to be recognized that there is the potential for conflict between street trees and sidewalks. This includes competition for limited space in the public right-of-way, including the potential to decrease mobility for those with disabilities and the negative impact that tree roots can cause to sidewalks resulting in buckling which then becomes a safety hazard.

Mission

who we are - what we do

Feet First promotes walkable communities and envisions people walking every day for their health, transportation, environment, community, and pleasure.



feet first
promoting walkable communities



Street Trees and Sidewalks

recommended policies

In order to realize the benefits of having both street trees and sidewalks while avoiding the potential for conflict; cities need to adopt carefully crafted street design and street tree policies. These policies need to address the following issues.

First, cities should address as part of their street design policy the requirements for the space allocated to non-vehicle (motorized and bicycle) uses. These design criteria should include:

- A landscape-furniture zone with a planting strip width of at least 5 ft.
- A walkable zone of at least 6 ft.
- A frontage zone next to buildings
- Desired size and spacing of trees
- Maintain a minimum limb clearance of 8 ft. above the sidewalk
- Larger tree pit allowances to support tree health and reduce tree root expansion
- Acceptable tree pit options including grates and gravel, moving tree centerlines closer to the curb and designing sidewalks at the edge of the tree pit with deeper grooves to enable expansion to accommodate the needs of trees as they mature, while maintaining sidewalk width minimums.

Grates should not be placed too close to the trunk and should be of adequate size to accommodate tree growth.

Secondly, cities should adopt a list of recommended and prohibited street trees. The list of recommended trees may be city-wide or customized for individual neighborhoods and business districts. In addition to achieving the desired appearance, the trees selected should take into account compatibility with utility issues (e.g. overhead power lines) and the avoidance of trees with “aggressive roots” that lead to sidewalk buckling.

Thirdly, cities should adopt a set of best practices for the maintenance of their street trees and sidewalks. These practices need to address the problems of sidewalk buckling caused by aggressive tree roots and low limbs that can cause obstructions particularly for those with disabilities. This should include proactive root and limb pruning and the repair or replacement of sections of sidewalk that pose significant safety hazards for people walking. In particularly problematic areas, consideration should be given to using alternative paver materials to concrete and the use of innovative sidewalk construction techniques.

resources

City of Seattle’s Pedestrian Master Plan:

www.Seattle.gov/transportation/pm_pmpag

Seattle Department of Transportation’s Right of Way Improvement Manual:

www.Seattle.gov/transportation/rowmanual



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Street Trees and Sidewalks

Seattle Department of Transportation's
Recommended Street Tree List:

www.Seattle.gov/transportation/treeplanting

City of Portland - Friend of Trees:

www.friendsoftrees.org

Green Cities: Good Health; Kathleen L Wolf
PhD, University of Washington: College of the
Environment

Photo courtesy of the Seattle Department of Transportation



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