WALKABLE WASHINGTON

Transformation towards walkability is taking place all over the state of Washington. From urban, suburban and small town initiatives, the program showcases the effects of a renewed focus on creating great places for people to walk. The case studies are exceptional projects and programs showcasing how cities, counties, school districts, and community organizations throughout the state are making it safer, easier, and more inviting for people to walk.

WHO WE ARE & WHAT WE DO

We promote walkable communities and empower people throughout Washington to connect to the world by foot.

CASE STUDY

MERCER MIDDLE SCHOOL WALKWAY IMPROVEMENT
SEATTLE WASHINGTON

DESCRIPTION AND PURPOSE: Mercer Middle School is located on Seattle’s Beacon Hill, near Jefferson Park Golf Course. Middle school students living north of the school use 16th Avenue S. as one of the main walking routes to get there. Additionally, this sidewalk connects to the new multiuse trail through Jefferson Park. Although 16th Avenue S. extending north from the school to S. Dakota Street always had a sidewalk, it was in poor condition. Water seeping from the hillside regularly flooded the sidewalk and unimproved shoulder on the east side of the street. The mud and accompanying slippery algae growth made the pathway difficult to walk on. In addition, people would regularly park vehicles on the planting area, making that area impassable to walkers. Cars parked perpendicular to the road often extended over the poorly-delineated sidewalk. As a result, students frequently walked in the street to avoid the sidewalk muck and the parked cars. The Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT) and the Seattle Parks Department (Parks) partnered to address the safety concerns and consulted with Seattle Public Utilities (SPU) to develop a low-cost solution. The solution included installation of an interceptor drain, replacement of concrete paving to eliminate of trip hazards, utilization of Green Stormwater Infrastructure techniques, and placement of wheel stops.

COSTS AND FUNDING: This project was a multi-jurisdictional effort. The existing walkway and planting strip were on Parks property, not SDOT right-of-way, so the two agencies split the cost of this $146,000 improvement.
SDOT contributed $86,000 and Parks covered the remaining $60,000. In addition, SPU volunteered their expertise and review time as in-kind contributions.

**IMPLEMENTATION AND TIME FRAME:**
SDOT and Parks had known about the problems on this street for some time, but they didn’t have the resources to develop an affordable solution. SDOT approached SPU to help brainstorm an affordable solution. The solution involved an interceptor drain on the back side of the sidewalk and a bio-filtration swale in the planting strip. The bio-filtration swale allows water to infiltrate, but also performs an important water quality function. Catch basins were installed to capture any overflows during storm events and connect to SPU facilities. Because the street is flat, the bio-retention swale also treats run-off from the street and parking area. Wheel stops prevent cars from parking on the vegetation while allowing street run off to drain into the planting area. The added protection allowed Parks to plant native trees which have a less aggressive root system but are more tolerant to wet and dry soil conditions. Lastly, broken sidewalk panels were replaced. Seattle Parks Department was responsible for all of the construction, and all work was completed in November 2015.

**COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT:** In January of 2015, Mercer Middle School students, parents, staff, neighbors, and cycling advocates participated in a walking and biking audit, and they identified the muddy walkway along 16th Avenue S. as a high priority areas for improvements near the school. This area had also been identified by the community during earlier Safe Routes to School efforts at Mercer Middle School. Parks engaged the school and surrounding community during the entire construction phase. After construction was finished, flower bulbs were planted under the trees in the school’s colors and the Principal and several students stamped their hands in the newly poured concrete.

**BENEFITS AND RESULTS:** Cleaning up the walkway has significantly improved walkability and pedestrian safety for students walking along 16th Avenue S because students no longer walk in the street dodging cars to get to school. In addition, the planting strip creates a pleasant environment with mown grass, trees, and bulbs. There is no more standing water for breeding mosquitoes, both the underground stream and surface runoff are treated naturally, and overflows are connected to SPU facilities. This walkway connects directly to the new multi-use trail in Jefferson Park. It also ties in with a prior walkway project along S. Dakota Street completed as a part of the Beacon Hill Neighborhood Greenway in 2012. This project installed curb ramps and repaired and widened the existing sidewalk.

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