

Why the Planning Commission Needs a Borough Sidewalk Plan (and Ideas for Producing One)

Scott Oswald

Malvern Planning Commission

November 2022

Problem

- The Malvern Planning Commission (MPC) is responsible for reviewing development plans and making recommendations to Council regarding the approval of the plans
- Developers frequently request sidewalk waivers (ie, requests to not provide sidewalks) as part of their plans
 - Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance (SALDO) Section 515.A states “Sidewalks shall be provided on both sides of all existing and proposed streets....”
- MPC considers these sidewalk waiver requests in isolation, for the given property being developed, rather than in the context of our town’s overall walkability goals
 - “Is not including a sidewalk *on the given property* reasonable?”
- MPC generally recommends the approval of these waivers
 - Routinely approved waivers, regardless of the topic, suggests a problem

Solution

- MPC needs a planning tool for the sidewalk waiver reviews
- MPC is requesting Council support for the creation of a *sidewalk plan* to address this need
 - **Sidewalk plan** – a map of the borough identifying each property where a sidewalk is desirable
 - This plan would be based on a set of thoughtfully created sidewalk criteria
- According to MPC Solicitor Ken Kynett: If the MPC is to use this type of sidewalk plan as a planning tool, Council should adopt it by updating the SALDO (or some other ordinance)
 - Additional benefits of adopting sidewalk plan via SALDO:
 - Sidewalk waivers should become rare
 - Developers would prefer a SALDO that reflects Council's vision for sidewalks
- Tonight's goal: gain agreement on how to proceed (ideas on next page)
- Not tonight's goal: discuss sidewalk criteria

Steps to Achieve Solution

1. Determine who will produce sidewalk plan
 - MPC has capacity at the moment; working with Council plus other committees would be preferable
2. Define sidewalk criteria
 - Advantages of sidewalks (eg, safety, aesthetics)
 - Disadvantages of sidewalks (eg, safety, environment)
 - Possibly also define sidewalk "quality" factors (eg, sidewalk width, signage, lighting)
 - Possibly also consider related topics: street widths (complicated), curbs (less complicated)
 - MPC's 2015 Walkability Study has good source material for this task; comp plans do too
3. Apply sidewalk criteria to identify properties in town where sidewalks are desired
4. Adopt the plan in the SALDO (or some other ordinance)

Backup

Background

- At the 20 Oct 2022 MPC meeting, the MPC discussed:
 - The MPC's need for a borough sidewalk plan – MPC needs a borough sidewalk plan to make informed recommendations to Council regarding sidewalks
 - Ideas for creating a sidewalk plan
- The 20 Oct MPC discussion was motivated by multiple recent MPC reviews of development plans that requested waivers for the SALDO requirement to provide sidewalks
- The MPC reached agreement at the 20 Oct meeting that:
 - MPC needs a sidewalk plan
 - MPC needs Council support to produce and document a sidewalk plan
- Since I provided the source material for the 20 Oct discussion, the MPC asked me to present this material to Council

2015 Walkability Study

- 2015 Walkability Study
 - Survey conducted by MPC in 2014
- Results presented to Council in 2015
- Thorough, thoughtful analysis
- Well-written report presenting results
- Presentation and report included recommendations to Council
 - Council has not adopted the recommendations
- Recommendations did not include a suggestion for Council to adopt a borough-wide sidewalk plan