

Report to Civic Works Committee

To: Chair and Members
Civic Works Committee

From: Kelly Scherr, P.Eng., MBA, FEC
Deputy City Manager, Environment & Infrastructure

Subject: Neighbourhood Connectivity Plan – Engagement Strategy
January 10, 2022

Recommendation

That on the recommendation of the Deputy City Manager, Environment and Infrastructure the following report on the trial Neighbourhood Connectivity Plan approach to sidewalk engagement **BE RECEIVED** for information and Civic Administration **BE DIRECTED** to continue this trial engagement strategy into 2023.

Executive Summary

New sidewalks are to be installed as part of road reconstruction and underground infrastructure renewal projects in accordance with London Plan policy that requires sidewalks be included on both sides of most streets when construction occurs.

Neighbourhood Connectivity Plans (NCP) establish a guide for the installation of sidewalks in legacy areas of the City with limited sidewalk connectivity. Staff have developed a community engagement strategy to guide communities in thinking wholistically about connectivity in their neighbourhood.

This report provides an update on the NCP approach, the outcomes of initial NCP engagement and the process for presenting the first three recommended plans to the community and Council.

Linkage to the Corporate Strategic Plan

The following report supports the 2019-2023 Strategic Plan through the strategic focus area of Building a Sustainable City and Creating a Safe London for Women and Girls. The report identifies strategies for building new neighbourhood infrastructure to support mobility, safety and more livable, sustainable, vibrant communities. The plan also identifies the implementation and enhancement of road safety measures to deliver convenient and connected mobility choices.

Analysis

1.0 Background Information

1.1 Previous Reports Related to this Matter

- Civic Works Committee – June 19, 2012 – London 2030 Transportation Master Plan
- Planning and Environment Committee – June 13, 2016 – The London Plan
- Civic Works Committee – August 13, 2018 – Complete Streets Design Manual
- Civic Works Committee – September 25, 2018 – Byron South Neighbourhood Sidewalk Connectivity Plan
- Civic Works Committee – February 9, 2021 – New Sidewalks in 2021 Infrastructure Reconstruction Projects
- Civic Works Committee – March 15, 2021 – New Sidewalks in 2021 Infrastructure Reconstruction Projects – Special meeting to hear public delegations

- Civic Works Committee – November 23, 2021 – New Sidewalks in Established Neighbourhoods.

1.2 Background

In keeping with the various policies supporting sidewalk infrastructure, road reconstruction project designs now strive to include sidewalks on both sides of the street unless there are significant constraints, and then, at a sidewalk on at least one side is pursued. In recent years, this has led to debate within communities due a conflict between the goal of providing a safe and accessible mobility network and the desire to avoid neighbourhood impacts to existing trees, parking, and driveways.

History of Sidewalks

The history of sidewalks is very much linked to the history of cars.

Before the 1950s, when many people did not own a family car, neighbourhoods were typically designed in a grid pattern with sidewalks on both sides. This was to make it easy to walk to local destinations and amenities or access them using trolley services. In London, this includes neighbourhoods like the Core, Old South and Old North.

From the 1950s to 1980s, as cars became less expensive and more widely produced, car ownership increased exponentially and this had a huge influence on the way neighbourhoods were designed. Neighbourhoods built in this era were designed with far fewer sidewalks and more meandering streets and wider roads. This is true of most cities across North America during this period.

Starting in the 1980s and 1990s, neighbourhood designs returned to having more regard for walkability and accessibility. Newer subdivisions in London started being planned and built with sidewalks again.

Essentially, changing neighbourhood design approaches over many decades have created a ring of legacy neighbourhoods with limited sidewalk connections located between the historic core of the city and the newer subdivisions around the perimeter.

Policy Context

Walking is an active mode of transportation that has been promoted in London dating back to the early 2000's and reinforced in the Smart Moves 2030 Transportation Master Plan. Planning for sidewalks on both sides of most streets has become standard practice amongst many Ontario municipalities. Multiple policies and principles have been approved by Council over the last decade that align with improving connectivity and safety in the City and its neighbourhoods.

The Active Mobility section of the London Plan recognizes that walking can play a positive role in improving mobility and quality of life as part of a balanced mobility system. Policy 349 specifically speaks to supporting walkability through the inclusion of sidewalks in street design.

349_ To support walkability, sidewalks shall be located on both sides of all streets. An exception to this requirement may be considered in the following instances. In most of the instances a sidewalk will be required on one side of the street.

- 1. Cul-de-sacs or dead-end streets that extend less than 200 metres and do not connect to neighbourhood features or amenities.*
- 2. Portions of streets flanking natural heritage features or areas.*
- 3. Portions of streets flanking a Green Space that includes alternative active mobility infrastructure parallel to the street.*
- 4. Portions of streets that have a designated multi-use pathway within the boulevard on one side.*
- 5. Streets classified as Expressways or Rural Thoroughfares.*

6. *Road reconstruction projects, where the existing conditions such as mature trees, right-of-way widths, or infrastructure would impede sidewalks on both sides of the street.*

In keeping with the London Plan and the various policies supporting sidewalk infrastructure, road reconstruction project designs now strive to introduce sidewalks on both sides of existing streets unless there are specific constraints that may result in it being more desirable to include one side only, or in some cases, no sidewalks. That means, when a street is due for construction and there is no existing sidewalk, it should be rebuilt with a sidewalk on at least one side of the street.

Annual Sidewalk Programs

The City builds new sidewalks based on Mobility Policy 349 under three distinct annual programs.

- **Local Road Reconstruction Program (LRRP):** Local road projects to reconstruct neighbourhood streets with poor pavement conditions including new curb and sidewalks, replacing asphalt road base and upgrading underground services if needed.
- **Infrastructure Lifecycle Renewal Program (ILRP):** Projects Driven by either sewer, water or transportation lifecycle renewal needs, these projects could trigger the need for a new sidewalk if one does not exist.
- **New Sidewalk Program:** The New Sidewalk Program follows a request-based process to identify locations for new sidewalks in existing communities independent of other infrastructure improvements.

It is important the City provide a consistent approach when engaging the public. New sidewalks may be introduced through different programs, but the public only sees the impacts a new sidewalk will have on their street.

Public Response to Sidewalks in Existing Neighbourhoods

Recent years have seen growing debate within communities due to a conflict between the goal of providing a safe and accessible mobility network and the desire to avoid neighbourhood impacts to existing trees, parking, and driveways.

After the 2021 construction program saw a street-by-street debate that resulted in several policy exemptions, Council directed civic administration to develop a Neighbourhood Connectivity Plan (NCP) approach and implement a community engagement strategy on a trial basis in 2022 to inform the 2023 Renew London Construction Program.

Sidewalks in New Subdivisions

This report is focused on addressing the challenges of implementing sidewalks in established neighbourhoods. A retrofit approach is not required in new subdivisions where current standards for draft plans of subdivision provide strong neighbourhood connection and natural walkability. Streets within new subdivisions do not meet the exemptions noted in Policy 349 and sidewalks will be constructed on both sides of all streets.

1.3 Neighbourhood Sidewalk Connectivity Trial

Elevating the sidewalk discussion through an NCP provides a mechanism to look beyond individual streets and identify safe travel paths to key neighbourhood destinations, services, transit and active spaces. By reviewing neighbourhood connectivity holistically, sidewalk options can be considered where they will provide the greatest benefit without automatically assuming sidewalks on every street.

Reviewing all streets in a neighbourhood together provides the ability to identify

strategic sidewalk connections whereas, reviewing individual streets in isolation can lead to gaps in the network resulting from one-off exemptions.

NCP reviews focus on established neighbourhoods within the legacy ring that would benefit most from a connectivity plan. A high-level review identified more than 20 neighbourhood “pockets” that would benefit from an NCP. These connectivity plans would not need to be completed all at once. They could be staggered over several years to align with works planned for the following road reconstruction season or seasons. The New Sidewalk Program could work in tandem with planned roadworks to implement NCPs, once established.

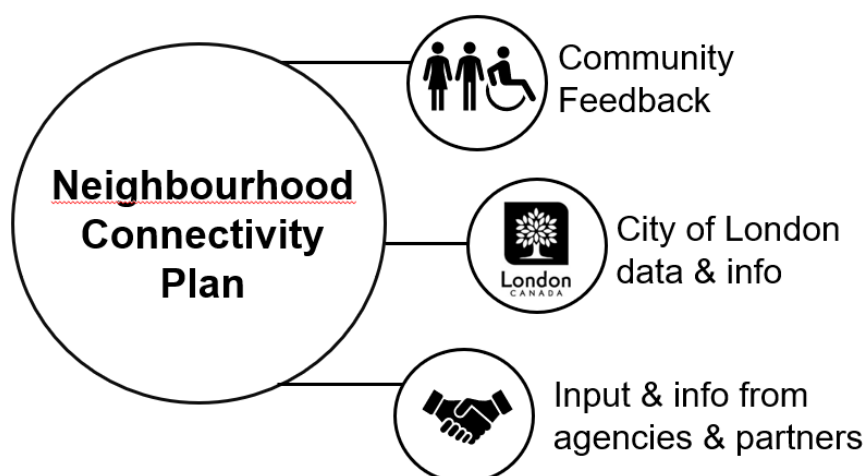
The trial was recommended to start with the following neighbourhoods: Whitehills, Grenfell, and Glen Cairn. Appendix A illustrates neighbourhoods in the legacy ring that would benefit from an NCP.

2.0 Discussion and Considerations

2.1 Gathering NCP Input

The NCP trial engagement strategy was developed to establish a mutual understanding of pedestrian infrastructure requirements and the overall benefits of community connectivity by supporting a community conversation focused on the neighbourhood’s goals and mobility needs, and travel patterns.

To develop each NCP, information was sought from three inputs: community feedback, available City information and data, and input from local agencies and partners.



Community feedback is critical to planning effective NCPs. Input from residents helps staff better understand the community’s priorities around connectivity and pedestrian infrastructure. What are the key destinations in the community, including everything from schools to places of worship to parks and trails to corner stores and coffee shops? How are residents currently using their neighbourhood when it comes to walking, what works and what doesn’t?

The City has information available that can provide insight into better connecting a neighbourhood. NCPs considered data such as traffic and pedestrian volumes and past requests for traffic calming, sidewalks or pedestrian cross-overs. Contributions from the Anti-Racism and Anti-Oppression (ARAO) Office also provided invaluable insight into accessibility, gender and equality considerations.

Various local groups, agencies and experts were contacted to inform the plan. This included talking to local schools, community agencies and school bus providers to understand travel patterns and hot spots. LTC assisted by providing data on local bus stops and volumes and the police offered information regarding safety and collisions.

With input from all three of these areas, the goal is to develop an NCP that is holistic and considers the needs of the entire community from a 360-degree perspective.

2.2 NCP Community Engagement

The goal of community engagement was to make it easy for community members to help shape their Neighbourhood Connectivity Plan. The team developed a toolkit of standardized engagement options to be applied consistently across communities but also tailored to reflect each neighbourhood's characteristics.

The engagement strategy offered a variety of options for residents to provide feedback over the month of June 2022. In an effort to reach as many residents in the neighbourhoods as possible, letters were mailed out to all affected properties and engagement opportunities were promoted on social media.

Project Website

Residents were able to visit a project website for each neighbourhood – ie. getinvolved.london.ca/whitehills – to submit comments, answer survey questions or use a community map tool to provide input. The websites also contained detailed information about the rationale, process and timelines for developing a Neighbourhood Connectivity Plan.

Virtual Webinar

The City hosted a virtual community meeting for each community, via Zoom webinar, to outline the rationale, process and timelines for developing a Neighbourhood Connectivity Plan and how to contribute feedback. The webinars wrapped up with a Q&A session. The recorded presentation was then posted to the NCP getinvolved.london.ca website.

Drop-In Community Consultation

City staff hosted public drop-in sessions at a local library in each community for residents who wanted to drop in and provide feedback in person. Staff were on hand to outline the rationale, process and timelines for developing an NCP, take resident input and answer questions. There were also hard copies of the online survey for those that prefer to submit a handwritten response.

Reach Out to the Project Team

Accessibility was considered in developing the community engagement plan. Anyone requiring the materials and information in an alternate format, was able to reach out to the project team to ensure that as many people as possible could participate.

2.3 NCP Recommendations

A cross-functional working group was assembled to review input gathered through the NCP engagement process drawing upon expertise from Construction Administration, Transportation Planning & Design, the City's Active Transportation Manager, Communications, and the ARAO Office. The working group considered the distinct characteristics of each neighbourhood to identify gaps in connectivity that warrant new sidewalks. The group also reviewed other infrastructure options to aid in safe, active mobility and respond to things heard from the community – such as pedestrian crossings, traffic calming measures, pathway extensions or four-way stops.

Applying a Climate Emergency Action Plan lens to NCPs also supports reconstruction of streets that are missing pedestrian amenities as a cost-effective approach to enable sustainable mobility choices. Improving pedestrian connectivity is another way to promote sustainable modes of travel and counteract the vehicle-focused trend known as “induced demand”.

The City is also committed to the principles of independence, dignity, integration, and equality of opportunity, as described in the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA). The term “disability” covers a range of visible and invisible conditions that may have been present from birth, caused by an accident, or developed over time. For

instance, disabilities include visual impairment, deafness, brain injury, intellectual disabilities, or reliance on a mobility device, to name a few. NCP recommendations also considered the ARAO framework that will provide an equity tool that combines the previous Gender Equity Lens and the Equity and Inclusion Lens. Each NCP recommendation provides a plan for sidewalk connections tailored to the community's mobility trends and patterns with regard for accessibility, equity and safety.

Infrastructure recommendations will be presented in the form of an NCP map, that will act as a blueprint for where to add sidewalk infrastructure when the time comes to reconstruct a given neighbourhood street.

Staff plan to present the NCP recommendations to council together with a Public Participation Meeting (PPM). Each of the three 2022 NCP neighbourhoods will be scheduled for its own individual PPM on the January 31, 2023 Civic Works Committee agenda. Hosting individual PPMs on the same agenda will support ease of engagement for the public as well as support consistent decision-making across the neighbourhoods while acknowledging the unique nature of each neighbourhood.

Email notifications have been sent to those residents that engaged in the three neighbourhoods to provide advance notice of this information report as well as the January 31, 2023 PPMs. Details of the PPMs will also be promoted on social media and the neighbourhood Get Involved pages. The goal is to provide residents with ample notice of their opportunity to comment on the recommended outcome of this engagement process.

2.4 Neighbourhood Connectivity Plans Going Forward

In its first year, the NCP engagement strategy was able to gather valuable community feedback. The various options for input provided a neutral space for residents to express their opinions on adding new sidewalks in established neighbourhoods, both for and against. This valuable feedback provided a picture of how people move in their community, where they enjoy walking and where there are gaps that make walking uncomfortable.

To really understand the benefits of a neighbourhood approach to sidewalk discussions, the NCP trial should continue to see the 2022 communities through the PPM process and possibly implementation of an NCP recommended sidewalk through to street-level engagement and construction. It is recommended that the trial continue into 2023.

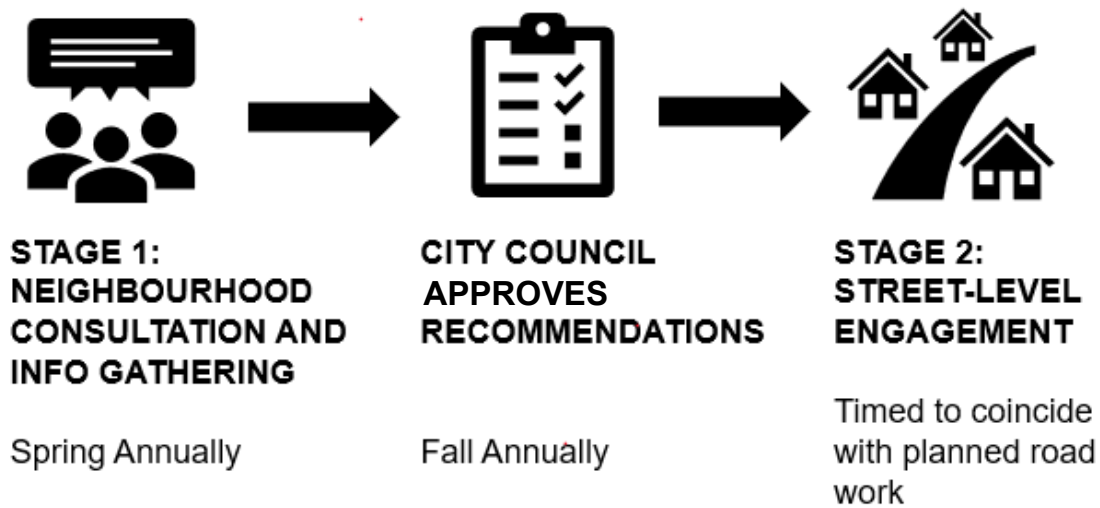
For the January 31 CWC agenda, staff will provide a companion report to the three NCP recommendations that will identify the citywide 2023 sidewalk project list and recommend the next communities to undertake the NCP engagement process.

2.5 Sidewalk Engagement at the Street Level

While an NCP provides a blueprint for sidewalk connections in a neighbourhood, individual project engagement will still be required when it comes time to implement the sidewalk. That is the point when the conversation should focus on finding the best fit design for the street and help residents understand the design considerations available to mitigate impacts of adding a new sidewalk.

Right now, staff are ready to provide NCP recommendations based on feedback gathered through Stage 1 Neighbourhood Consultation.

Those who live on the street will have an opportunity to provide feedback on the proposed sidewalk options in order to help refine the designs to add the sidewalk in a way that makes the most sense for the street. Stage 2 Street-level Engagement will consider factors such as trees and vegetation, existing driveways, on-street parking, emergency vehicle access, winter road maintenance and streetlighting to develop a design that mitigates some of the impacts of adding a new sidewalk.



In terms of timing, if a street is identified as a place where sidewalks should be added, that work will be timed to coincide with other road work planned for the area or street. For example, if the City is planning to re-pave the road or fix underground infrastructure, staff would try to time those works together to minimise disruption for residents. Regardless, before any sidewalks are installed, residents will hear from the City and have another opportunity to participate in a street level consultation.

3.0 Financial Impact/Considerations

3.1 Budget Implications

An NCP engagement strategy has been established and can support ongoing completion of connection plans in-house with support from the cross-functional working group. Ideally, moving to a NCP approach for sidewalk engagement should lead to a reduction in staff resource demands over the current street-by-street approach.

Conclusion

Staff have developed a new Neighbourhood Connectivity Plan approach and engagement strategy for engaging communities regarding implementation of sidewalks in established neighbourhoods.

Implemented on a trial basis, an initial three neighbourhoods have completed their engagement and staff will present the recommended plans to Council at Public Participation Meetings on January 31, 2023.

Continuing the trial into 2023 will provide an opportunity observe the outcome of the first three recommended NCPs and complete a second round of NCP engagement for select neighbourhoods.

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Attachments:

Map of areas that would benefit from a Neighbourhood Sidewalk Connection Plan

Appendix A: Areas that would benefit from a Neighbourhood Sidewalk Connection Plan

