

Seattle's Sidewalk Maintenance and Repair Program

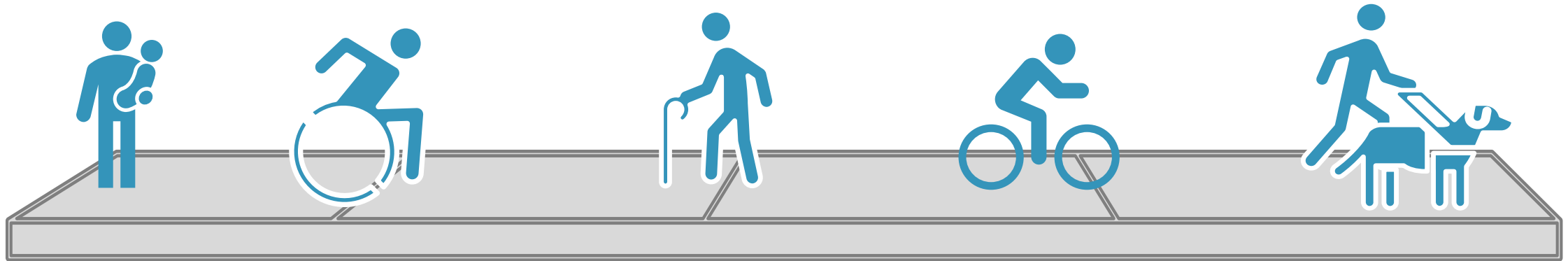
PRESENTATION TO THE TRANSPORTATION AND SEATTLE PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMITTEE

MARCH 1, 2022



Sidewalks are important

- Equity
- Access
- Mobility
- Protecting the environment
- Promoting health



Seattle City Councilmember Andrew Lewis asked us:

- What does the Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT) spend on sidewalk repair?
- How does SDOT decide which sidewalks to repair?
- How does SDOT solicit public input into sidewalk repair projects?
- To compare the cost of replacing sidewalks to shorter-term fixes.
- Update on the Council requested Policy Recommendations for Sidewalk Repair in Seattle report (June 2020, SDOT).

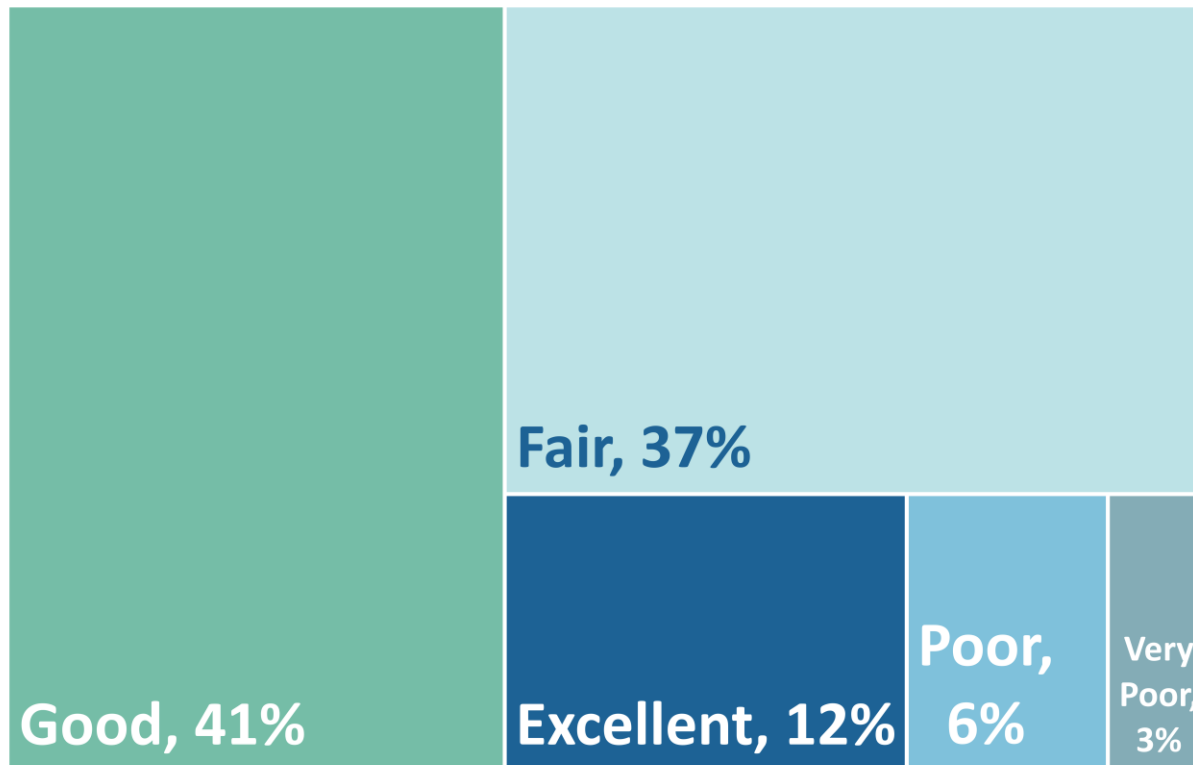


Seattle has about 2,300 miles of sidewalks

- The **City of Seattle** is responsible for **15-20%**
 - Sidewalks adjacent to City structures,
 - Affected by City utilities, or
 - Adjacent to City street trees.
- **Private property owners** are responsible for about **80-85%**



Nearly half of Seattle's sidewalks are in a state of disrepair that may affect mobility



- Excellent:** No observable issue within the pedestrian clear zone.
- Good:** Minor issues along the pedestrian clear zone.
- Fair:** Medium severity issues; discontinuities exist that may impact mobility.
- Poor:** Severe issues; discontinuities exist that may impact mobility.
- Very Poor:** Widespread severe issues; discontinuities exist that may impact mobility.

Note: Figure does not contain the one percent of sidewalks with no rating.

Source: Office of City Auditor analysis of Seattle Department of Transportation data, 2019.



SDOT's annual funding does not address need for sidewalk repair

- Average annual spending from 2010 – 2020: \$2.6 million.
- Council approved \$6.2 million additional funding in 2019.
- Conservative estimate: it would take \$500 million to bring all Seattle sidewalks—even those adjacent to private property—up to good or excellent condition.
- Due to the gap between funding and need, the City prioritizes semi-permanent repairs.



SDOT uses two main types of semi-permanent sidewalk repairs



Example of a **bevel**: Edge of sidewalk was ground down to match the height of the neighboring concrete panel.

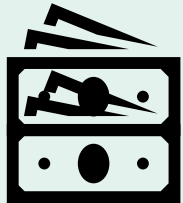


Example of **shims**: Asphalt was added to match the height of the neighboring concrete panel.



Replacing sidewalks costs \$30 per ft² more than repairing them

Asphalt Repairs (shims)



Cost **\$48.90** per ft²
Useful life of **>10**
years



USEFUL LIFE

VS

Concrete Sidewalk Replacement Projects



Cost **\$79.60** per ft²
Can last up to **100**
years



USEFUL LIFE



SDOT allocates sidewalk replacement resources carefully

- Leveraging opportunities with other capital projects
- Within an urban village
- Adjacent to an arterial street
- High Priority Project Areas as identified in Pedestrian Master Plan
- Within three blocks of a community or healthcare facility
- On a block with a transit stop
- Geographic and social justice distribution
- Constructability and cost



Like other jurisdictions, SDOT does not ask for input into whether to fix or replace a sidewalk

“The treatment method used for minor repairs is determined on a case-by-case basis by the size of the uplift or repair needed, and we don’t ask for community input on this.”

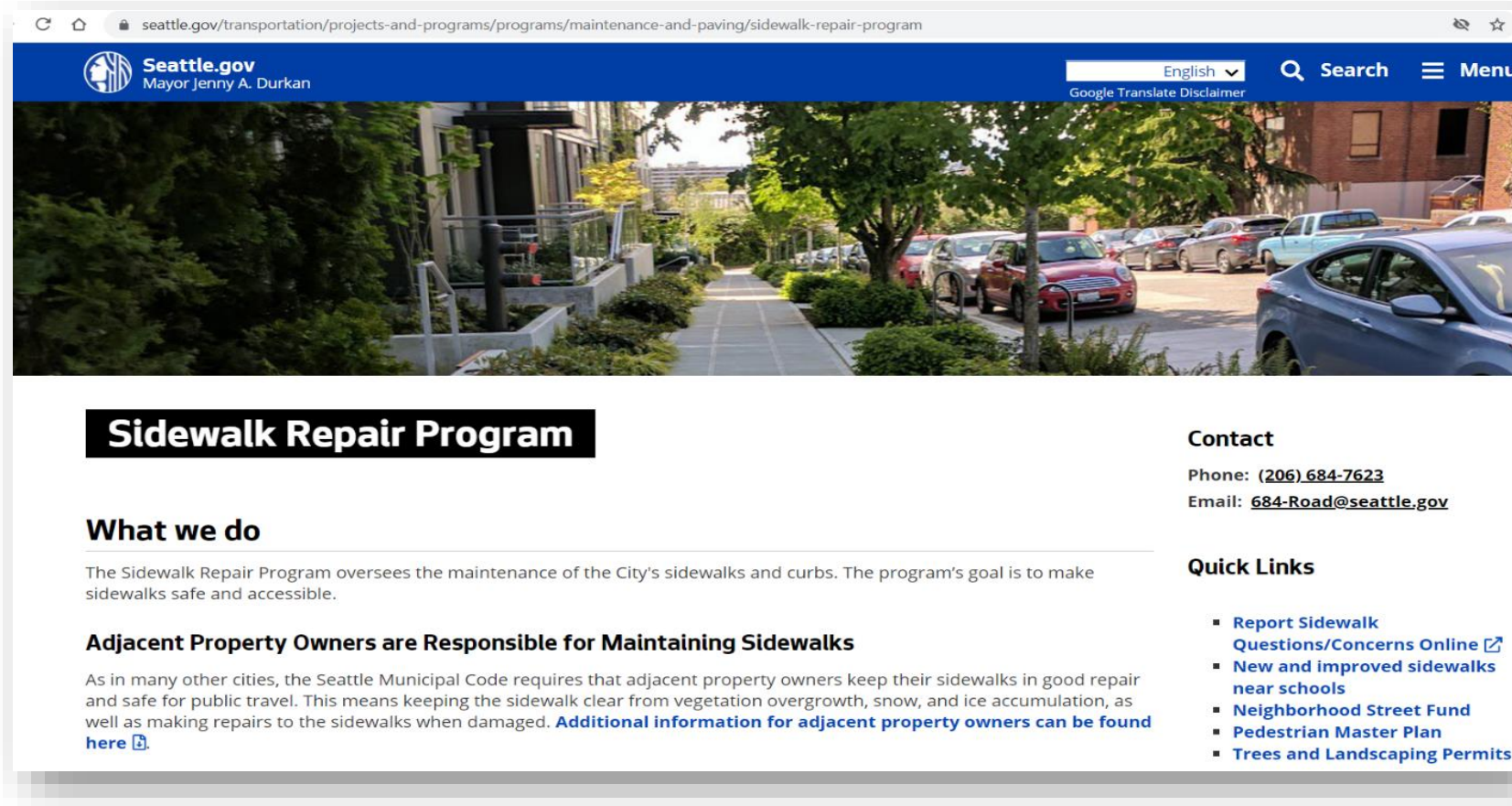
“We depend on the professional judgment of our inspectors, and do not solicit public input”.

“We do not solicit public comments regarding sidewalk repairs. If a sidewalk cannot be repaired by an acceptable method, then it will be removed and replaced with a new sidewalk section.”

Source: Office of City Auditor interviews with officials from five U.S. cities (three selected).



Seattle does not enforce private property owner's responsibilities for sidewalk repair



The screenshot shows a web browser window with the URL seattle.gov/transportation/projects-and-programs/programs/maintenance-and-paving/sidewalk-repair-program. The page header includes the Seattle.gov logo, Mayor Jenny A. Durkan's name, a language dropdown set to English, a search bar, and a menu icon. Below the header is a large photograph of a city sidewalk lined with trees and parked cars. The main content area features a black box with the title "Sidewalk Repair Program" in white. Underneath, there is a section titled "What we do" with a brief description of the program's goal. A sub-section titled "Adjacent Property Owners are Responsible for Maintaining Sidewalks" explains the municipal code requirements. To the right, there is a "Contact" section with phone and email information, and a "Quick Links" section with a list of related resources.

Sidewalk Repair Program

What we do

The Sidewalk Repair Program oversees the maintenance of the City's sidewalks and curbs. The program's goal is to make sidewalks safe and accessible.

Adjacent Property Owners are Responsible for Maintaining Sidewalks

As in many other cities, the Seattle Municipal Code requires that adjacent property owners keep their sidewalks in good repair and safe for public travel. This means keeping the sidewalk clear from vegetation overgrowth, snow, and ice accumulation, as well as making repairs to the sidewalks when damaged. [Additional information for adjacent property owners can be found here](#).

Contact

Phone: [\(206\) 684-7623](tel:(206)684-7623)
Email: 684-Road@seattle.gov

Quick Links

- [Report Sidewalk Questions/Concerns Online](#)
- [New and improved sidewalks near schools](#)
- [Neighborhood Street Fund](#)
- [Pedestrian Master Plan](#)
- [Trees and Landscaping Permits](#)



Washington State law governing enforcement of private property owners' responsibilities is complex

Process requires, for each individual case:

1. Identification of the costs to be assessed to be placed on the municipality's "assessment roll,"
2. Providing notice to the property owner and public,
3. A City Council hearing, and after the hearing,
4. Having the City Council, by ordinance, affirm the costs assessed against the abutting property owner.



City of Oakland, California showing results with its Buy, Sell, Repair Ordinance

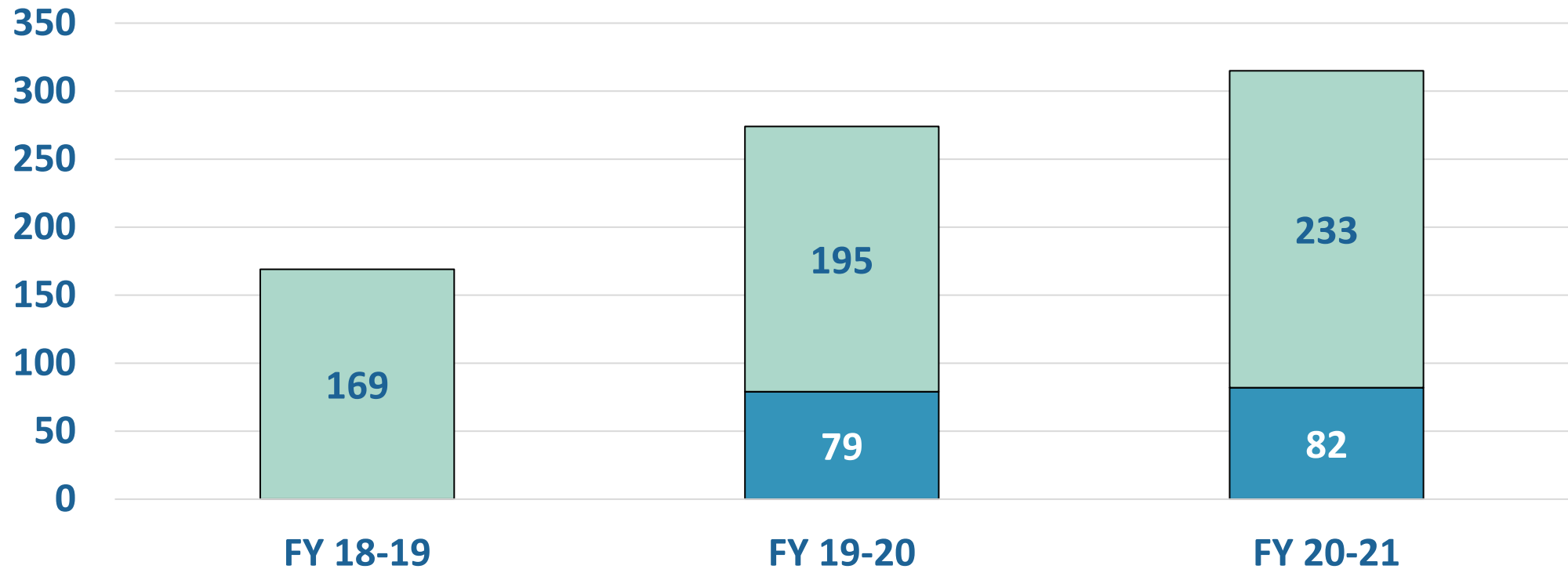
Property owners must repair their sidewalks and/or certify the sidewalk is compliant when selling a property, transferring title on a property, or performing a renovation on their lot valued at more than \$100,000.

First year results:

- 121 additional locations of sidewalk repair
- 62 percent increase over the prior year



City of Oakland's Sidewalk Repair Permits issued in the last three years



- Number of regular sidewalk permits
- Number of sidewalk repair permits due to Buy-Sell-Repair ordinance



Increased enforcement can be paired with financing and financial assistance programs

- **Denver, Colorado** has a sidewalk repair revolving fund.
- **Portland, Oregon** has an efficient, online permitting process for property owners, and offers loans to cover repair costs.
- **Oakland, California** has a small fund that can be used to perform sidewalk repairs at no cost to qualified (proof of participation in a means-tested program) low-income property owners.



First recommendation related to fixing sidewalks the City is responsible for

Recommendation	Status	Explanation
Implement a five-year shim/bevel plan.	Pending	<p><u>2018</u>: SDOT started prioritizing sidewalk spot mitigation based on citywide grids.</p> <p><u>2021</u>: Completed almost 15,000 shims and bevels.</p> <p><u>2022</u>: SDOT is positioned to scale up a program as more funding becomes available.</p> <p>SDOT would need \$3-4M in additional funding to complete a 5-year beveling and shimming maintenance program that would cover the whole City. To maintain the existing maintenance level, SDOT would need an additional \$1.5 million each year.</p>



Second recommendation related to fixing sidewalks the City is responsible for

Recommendation	Status	Explanation
Secure increased and stable funding sources	Pending	SDOT officials told us that sidewalk repairs and the associated funding needed to complete those repairs continues to be a priority for SDOT and a topic of discussion, both internally and with the community, as they move toward the end of the Move Seattle levy and seek other funding mechanisms.



Recommendations related to encouraging and enforcing private property owner responsibilities

- **Increase property owner awareness and education about sidewalk responsibilities.**
- **Simplify the sidewalk repair permitting process.**
- **Explore changes to state and city laws** to allow for more streamlined enforcement options so that private property owners meet their legal responsibilities (implement clearer enforcement methods).
- **Explore the use of a Buy, Sell, Repair Ordinance:**
 - Implement a sidewalk repair financing program.
 - Institute an income-based cost-sharing program for lower-income property owners.



Private property owners' responsibilities

Recommendation	Status	Explanation
<p>Increase property owner awareness and education about sidewalk responsibilities</p>	<p>Pending</p>	<p>SDOT is developing a public facing interactive website called the Sidewalk StoryMap</p> <p>Expected completion: Second quarter 2022</p>
<p>Simplify the sidewalk repair permitting process</p>	<p>Pending</p>	<p>The bulk of Street Use Permits (including sidewalk repair permits) transitioned to the Accela permitting system in 2020. Accela allows permit applicants to easily submit and monitor permit applications.</p> <p>SDOT is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • updating its Sidewalk Repair Client Assistance Memo (2208) • working on a Racial Equity toolkit to make sidewalk repair information more accessible to individuals who are Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC). <p>Expected completion: Fourth quarter 2022</p>



Private property owners' responsibilities

Recommendation	Status	Explanation
Explore changes to state and city laws to allow for more streamlined enforcement options so that private property owners meet their legal responsibilities (implement clearer enforcement methods)	In progress	<p>SDOT has worked with OIR to have these changes reflected in the City's state legislative agenda.</p> <p>As part of this, OIR consulted with the Association of Washington Cities (AWC), who recommended outreach to legislators to identify champions and begin additional work in the interim leading up to a longer legislative session.</p> <p>SDOT will work with OIR during the interim to cultivate these allies and champions, along with a draft bill.</p>



Questions?

Copies of our report can be found at:

<https://www.seattle.gov/cityauditor/reports#2021>

