

**Commissioner Questions and Staff Responses**

Follow-up to: [New Sidewalk Millage](#) discussion, June 17, 2020

Commissioner feedback:

1) I believe that the proposed sidewalk gap millage should not cover the full cost of construction to fill gaps. It should do one of the following:

a) Pay for a percentage of what would previously have been assessed (say, 50%) with the balance assessed to the property owner, or

b) Pay 100% of the cost beyond a capped value. The capped value would be paid in whole via assessment to the homeowner. The capped value could be based on the length of the gap or a fixed number (say, \$4,000).

These two options above have the following benefits:

- Significantly more distance of sidewalk gap could be filled each year, since the millage amount is based on a 5-year average amount that has been assessed to property owners. So if that money pays, say 50% of the cost to each property owner, then that money would allow for *approximately* twice as much gap distance to be filled annually.

- The two options would address questions of fairness that could legitimately be raised by the thousands of property owners that have paid 100% for their sidewalks for generations. This may improve the chances of the millage getting voter support and ultimately being passed.

2) I do not support gradually phasing in the millage support to property owners over the life of the millage. This would strongly encourage property owners to delay, obstruct, and lobby Council Members to push back their date of construction until the terms are more favorable. The terms should be consistent throughout the life of the millage to prevent gamesmanship. We've already seen this happen over the last couple of months with property owners lobbying Council to delay gaps that had already been approved until after the millage vote. I worry that this would be a constant state of affairs if the benefit were to be phased in over time.

3) We should be aware that if this millage passes, then virtually no property owner will ever agree to be assessed for a sidewalk gap ever again after the millage ends. I believe that it will set a precedent such that if it isn't renewed indefinitely, then filling in gaps will be ground to a halt after the millage ends unless the city finds a different source of funding. This prospect is a little frightening long-term given the amount of gaps we still have in the city (and would still have after one instance of this millage).

Staff response:

In regards to #1, staff has completed additional data review and calculations regarding the percentage of sidewalk gap projects that have been actually paid for by special assessment. Looking at data from the last 5 years or so, it appears that special assessments only made up an average of 5.6% of the total cost of the projects, with the highest amount being only about 12%. This is due mainly to the use of Federal funds to offset costs, and our efforts to avoid assessing for ancillary items like retaining walls, tree replacements, and extensive grading. Based on this analysis there would not be a great amount of extra revenue available for building more sidewalks if we went with the partial assessment option.

Commissioner feedback:

Concerned that overall spending on sidewalk gap filling would decrease through the millage, leading to less gaps filled overall.

**Staff response:**

Currently, average annual spending on sidewalk gap filling is \$1.1M, which comes from federal aid, the current millage, and special assessments; annual property owner assessments falls between \$55 - \$65k total (on average). The proposed 0.20 mill would generate \$1.3M annually, and federal aid will still be sought. Therefore, the new millage will outpace (or at least not fall below) current spending, and on average result in as many or more miles of sidewalk being constructed.

Commissioner feedback:

Concerned that the new millage will be shouldering costs previously covered by the current Street, Bridges, and Sidewalks millage.

Staff response:

The current Street, Bridge and Sidewalk millage does not have any dedicated funds specifically for sidewalk gap filling. The intent of the new millage is not as a generator of *additional* funding for sidewalk gaps, but rather to provide dedicated funding to these projects and remove the barrier that special assessments pose to successful completion of projects.