

To: Mayor and City Council Members  
Transportation Commission Members  
Nick [REDACTED] Theresa [REDACTED]  
From: Homeowners / residents at 1114 – 1200 Brooks Street  
Date: January 26, 2023  
Re: Request that City **not** spend scarce millage dollars to build a proposed east-side sidewalk in the 1114 - 1200 block of Brooks across from the existing sidewalk and boulevard (from Robin to Hockey Lane), and that the City eliminate this item before any bid for the Brooks sidewalk gap project is approved.

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## **BACKGROUND:**

As part of road repairs on Brooks Street scheduled for 2023, the City proposes also spending sidewalk gap millage funds to construct sidewalks both where there is no sidewalk on either side, as well as across from an existing sidewalk on the west side of Brooks between Robin Road and Hockey Lane. We have been told that City staff is proposing a bumped-out sidewalk (into the existing street) for our east-side block (1114 to 1200 Brooks) across from this existing sidewalk and the paved boulevard of Robin<sup>1</sup>, in order to protect all the east-side landmark trees. We agree with City staff that these landmark trees must be protected, but there is a less costly way to do so – simply leave this east-side block as-is and build no sidewalk at all across from the existing west-side sidewalk and boulevard.

## **SUMMARY OF REQUEST:**

**The undersigned, all the homeowners and residents in this block (1114 to 1200 Brooks), urge the City *not* to spend scarce tax resources to build *any* sidewalk in our block on the east side of Brooks, and request the City to eliminate this item before any construction bid for the rest of the Brooks sidewalk gap project is approved. With not enough sidewalk gap millage funds to fill even all of the “highest” priority gaps during its 6-year term, it seems to us unwise and unfair to taxpayers elsewhere to fill this lower priority gap across from a perfectly adequate existing sidewalk. Using the funds where the sidewalk need is greater would be a much more equitable and fiscally wise use of these tax dollars.**

## **WHY ELIMINATING A PROPOSED SIDEWALK FOR OUR BLOCK MAKES SENSE:**

Here’s a look at the numbers, from information provided to Council from City Engineering, and why a sidewalk on our east-side block would not be a wise or equitable use of taxpayer dollars:

**1. Limited millage revenue.** The 6-year Sidewalk Gap millage generates only about \$1.3M per year.

**2. Sidewalk cost per mile.** The City Engineering 2021 estimate of total sidewalk gap construction cost was between \$150M to \$220M (in 2020 dollars) for all 144 miles of gaps. At the midpoint in cost estimates (\$185M), the cost would be about \$1.28M per sidewalk mile. With

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<sup>1</sup> The frontage of 1200 Brooks is partially across from the existing west-side sidewalk and partially across from the boulevard width of Robin Road. The other addresses in our block (1114 – 1128) are across from the existing west-side sidewalk.

annual revenue of about \$1.3M, this could allow construction of only about 1.02 miles of sidewalk per year or approximately 6.12 total sidewalk miles over the 6 years of the millage.

**3. Total miles of the ranked sequence of gap priorities.** The City has created a sidewalk gap priority ranking system with 6 levels.<sup>2</sup> In the ranking of gap priorities there are:

- 7.4 miles (39,300 ft.) in the “highest” priority category
- 14.58 miles (77,000 ft.) in the “high” priority category (which is the category currently assigned to all of the Brooks gaps, although, as noted below, this is *not* correct for our block of Brooks, which should only be “mid-high”)
- 29.9 miles (157,900 ft.) in the “mid-high” priority category.
- 36.57 miles (193,100 ft.) in the “mid-low” priority category
- 35.02 miles (184,900 ft.) in the “low” priority category
- 18.62 miles (98,300 ft.) in the “lowest” priority category

**4. Revenue deficit to fill even all “highest” priority gaps.** The blunt reality is this – with only enough revenue for about 6.12 miles of sidewalks over the 6 years of the millage, there will not be enough revenue even to fill all 7.4 miles of “highest” priority sidewalk gaps, let alone any of the rest of the lower-priority gaps.<sup>3</sup>

**5. City incorrectly scored our block of Brooks. Should not be “high” priority.** Because the gap millage dollars are so limited, accuracy in prioritizing spending really matters. One scoring criterion that results in a lower priority gap score is where there is an “existing sidewalk on one side” of an urban collector. We note with concern that the computerized gap scoring for our block of Brooks is *not* correct. The scoring incorrectly notes “no sidewalk on either side” in the stretch of Brooks on the east side from Bydding south to across from Hockey Lane when in fact there *is* a sidewalk across the street for the majority of this gap. If our block of Brooks (1114 – 1200) was accurately scored and weighted for this criterion, the overall score for this block would be reduced from 4.19<sup>4</sup> to no more than 3.97 which would put our block of Brooks in the next lower sidewalk priority category (“mid-high” – below both “highest” and “high” categories).

**6. Sidewalks on only one side of a street wherever possible is a wise way to stretch limited gap millage dollars to more areas.** Given the very limited millage funding, the City should revise the scoring system for prioritizing sidewalk gaps – particularly the criterion referenced in item 5 above where there is an “existing sidewalk on one side” of an urban collector. In our view, this should be revised so that in most cases this criterion would be *the* determining factor in making such a gap a “low” or “lowest” priority one, and should result as much as possible in *not* installing a sidewalk across the street from an existing sidewalk in older residential neighborhoods -- as in our

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<sup>2</sup> The gap prioritization scoring ranges are: Highest: 4.97 - 7.00; High: 4.11 - 4.96; Mid-High: 3.39 - 4.10; Mid-Low: 2.76 - 3.38; Low: 2.14 - 2.75; Lowest: <2.13

<sup>3</sup> Even if taxpayers kept voting to renew the gap millage over and over -- which is *not* a given -- it would take roughly 120 years to fill all 144 miles of gaps (assuming revenue and costs stayed the same), and take over 22 years even to fill all the “highest” and “high” priority sidewalk gaps.

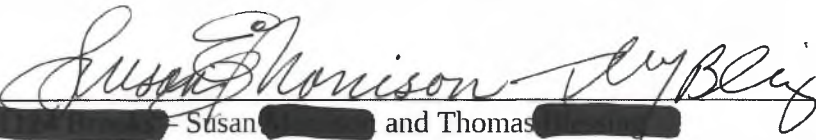
<sup>4</sup> This was the total score assigned per the engineering department’s computerized prioritization matrix, without the correction for the factual error noted in para. 5.

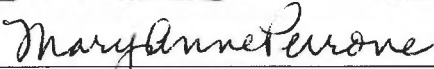

block of Brooks. Limiting sidewalks to a single side of the street wherever possible is a much more equitable and effective way to stretch gap millage dollars to higher priority areas and more areas.

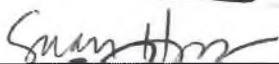

Other aspects of the priority scoring system also need attention – for example, the category “proximity to schools” should, in fairness, be fine-tuned to address only neighborhood schools where there are children walking to school, as opposed to a commuter school like Ann Arbor Open School on Brooks.

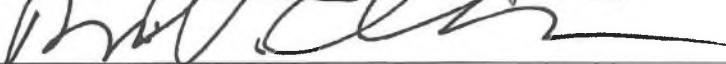
**7. We applaud decision in 2022 project to fill gap on only one side of street.** We applaud the City’s decision for a 2022 gap project to add a sidewalk on just *one* side of the street, not both, in the block of Hiscock south of Summit then curving west. There is now a painted crosswalk at the corner of Daniel where the sidewalk ends to cross over to the new sidewalk on just one side of this block of Hiscock. This is a great example of a fiscally-smart approach of limiting sidewalks to a single side of the street wherever possible. The same concept should be applied to our block by leaving it as-is because of the existing sidewalk across the street. If necessary, similar painted crosswalks could be added from the east side of Brooks over to the west side where appropriate.

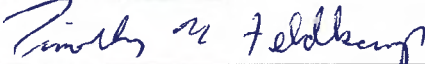
**8. Focus on “highest” priority sidewalk gaps first.** The reality is -- there aren’t enough millage dollars. Spending priorities need to be revised and more stringently followed. We strongly urge the City to focus first on the “highest” priority gaps. Do not spend scarce tax dollars on lesser priorities – like our “mid-high” priority block of Brooks (across from a perfectly adequate existing sidewalk and a paved boulevard) -- before the higher priorities have first been met. The costs saved by eliminating the proposed east-side sidewalk for our block should be used to fill higher priority gaps. In our view, that’s the more responsible and equitable way to allocate these funds. If the lower-priority sidewalk proposed for our block is not eliminated, how does the City explain to taxpayers on routes ranked “highest” or “high” priority that their sidewalk gaps weren’t really “highest” or “high” priority after all?

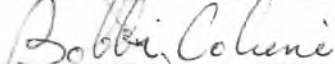

  
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- Susan \_\_\_\_\_ and Thomas \_\_\_\_\_

  
  
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- Mary Anne \_\_\_\_\_ and Ricardo \_\_\_\_\_

  
  
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- Susan \_\_\_\_\_ and Trevor \_\_\_\_\_

  
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- David \_\_\_\_\_

  
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- Tim \_\_\_\_\_

  
  
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- Bobbi \_\_\_\_\_ and Rick \_\_\_\_\_