

**TO:** Tacoma Permit Advisory Task Force  
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**SUBJECT:** **Policy background on off-site improvements related to sidewalk requirements**  
**DATE:** September 9, 2021

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**SUMMARY:**

The Tacoma Permit Advisory Task Force prioritized off-site improvements as a discussion item for 2021. In the June, July, and August meetings, Task Force members identified specific off-site improvements to consider. The September meeting will focus on concerns related to required sidewalk infrastructure. This memo provides information on plans, policies, and guidelines that direct City of Tacoma staff when they require off-site improvements related to sidewalks.

**OVERVIEW OF PURPOSE:**

TACOMA 2025: STRATEGIC – ACCESSIBILITY

Tacoma 2025 represents our community’s vision for Tacoma’s future. With defined indicators and other ways to measure progress, it is a plan that guides where the City of Tacoma – as both a local government organization and a community – is going. It is also a plan that helps us direct our efforts and resources in ways that reflect our growing community’s evolving needs. Council reviews and affirms this vision at their annual strategic retreat.

Key goals from Tacoma 2025:

- Goal #1 Livability: Tacoma will be a city of choice in the region known for connected neighborhoods...
- Goal #2 Economy and Workforce: Tacoma will be a growing economy where Tacoma residents can find livable wage jobs in key industry areas. Tacoma will be a place of choice for employers, professionals, and new graduates.
- Goal #5 Equity and Accessibility: Tacoma will ensure that all residents are treated equitably and have access to services, facilities, and financial stability.

Plans and policy

The Tacoma City Council has approved several plans and policies that direct staff to prioritize accessibility and sidewalk infrastructure. These include:

- One Tacoma – Comprehensive Plan (Multiple Sections)
- Tacoma 2025 Strategic Plan - focuses on equity in access
- Climate Action Resolution – increased tree canopy
- Vision Zero Resolution – multimodal streets (< cars) – NO SERIOUS COLLISIONS BY 2035
- Affordable Housing Initiative – easy access to transportation
- 2015 City Transportation Plan (amended in 2018)
  - Mobility Master Plan (Appendix C)

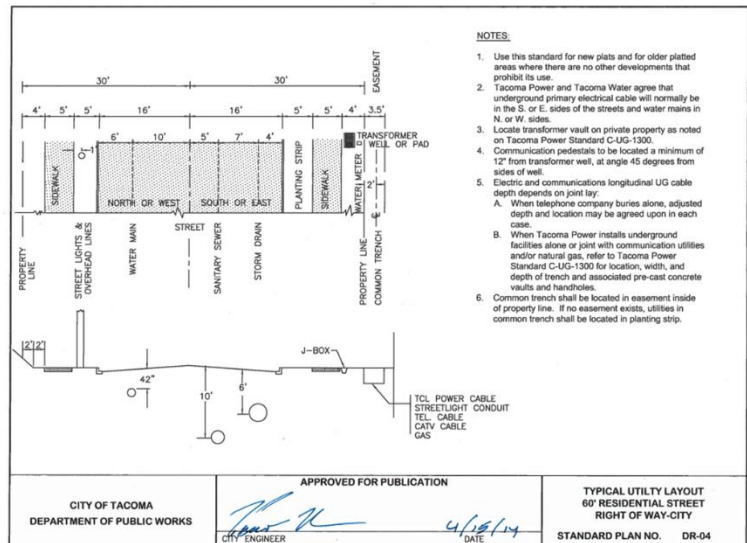
**RESOURCES FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ON CODES AND GUIDELINES:**

The information below directly cites codes and guidelines that govern off-site improvements related to sidewalks in the City of Tacoma.

**TMC2.22.040 Off-site Improvement Requirements.**

**B. Off-site Improvements.**

1. Off-site improvements **shall be required for all New Construction, Additions, Site Uses, Change of Occupancies** as defined in the International Existing Building Code, Moved Buildings, and Remodels/Alterations to existing buildings. Projects involving more than one project type (New Construction, Additions, Change of Occupancy, and Remodel/Alteration) shall apply the most restrictive criteria in Table 2.22.1.
2. The Director of Planning and Development Services, or designee, is authorized to establish and modify or eliminate the offsite improvement requirements shown in Table 2.22.1 for individual cases where there are practicable difficulties involved in implementation of the requirements of this code. **The Director of Planning and Development Services, or designee, shall determine the order of preference when determining off-site improvement requirements, considering health, safety, and welfare, along with environmental protections as the primary objectives.** Secondary objectives may include considerations for transportation corridors and proximity to schools and parks. Although a maximum level of off-site improvements that may be imposed by project type is shown in Table 2.22.1, this limitation shall not apply to any additional improvements for projects that have requirements imposed by a SEPA, Conditional Use Permit, or other conditioning documents. **Nor does it absolve the property owner of the responsibility to repair any damaged or defective sidewalk.**
3. Off-site improvements, as defined in TMC 2.19.020, shall be constructed to conform to **City of Tacoma Standards** as defined by, but not limited to, the City of Tacoma’s most current: Right-of-Way Design Manual; Right-of-Way Restoration Policy; Stormwater Management Manual; and/or Side Sewer and Sanitary Sewer Availability Manual.
4. The following off-site improvement requirements shall apply to all applicable project types listed in Table 2.22.1.
  - b. Off-site improvements are dependent on the project type and threshold listed in Table 2.22.1, and shall require the development of cement concrete curb and gutter, **sidewalks**, curb ramps, paving, safety measures, other right-of-way elements and drainage of all dedicated streets along the lot frontages, except, in cases where the topography or other conditions make it impractical



C. Fee In Lieu of. Upon approval of the Director of Planning and Development Services, or designee, a fee may be paid in lieu of construction of the required off-site improvements. In addition, the Director of Planning and Development Services, or designee, shall determine the eligible off-site improvements and fee in lieu amount. The fees shall be paid at the time of permit issuance and deposited in the Fee In Lieu of Off-site Improvements Fund.

### **Sidewalk responsibilities**

Revised Code of Washington (RCW) [35.69](#) and Tacoma Municipal Code (TMC) 9.17 and TMC 10.18 and 10.20.

- [https://www.cityoftacoma.org/government/city\\_departments/public\\_works/engineering/sidewalks](https://www.cityoftacoma.org/government/city_departments/public_works/engineering/sidewalks)
- Abutting Property Owners Are Responsible for Maintaining Their Portion of the Right-of-Way in Tacoma
  - The public right-of-way is typically an easement over the land of the abutting property owner. According to our TMC 8.30.020, public right-of-way includes the area of land, the right to possession of which is secured by the City for right-of-way purposes and includes the traveled portion of the public streets and alleys, as well as the border area, which includes, but is not limited to, any sidewalks, planting strips, traffic circles, or medians.
  - The City of Tacoma requires abutting property owners to maintain adjoining rights-of-way. This includes streets and alleys extending from the owner's property lines out to the curbs or edges of pavement (includes sidewalks and planting strips) if improved, or if unimproved (unpaved), out to the centerlines. There are several places in the Tacoma Municipal Code where these obligations are stated: Chapters [9.17](#), [9.18](#), [8.30](#), and [12.09](#).

### **Complete Streets Design Guidelines**

- *On November 17<sup>th</sup> 2009, the City Council adopted Resolution Number 37916 endorsing the creation and ongoing development of the Complete Streets Design Guidelines; and, directing the City Manager to implement the Mixed-use Centers Complete Streets Design Guidelines and the Residential Complete Streets Design Guidelines.*

#### Complete Streets Section 2.3

##### Residential Complete Street Design

##### Considerations and Features

- Sidewalks on both sides
- Minimum 5 feet wide
- Curb ramps should be installed at all crossing points meeting ADA
- Bulb outs should be considered
- Sidewalk cross slopes of 2% max and ramp grades of 8.33% also meeting ADA

#### Complete Street Design Guidelines

[https://www.cityoftacoma.org/government/city\\_departments/planning\\_and\\_development\\_services/planning\\_services/complete\\_street\\_design\\_guidelines\\_project](https://www.cityoftacoma.org/government/city_departments/planning_and_development_services/planning_services/complete_street_design_guidelines_project)

TMC10.29 – Complete Streets

10.29.020 Purpose – Objectives.

The purpose of this Chapter is to provide guiding principles and practices so that transportation improvements are planned, designed, and constructed to **encourage walking**, bicycling, and transit use while **promoting safe operations for all users** of the City’s transportation network. The Public Works Department (“Department”) will prioritize the safety and convenience of all users of the transportation system, including pedestrians, bicyclists, transit riders, people of all ages and abilities, motorists, emergency responders, freight providers, and adjacent land users. The goals and policies of this Chapter 10.29 and as incorporated into the Transportation Element of the City of Tacoma Comprehensive Plan, are hereby designated as the Tacoma Complete Streets Policy (“Complete Streets”).

## Design Manual – Chapter 4 – Section 7 - Mobility Facilities (a.k.a. Sidewalks)

### 7.1 Sidewalk, Amenity Zone and Buffer Widths

The City minimum standard sidewalk width is 5 feet. Additional width is required in the circumstances listed below by roadway type/area.

7.1.1 Residential - Adjacent to residential streets, sidewalk widths shall be a minimum of 5 feet, excluding the curb and buffer or planting strip.

7.1.2 Arterials - Adjacent to arterials, sidewalk widths shall be a minimum of 7 feet (excluding the curb and buffer or planting strip), unless otherwise specified in the TMC or City design guidelines. Wider sidewalks may also be required adjacent to angle parking to account for vehicle overhang.

7.1.3 Mixed-Use Centers - For these high pedestrian activity areas, the City Council has directed that wider sidewalk and amenity zones be provided (see Complete Streets Mixed-Use Centers Design Guidelines)...

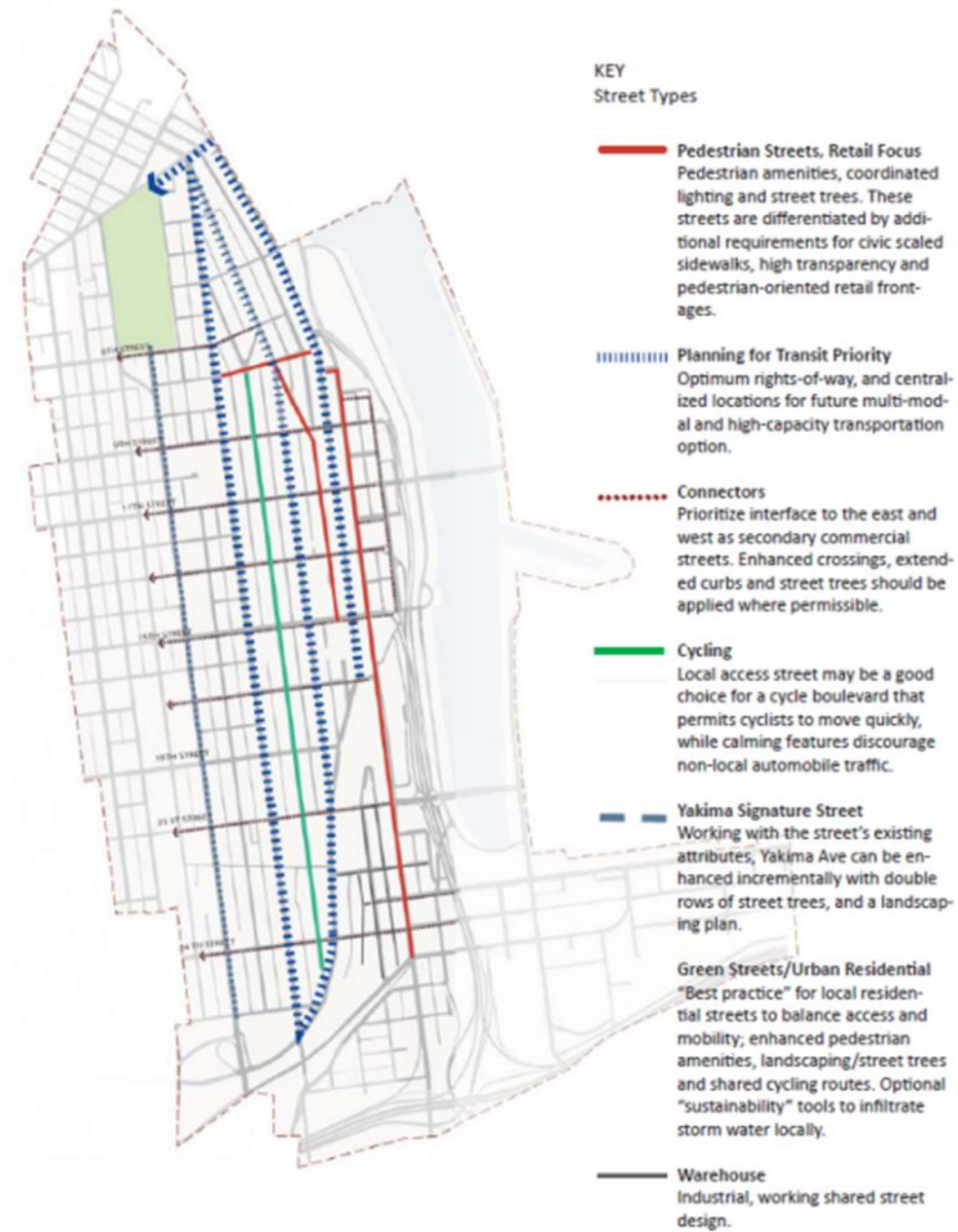
On streets designated as pedestrian streets or primary pedestrian streets in TMC 13.06 and 13.06A respectively, a typical sidewalk width of 10 to 12 feet and an additional amenity zone width of 6 to 8 feet shall be provided....

**7.1.4 Downtown** - On streets within downtown Tacoma, specific sidewalk and amenity zone widths are called out by street in the Downtown Element of the Comprehensive Plan (see Figure 4-13). In all circumstances, a minimum 7 feet shall be provided for unobstructed pedestrian passage.

Table 4-7: Downtown Tacoma – Desired Sidewalk/Amenity Zone Widths

Street Types	Sidewalk/Amenity Zone Widths
Pedestrian, retail streets	15.5 feet
Transit priority	14 feet
Connectors	11 feet
Cycling boulevards	18 feet
Urban residential	10 feet
Green streets	20 feet
Yakima Avenue	20 feet
Warehouse District	Varies

Figure 4-13: Downtown Tacoma Plan



## Design Manual - Chapter 8 - Pedestrian Facilities

### SECTION 1 Design Guides and Resources

The following resources are meant to accompany the requirements of this Manual:

#### Federal/State/Local Laws and Codes

- ADA, 28 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Part 35
- 23 CFR Part 652, Pedestrians and Bicycle Accommodations and Projects
- 49 CFR Part 27, Nondiscrimination on the Basis of Disability in Programs or Activities Receiving Federal Financial Assistance (Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 implementing regulations)
- Revised Code of Washington (RCW) 35.68, Sidewalks, Gutters, Curbs and Driveways
- RCW 35.68.075, Curb Ramps for persons with Disabilities
- RCW 46.04.160, Crosswalk (definition)
- RCW 46.61, Rules of the Road
- RCW 47.24.020, City Streets as Part of State Highways – Jurisdiction, Control
  
- PROWAG
- City of Tacoma Curb Ramp Installation Matrix
- City of Tacoma Right-of-Way Restoration Policy
- City of Tacoma, Right-of-Way Design Manual Issued: January 7, 2016
- Chapter 8 8-4 Revised: January 11, 2018
- City of Tacoma Transportation Master Plan
- SWMM
- City of Tacoma Complete Streets Guidelines
- City of Tacoma APS Policy

### SECTION 2 - Policy

It is the City's policy to provide appropriate pedestrian facilities as an integral part of the transportation system, and that bicycle and pedestrian facilities are given full consideration in the planning and design of new construction and reconstruction ROW projects, except where bicycle and pedestrian use is prohibited

### SECTION 3 - ADA Requirements by Project Type

Wherever pedestrian facilities are intended to be a part of the transportation facility, federal regulations (28 CFR Part 35) require that those pedestrian facilities meet ADA guidelines.

## Design Manual - Chapter 8 – Section 5 - Pedestrian Facilities – Pedestrian Accessible Route (PAR)

#### *Design Requirements:*

- Cross slope – max of 2%
- PAR running shall not exceed the general grade of the roadway. Should the roadway slope be less than 5% any running slopes exceeding 5% must be designed as an access ramp.
- Surface discontinuities may not exceed ½ inch maximum (see example photo below). Vertical discontinuities between ¼ inch and ½ inch maximum shall be beveled at 2:1 or flatter. Apply the bevel across the entire level change.

- Opening shall not permit passage of a 0.5 inch diameter.

### **Design Manual Chapter 8 – Section 6 - Sidewalks**

- The City minimum standard residential sidewalk width is 5 feet (excluding the curb width and required planting strip).
- Adjacent to arterials, sidewalk widths shall be a minimum of 7 feet (excluding the curb width and buffer or planting strip), unless specified in the TMC or design guidelines.
- For example, minimum widths for mixed-use centers shall be superseded by the mixed-use center design criteria found in TMC 13.06.300. A 10 to 12 foot sidewalk is preferred for high pedestrian traffic and commercial areas.
- Wider sidewalks may also be required adjacent to angle parking to account for vehicle overhang. Refer to CHAPTER 4 for additional information.