



**City of Tacoma  
Tacoma Permit Advisory  
Task Force**

**Memorandum**

**TO:** Mayor Victoria Woodards, Tacoma City Council, and City Manager Elizabeth Pauli

**FROM:** Tacoma Permit Advisory Task Force

**SUBJECT:** Recommendation on development requirements for offsite improvements pertaining to sidewalks, curb, and gutter improvements

**DATE:** February 10, 2022

**CC:** Jennifer Kammerzell, Kurtis Kingsolver, Peter Huffman, Philip Kao, Terry Forslund, Chris Johnson, Lynda Foster

In 2021, the Tacoma Permit Advisory Task Force (Task Force) has spent significant time focused on issues that affect the off-Site development of projects, this is public land adjacent to a development that must be improved to meet Public Works (PW) requirements. It is common for development to trigger these requirements to build, repair, upgrade, and replace portions of public infrastructure that is in the right-of-way and not owned by the developing party. Common off-site improvements include curbs, gutters, catch basins, street surface improvements, street trees and landscaping, and sidewalks.

Public Works provided context for Tacoma's goal of having a complete pedestrian and bike transportation network, one that prioritizes safe routes to school. Staff and the Task Force agree that this is a worthwhile goal. The Task Force believes the implementation of the policy is not proving effective. Tacoma has 969 miles of sidewalk (approximately 70% of the city) and 408 miles are left to be completed. City data projects it would cost \$1.2B to complete the sidewalk/curb ramp/Safe-Routes system. At current average annual expenditures (\$12M) the network is expected to be complete in 100 years. Many of the existing sidewalks we do have are nonconforming and do not meet accessibility requirements so the Task Force believes the cost is even higher. The goals, policy, and implementation strategy is worthy of reconsideration by the Council.

Tacoma's current policy requires major development projects to provide conforming curb, gutter, and sidewalk along parcel frontage, this requirement does not consider whether adjacent parcels have a sidewalk to connect to or not. The policy relies on the assumption that eventually enough development will occur to complete the network. In reality, this policy has resulted in random patches of curb, gutter, and sidewalk connecting to nothing. The Task Force refers to these as "Sidewalks to Nowhere". Development projects that are not connected to the network are spending significant money on offsite improvements that cannot practically be used. A block that does not have a sidewalk from corner to corner is not a useful sidewalk.

The Task Force recommends considering allowing a fee-in-lieu or other policy that can collect reasonable resources from significant development and to use them elsewhere for high priority locations where the network needs it more. This would be in the public good and help to expedite the safe pedestrian network Tacoma desires.