

City and County of San Francisco



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DPW Order No: 178.884
Guidelines for Inspection of Sidewalk Defects

Public Works Code Section 706 states that it is the duty of the property owner(s) to maintain sidewalks in front of and adjacent to their properties in good repair and condition.

The property owner is responsible for the repair and condition of the sidewalk fronting his/her property except in the following instances:

- When the damage is caused by City maintained trees (i.e., tree root damage).
- When the damage is in the sidewalk corner (angular corner or corner return).
- When the damage is related to a utility facility.
- Special instances where City maintains sidewalks, e.g. Market Street Bricks or Mission Street Tiles

When the Department of Public Works (DPW) inspects, or becomes aware of, sidewalk problems, it will inform the responsible party of sidewalk defects such as gaps, cracks, chips, displacement, holes, or other defects. The normal process to repair a sidewalk defect is the removal and replacement of the sidewalk as specified in the City's Standard Specifications (Section 204). However, DPW Order 177,526 provides for alternative temporary repair methods (e.g. patching and grinding) that are available to property owners. Note that this Order contains general guidance. Some conditions may warrant immediate attention.

This Order establishes DPW's guidelines to improve sidewalk accessibility within the area of the sidewalk most traveled by pedestrians and referred to in the *Better Streets Plan* (2009- page 98) as the "Throughway Zone". Sidewalk defects that impair pedestrian accessibility shall be identified as a priority for repair and must be corrected by the responsible party in a timely manner.

The Throughway Zone shall be defined as the area of sidewalk most traveled by pedestrians. Judgment by the inspector will be paramount in determining the Throughway Zone, but it can be described as the area which is 12 inches beyond any physical obstruction from the property line to within 12 inches of the closest obstruction adjacent to the curb (e.g., tree basin, parking meter, street light etc.). In the case of a narrow sidewalk where the "Throughway Zone" would be less than 48 inches, the area most traveled by pedestrians is defined as 12 inches beyond any physical obstruction from the property line and extending towards the curb.

The following defects found within the Throughway Zone most traveled by pedestrians are priorities for repair:

- (1) Vertical Displacement – where the sidewalk pavement, or curb, is displaced by ½ inch or more from the abutting pavement or curb.
- (2) Voids, cracks, chips, holes, gaps – where sidewalk pavement, or curb, has eroded leaving a ½ inch or more void, in width and/or depth, from abutting pavement or curb.

These measurements should account for existing grades, slopes and existing sidewalk patterns.

Exceptions to the prioritized pedestrian area should include missing / damaged sewer / utility box covers and curbs with defects that exceed 1 inch. In the case of a specific Request for Action, or as directed by your supervisor, please utilize Sections 1 and 2 for the entire sidewalk area.

These guidelines allow inspections and subsequent repairs to be conducted expeditiously. These guidelines are not meant to defer or relieve a property owner's responsibility to maintain defect-free sidewalks. In addition to areas identified by DPW that must be repaired, a property owner should also identify and repair any defect to the pavement in order to fully comply with Sec. 706 of the Public Works Code.

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Sidewalk Width and Zones

Well-designed sidewalks are a fundamental part of good multi-modal streets. They are the building block of a great pedestrian environment and are critical to the quality of public life and pedestrian safety in San Francisco.

Sidewalks should be included on both sides of all streets throughout the city. As pedestrian crossings at intersections are considered extensions of the sidewalk, crosswalk closures create discontinuous sidewalks and should be evaluated and re-opened as appropriate (see Section 5.1).

Sidewalks should enable active public space and accessible pedestrian travel. Amenities such as landscaping, lighting, seating, and merchandise displays work to activate the street. These amenities should be properly organized to ensure safe and accessible travel. To accomplish this balance, a sidewalk must simultaneously be viewed holistically and through the organizing logic of a set of zones. The five zones, from property line to curb, are:

- **Frontage Zone:** The area adjacent to the property line where transitions between the public sidewalk and the space within buildings occur
- **Throughway Zone:** The portion of the sidewalk for pedestrian travel along the street
- **Furnishing Zone:** The portion of the sidewalk used for street trees, landscaping, transit stops, street lights, and fire furnishings
- **Edge Zone:** The area used by people getting in and out of vehicles parked at the curbside
- **Extension Zone:** The area where pedestrian space may be extended into the parking lane, via features such as bulb-outs with mid-block plazas

These terms are used throughout this plan.

SIDEWALK WIDTH

Sidewalk width has significant implications for streetscape design and the quality of the pedestrian environment. Sidewalks that are too narrow prevent pedestrians from moving safely and comfortably. Narrow sidewalks also make it difficult or impossible to provide important additional streetscape elements and pedestrian amenities.

A wide sidewalk offers pedestrians enough space to walk at their chosen pace, stand, sit, socialize, or merely enjoy their surroundings. Wider sidewalks also offer more space for landscaping and amenities, making the streetscape more useful and attractive and also acting as a buffer between traffic and pedestrians.

In addition to street types as described in this plan, the following variables should be considered in determining appropriate sidewalk width:

- **Adjacent land uses:** High-intensity uses attract more pedestrians, generally necessitating greater sidewalk widths.
- **Adjacent building form:** Taller buildings create greater shadow and scale; wider sidewalks can create greater separation from the buildings, and allow more sun to reach sidewalks opposite tall buildings.
- **Adjacent ground floor uses:** Office and residential uses are often slightly set back to allow a transition from public to private spaces. In contrast, buildings with active ground floor uses typically front more directly onto the street and often spill out into the sidewalk with seating or merchandise displays. These features may constrain clear sidewalk width.
- **Roadway characteristics:** Pedestrians are typically more comfortable on sidewalks that are buffered from moving vehicles. Faster, higher volumes of cars and trucks require a wider buffer to create a comfortable walking environment. On-street parking and bicycle lanes can serve as buffers; where they are not present, additional sidewalk width and landscaping may be necessary.

Sidewalk Zones (Plan View)

