CITY OF TUCSON, ARIZONA
DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

ENGINEERING DIVISION
ACTIVE PRACTICES GUIDELINES

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APPROVED BY: [signature] City Engineer DATE: 01/04/01

SUBJECT: SIDEWALK WIDTHS FOR ARTERIAL AND COLLECTOR ROADWAYS

A. PURPOSE:

To establish a design guideline for sidewalk widths along arterial and collector roadways, as well as to identify constraints that may prohibit the preferred minimum width from being realized.

B. BACKGROUND:

In 1999, policy direction was given that all sidewalks be constructed to a width of six (6) feet. The City's previous standard sidewalk width was four (4) feet with a three (3) foot curb-to-sidewalk buffer, or five (5) feet if the sidewalk is adjacent to the curb. In the months since this policy direction, staff has had several opportunities to implement wider sidewalks on Capital Improvement Projects. These opportunities have given insights into the various constraints and design issues that may arise during the course of a design effort. This Active Practice Guideline will establish the standard sidewalk width to be designed on Capital Improvement Projects, with a procedure to follow when this standard width cannot realistically be met.

C. POLICY:

The new policy, established by this Active Practice Guideline, is to design and construct sidewalks to a maximum width of six (6) feet, within the limits of the specific project budget. The designer shall explore all avenues in an attempt to provide this maximum width along arterial and collector roadways. This design may be supplemented by offsetting the sidewalk from the curb, and providing a maintenance-free, paved buffer of at least two feet.

It is understood that this width may be difficult to obtain, particularly throughout most of the City's urban setting; therefore, other options have been made available to the designer. These options include reduction of the sidewalk to a minimum width of five (5) feet, either when adjacent to the curb or offset by at least two feet. Only in the situations listed below shall the effective width of the sidewalk on arterial and collector roadways be reduced to less than five (5) feet.

Wider sidewalks adjacent to the curb may incorporate a 12 inch tactile warning strip adjacent to the curb, to alert users of their proximity to the curb. This strip can be in the form of ADA compliant brick pavers, exposed aggregate or stamped concrete, or sawcut rumble strips perpendicular to the curb.

D. RESTRICTIONS:

In attempting to provide a six (6) foot wide sidewalk, designers can expect to encounter a variety of restrictions. These restrictions include, but are not limited to, insufficient right-of-way, utility conflicts, landscape conflicts, existing sidewalks of lesser widths, and other physical barriers (walls, buildings, etc.). These restrictions are heretofore addressed:

Insufficient Right-of-Way – When this situation is encountered, the design shall attempt to identify all right-of-way necessary to achieve the wider sidewalk. With the assistance of the Real Estate Division, an estimated cost of acquisition can be determined. The Engineering project manager shall consider such factors as the estimated cost, the project budget, and the anticipated pedestrian usage along the subject stretch of sidewalk, and shall make a recommendation to the City Engineer. In the event that additional right-of-way is necessary to construct any of the necessary improvements, the designer should expand the acquisition area to include a wider sidewalk when reasonably possible.

Utility Conflicts – The guidance herein is meant to address the situation of continuous utility conflicts. When utility conflicts are encountered in isolated cases, the feasibility to relocate a utility to attain the preferred minimum sidewalk width may be unrealistic. Examples of such items that may be encountered include communications (US West) pedestals, pad mounted transformers, power and street light poles, and fire hydrants. In the event of a continuous run of power poles, the Engineering project manager shall evaluate the effort required of the affected utility to relocate the conflicting poles outside the proposed sidewalk area. In the event that the potential utility relocation falls under a prior rights situation, the project manager shall also consider the cost of the relocation being borne by the City, in the evaluation. At no time shall a utility conflict be allowed to remain if the effective sidewalk width is reduced to less than four (4) feet. The Engineering project manager shall weigh all factors and shall make a recommendation to the City Engineer.

Landscape Conflicts – This situation will typically involve limited right-of-way areas behind the proposed sidewalk. This will result in a landscape design that is inconsistent in terms of plant quantity, type, and size. The civil designer will be expected to work with the landscape designer to develop a consistent planting scheme while maintaining the integrity of the preferred minimum width requirement. Some situations may involve existing landscaping installed in the right-of-way by adjacent developments. Removal or modification of affected landscaping or irrigation systems shall be coordinated with the property owner. At no time shall a utility conflict be allowed to remain if the effective sidewalk width is reduced to less than four (4) feet. It should be noted that the use of tree grates, when installed flush with the sidewalk, may be considered as part of the sidewalk itself.

Existing Sidewalks of Lesser Width – This situation will usually be encountered on spot improvement projects. In the example that a stretch of sidewalk is proposed to be constructed between existing sidewalks, the design shall provide a minimum sidewalk width of six feet only when 100 linear feet of sidewalk or more is to be constructed (curb return to curb return). In the event that less than 100 linear feet of sidewalk is to be constructed, the designer shall simply match the width of the existing portions of sidewalk, but in no instance shall the width of the new sidewalk be less than four (4) feet.

Miscellaneous Physical Barriers – The most restrictive of all situations is the case of a physical barrier preventing the construction of the preferred minimum sidewalk width. In the event that the planned improvements impact a physical barrier and require its relocation and reconstruction, the design shall provide for the preferred minimum sidewalk width. Examples of such barriers include landscape/hardscape improvements within the right-of-way, approved via a temporary revocable easement, or apparent encroachments in the form of fences or walls, but no right-of-way survey to verify the encroachment.

In any situation that may be encountered, the absolute minimum sidewalk width shall never be less than four (4) feet. While it is understood that the six (6) foot width may be unattainable in certain limited situations, all Capital Improvement Projects including the construction of sidewalk should strive to provide this minimum width. When this minimum width cannot be realized, it is the responsibility of the Engineering project manager to document the constraint and the attempts at resolution, and to provide the City Engineer with a written recommendation to reduce the minimum sidewalk width.

E. MISCELLANEOUS DESIGN ISSUES:

Other design issues that may be encountered include transitions to existing four or five foot sidewalk and matching curb access ramps with narrower walkways. In these instances the designer shall provide match transitions at a rate no greater than 3:1. The current four (4) foot width of the City's walkways through curb access ramps shall remain at four (4) or five (5) feet, depending on the type of access ramp being used. It is the position of the City Engineer's Office that the additional sidewalk width is to provide sufficient separation for passing users (able-bodied or in wheelchairs), and that user conflicts will rarely be encountered in the areas of access ramps.