

From: [skenny17](#)
To: [City Council and Mayor](#)
Subject: Sidewalk Safety Program
Date: Thursday, May 11, 2023 7:16:06 AM
Attachments: [Sidewalk Repair Standards Rev 2023.pdf](#)
[NON-COMPLIANT UNCHECKED.pdf](#)
[PINK X.pdf](#)
[Ames App sidewalk complaints.PNG](#)

[External Email]

Ames City Council and Mayor -

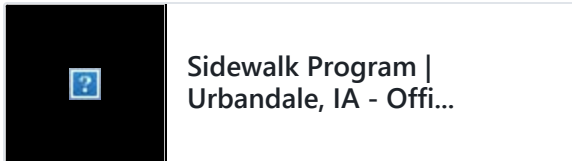
I am writing you in hopes of a review and rethink of the city's Sidewalk Safety Program. I became aware of this program after the 1.1 miles of sidewalk within our neighborhood (Prairie View East and Prairie View West) was reviewed by the Public Works Department resulting in 200 non-compliant sidewalk panels across 50 property owners. To learn more, I reached out to Justin Clausen, Public Works Operations Manager, and he very politely and thoroughly described the complaint-based process that has been in effect for 20 years, the criteria used to determine sidewalk compliance, that the Public Works division is the executor and enforcer of the policy and the City Council is the policy owner. Upon review, I would like to share why the city's complaint-based process for ensuring sidewalk safety is in need of revision:

1. When comparing other community's (Urbandale, Johnston, West Des Moines) criteria to determine sidewalk compliance (below are links to other communities sidewalk safety programs), Ames is significantly more stringent. According to strictest section of our city's standard, a sidewalk panel can be considered non-compliant if a single piece of concrete is missing that has one dimension greater than 1/2", and the only acceptable repair is complete replacement of the panel. So a non-compliant sidewalk panel requiring the entire panel to be replaced can be as simple as a 1/2" diameter piece of missing concrete. Attached is a copy of the city's compliance standard for reference.
2. Safety is a subject that requires being proactive. The other communities referenced all use a schedule to ensure all sidewalks are inspected at some frequency. Using a complaint-based method to address sidewalk safety is only reactionary, thus allowing sections of sidewalks to never be inspected. This results in some property owners being held accountable to a high standard of sidewalk safety while others can have sidewalks in actual unsafe conditions indefinitely. Please see the pdf named "PINK X" showing examples of city inspected sidewalk panels requiring complete replacement compared to the pdf named "NON-COMPLIANT UNCHECKED" of non-compliant sidewalk panels that will remain as is unless a complaint is filed.
3. The combination of the complaint-based process and strict sidewalk standard allows for agendas different from sidewalk safety. As is, any person can file an unlimited number of complaints anonymously forcing the property owners of their choice to make the repairs up to the levels required by the city's stringent

standard. Examples of this are all the 1.1 miles of sidewalks in our neighborhood, and Justin Clausen indicating someone filed a complaint against “*all the sidewalks in Somerset*”. He said requested the filer to provide specific locations and if the complaint comes back with those, the city will respond accordingly to every one. This is illustrated by the attached screenshot of the Ames On The Go App where there is a disproportionate number of sidewalk complaints in Somerset compared to the rest of the city. If someone has the time and energy, literally one person could force every sidewalk in the city to meet this very high standard. Another example of how this loophole could be present itself is if a concrete contractor looking for new business reports sections of sidewalk and then hand out flyers to those property owners.

The following links are to other city’s sidewalk programs (Urbandale, Johnston and West Des Moines):

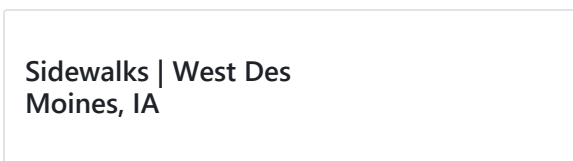
[Sidewalk Program | Urbandale, IA - Official Website](#)



[Sidewalk repair, replacement and construction | Johnston, IA - Official Website](#)



[Sidewalks | West Des Moines, IA](#)



In an effort to help be part of the solution (and not just complain :-), upon review what has been established in those cities, the following proposal might be an effective update to the Sidewalk Safety Program:

- Use the West Des Moines frequency and inspect city sidewalks on an 8 year rotation to proactively maintain the city's sidewalks
- Use the West Des Moines criteria for sidewalk repair, or if a tighter guideline is preferred, use the Urbandale criteria (this has defined criteria for major issues, but also an engineer's discretion on minor sidewalk infractions (noted by Repair Code "E" at the following link"))

- <https://www.urbandale.org/DocumentCenter/View/12021/Standards-for-Defective-Sidewalks>

- Continue to use the complaint-based system for review of sidewalks within the 8 year cycle using West Des Moines or Urbandale's standard as a way to mitigate safety between inspections. Perhaps to help limit the number of trips the city would have to make for inspections, a photo of the complaint and person's name and contact information filing the complaint would have to be submitted for the Public Works to review before sending someone out.

While the current process was probably the right decision 20 years ago, looking at the policies of surrounding communities and the current situation in Ames, I believe a discussion and revision to the Sidewalk Safety Program is due.

If you have any questions or would like to converse, please feel free to text or call: 515-231-9354

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Best regards,

Shawn Kenny
2012 Prairie View East