

Sidewalks – A Smart Investment[©]

prepared by

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"Communities do not embrace change. Change is hard. We must make it compelling so they will want to change." --- Mark Fenton, host, "America's Walking" on PBS.

Unfortunately, in the United States and Tennessee we have a crisis in our health care. Our generation of children is the first generation in 150 years that is not expected to live to be as old as their parents. With the high incidence of obesity and diabetes now being found in our children (elementary and high school age), physicians are already seeing heart attacks in 17 year-olds and expect to see more on a regular basis in the future. Is this what we want as normal for the future of our children?

The #1 issue of CEO's in the United States is health care costs, both direct and indirect.

There are many approaches and solutions to the crisis: recess & physical education at school, changing school lunch menus, increased physical activity for all ages and abilities. There are policy changes that the City can enact in order to accomplish these goals, and thus improve the physical health and economic well-being of our community.

A significant part of the solutions is to make it easy to be physically active---where you don't have to load up a car and drive someplace, or join a gym. Just make it easy by walking out your front door and lead your family on a neighborhood adventure outing, possibly to a small community park to play and visit with other neighbors.

Sidewalks are smart investments. Benefits of properly-designed sidewalks and connectivity include:

- improved pedestrian safety
- improved safety for young and elderly on bicycles (transit bikers should ride on the streets)
- improved safety for motorists (not worrying about hitting a pedestrian, so they have a head on collision with a car)
- improved sociability and neighborliness
- improved air quality from decreased useage of vehicles
- improved family budgets because of being able to safely walk on short trips rather than driving (25% of vehicle trips are less than 1 mile)
- improved health, ie., aerobic capacity, cardiovascular fitness, muscle strength and balance; decreased obesity, diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure, asthma, cancers of various types
- improved mental & emotional health, ie., decreased depression, anxiety, and social isolation
- improved work performance, on the job and at school (that's where kids work)
- decreased medical costs for individuals and companies
- the cost of a mile of sidewalk is cheap compared to emergency room visits, operations, hospital stays, rehab, and sometimes, permanent disability.

Additionally, we have the data from the Visual Image Study and VISCOR. These scientifically designed and statistically valid studies evaluated a broad base of 1,100 citizens in our community.

The top 5 identified findings for a positive community were:

"Clean - Green - Sidewalks - Parks & Playgrounds-Neighborhoods".

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