

Q: Which City of Houston department reviews sidewalks throughout the City of Houston? Answer

As of Oct. 1, 2020, the Planning and Development Department began reviewing sidewalk widths and locations along all public streets within the city limits of Houston, while the Office of City Engineer reviews the sidewalk engineering specifications.

Q: How is the process different prior to Oct. 1, 2020? Answer

Prior to Oct. 1, 2020, the Office of City Engineer reviewed all sidewalk related applications. This new process allows the Planning and Development Department (PD) to review sidewalk widths and locations simultaneously with landscaping requirements along the public streets. It will allow planning staff to enforce the ordinance compliance before it reaches the late stages of the permitting process and avoid unnecessary delays. The new process also gives applicants the flexibility to file an application for the modification of sidewalks or safety buffer standards in certain circumstances. PD will review all sidewalk applications in collaboration with the Office of City Engineers (OCE) and the Mayor's Office for People With Disabilities (MOPD).

Q: Why did the City make these changes? Answer

Prior to Oct. 1, 2020, the City had sidewalk requirements established based on different street classifications. However, the sidewalk requirements were not written in the ordinance, which created challenges for code enforcement. The existing sidewalk requirements were not changed. Instead, the ordinance amendments aim to streamline the sidewalk review process. It will help to enhance walkability of our city and improve safety and accessibility in the pedestrian environment. It will also support the goals of the City's Vision Zero plan of ending roadway deaths and serious injuries in Houston by 2030.

Q: How do I know if these regulations apply to my project? What type of permit triggers a sidewalk review? (Sect. 40-552) Answer

- New sidewalk (permit)
- Repair or replace a segment of sidewalk more than 20 feet in length
- New single-family residential (SFR) home
- Development plat
- New parking lot
- Parking lot addition of 10 spaces

- Parking lot reconstruction with more than 10 spaces or 25% of total area
- Any off-site parking paths (with an off-site parking lease agreement)
- Alterations of non-single family residences within 15 feet of the pedestrian realm with increased 250 square feet or 25% footprint along a Transit-Oriented Development or Walkable Places street

Q: What are the exceptions to the sidewalk requirements? (Sec. 40-554) Answer

- Existing sidewalk is in good condition and meets current width standards
- Sidewalk is within a planned community with alternative paths or trails in lieu of sidewalks
- Sidewalk is within a sidewalk easement provides pedestrian accessibility adjacent to the public street
- Street is a grade-separated freeway without frontage road.
- Street is a grade-separated freeway with frontage road where PD, Office of City Engineer (OCE), and Mayor's Office for People With Disabilities (MOPD) determines it is infeasible or unsafe.
- No roadway or no plans to construct a roadway
- Cost for sidewalk is more than 50% of project (determined by CIP) except in the Central Business District, along Walkable Places or Transit Oriented Development streets
- The property is located along Fourth Ward streets. Call 832-393-6600 to speak with a staff member for confirmation of requirements.
- The applicant has received an approval of modification of sidewalk standards
- Certain repair and rehabilitation work will be performed by government entities

Q: Do I need to construct a sidewalk if there are no existing sidewalks along the street? Answer

If the proposed permitting activity requires construction of a sidewalk pursuant to Sec 40-552, a sidewalk will be required regardless of the whether there are existing sidewalks along the street or not.

Q: Do I need to construct a sidewalk if there is a deed restriction prohibiting sidewalks in my neighborhood? Answer

Generally, deed restrictions regulate developments on private properties. Most sidewalks and safety buffers are constructed within public rights-of-way. Therefore, when there is enough space to construct sidewalks and safety buffers outside private property boundaries, the sidewalk and safety buffer requirements do not contradict with the deed restrictions and the sidewalk is required pursuant to Sec 40-552. When there is not enough space to construct a sidewalk and a safety buffer within a public right-of-way and there is an effective deed restriction prohibiting sidewalks on private properties, the

Sidewalk Review Committee will consult with Legal Department to make the determination case by case.

Q: Do I need to construct a sidewalk if there is an existing tree, power pole, or other obstructions?

Answer

Yes, a sidewalk is required even if there is an existing obstruction. In this scenario, the applicant is required to construct the sidewalk bypassing the obstruction. If it's technically infeasible to meet the sidewalk requirements, the applicant can submit a sidewalk standards modification application.

Q: What are my options if I do not want to construct a sidewalk with my project? Answer

The applicant can request a modification of sidewalk standards through the Planning Department. The sidewalk standard modification applications are reviewed by the Sidewalk Review Committee. The committee reviews each application based on Sec 40-556 and makes decisions accordingly.

Q: When is the \$1,144 fee required? Answer

Applications that propose both a sidewalk and a safety buffer, even if they are somewhat narrower than the widths otherwise required, are not subject to the \$1,144 fee. If no sidewalk is being proposed, or if there is a sidewalk being proposed without a safety buffer, the fee will apply.

It is important to note that this is an application fee, not a fee in lieu of compliance. It does not guarantee that an application for sidewalk standards modification will be approved.

Q: What happens if my application is denied? Answer

A denied application typically means that the full sidewalk and safety buffer standards must be met.

Applicants may submit new sidewalk standards modification requests containing additional supporting information if the first request is denied, but this does not ensure a different outcome. Additional details are provided in a letter sent to applicants.

Q: How do I get started? Answer

Read the Reference Guide for the Modification of Sidewalks and Safety Buffer. Applicants can request a pre-submittal meeting with staff to review submittal requirements for a modification of sidewalk standards.

Q: Where can I get an application for the modification of sidewalk standards? Answer

The application for the modification of sidewalk standards can be found at, please click here.

Q: What is a Walkable Place Plan (WPP)? Answer

A WPP is an area designated by Houston City Council to promote more walkable streets by providing a safe pedestrian environment. Three areas in Houston have been designated as Walkable Places: Midtown, Hogan-Lorraine Street, and the Emancipation Avenue corridor within the Third Ward area.

Q: What is the sidewalk width requirement for streets within a WPP? Answer

A sidewalk width can vary from 6, 8 or 10 feet depending on the WPP designation.

Q: What is a Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) street? Answer

A TOD street is a public street designated as a primary TOD street or secondary TOD street on the Transit-Oriented Development Plan adopted by the Planning Commission. They are within ½ mile walking distance from an existing or future transit station.

Q: What is the sidewalk width requirement for streets within a TOD Street? Answer

Primary TOD streets require 8-foot wide sidewalks. Secondary TOD streets require 6-foot wide sidewalks.

Q: What is the sidewalk width requirement for a major thoroughfare outside a TOD or WPP Street?  
Answer

6 feet

Q: What is the sidewalk width requirement for a local street outside a TOD or WPP street?

Answer

5 feet

Q: What is the sidewalk width requirement for developments within the Central Business District (CBD)?

Answer

8 feet