

Motion under special appropriation 44 of Warrant Article 8 offered by: Marissa Vogt (TMM-6), Amanda Zimmerman (TMM-7), Susan Granoff (TMM-7), Anita Johnson (TMM-8), and Len Wholey (TMM-11)

VOTED: that special appropriation 44 for the rehabilitation of sidewalks be increased by \$147,000 to a new total of \$500,000 with the additional funds dedicated to improving sidewalk PROWAG compliance.

Explanation:

The Town of Brookline has committed to build a transportation network on the public way that accommodates people of all ages and abilities, regardless of their mode of transport, through its 2016 adoption of the Complete Streets policy. Accessibility of sidewalks and curb ramps is critical for pedestrian safety. Sidewalks and curb ramps that are too narrow, cracked, or bumpy may force pedestrians to walk in the streets, placing them at increased risk. Car crashes with pedestrians are a frequent cause of physical harm in Brookline, with roughly ~50 pedestrian crashes, of which ~20 lead to injury, per year prior to the pandemic.

The Town of Brookline has adopted PROWAG (“Public Right Of Way Accessibility Guidelines”) guidelines as its standards for pedestrian access. These guidelines have been developed by the U.S. Access Board, which is “a federal agency that promotes equality for people with disabilities through leadership in inclusive design and the development of accessibility guidelines and standards,” according to its website. PROWAG guidelines address a variety of sidewalk and curb ramp design properties like the minimum clear width, maximum allowable cross slope, maximum allowable height before changes in level should be beveled, and the size and placement of “detectable warning surfaces,” textured surfaces of contrasting colors that warn the visually impaired that they are entering a potentially hazardous area.

PROWAG guidelines are recommended by MassDOT and other agencies as best practices for sidewalks and curb ramps that are similar to, but often have greater baseline standards than, ADA standards. For example, the PROWAG guidelines specify that sidewalks should be designed with a minimum of 4 feet of clear width that is continued around any obstructions (like a street tree), while the ADA standards require only 3 feet of clear sidewalk width.

Unfortunately, many of Brookline’s sidewalks and curb ramps fail to meet PROWAG guidelines – or ADA standards. The Town recently conducted thorough inventory and condition assessment of the Town’s transportation infrastructure, including sidewalks and curb ramps. The results are summarized in the Transportation and Mobility Plan¹, which was released in early 2022. Among its findings: **10 percent of Brookline’s sidewalks were rated as “unsafe in certain areas” or “potentially hazardous for public use” and 13 percent of *existing*² curb ramps were determined to display “significant signs of failure that could present safety issues”.**

¹ <https://www.brooklinema.gov/DocumentCenter/View/29829/Brookline-Transportation--Mobility-Plan-FINAL-02252022>

² Some intersections do not have curb ramps at all.

The Transportation Department estimates that bringing Brookline's sidewalks and curb ramps up to compliance with PROWAG guidelines would cost ~\$4.2 million – nearly 12 times the \$353,000 originally designated for sidewalk rehabilitation in the Advisory Committee's budget motion. Assuming a similar budget in future years, and taking into account that sidewalks and curb ramps would also require regular repair and maintenance (fixing cracks, etc.), it is reasonable to conclude that completely bringing Brookline's sidewalks and curb ramps up to compliance with PROWAG guidelines would take at least 15-20 years. That is an unacceptably long time for the public way to remain inaccessible to people in wheelchairs, young children in strollers, or people with other mobility issues.

While the Town has been making slow but steady improvements to its pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure thanks in part to the adoption of the Complete Streets policy in 2016, those areas have been chronically underfunded, particularly compared to motorist infrastructure. For example, the Town's 2008 annual budget included \$1,000,000 for the rehabilitation of streets and \$200,000 for the rehabilitation of sidewalks. The 2008 operating override added an additional \$700,000 for streets – an increase of 70% – but just \$50,000, or a 25% increase, for sidewalks. This motion adjusts the Town's budget to reflect our support of sustainable, healthy transportation options.

Our motion increases the special appropriation for the rehabilitation of sidewalks by \$147,000 from \$353,000, for a total of \$500,000, roughly matching the annual funding level recommended to the Transportation Department by Town consultants and that the department initially requested from the Town Administrator.

This motion is brought by members of the Pedestrian Advisory Committee, Bicycle Advisory Committee, and Transportation Board in our individual capacities, with thanks to Officer Nicholas Goon of the Brookline Police Department for providing traffic crash data and to several other TMMs and community members who are working to make Brookline's transportation infrastructure safer and more equitable.