



To: Downtown Mobility Authority Board of Directors
From: DMC Staff
Date: July 13, 2021
RE: Proposed - Downtown Sidewalk Repair Grant Program

Background:

Well-maintained sidewalks are important to the long-term success of Downtown Memphis. They improve the appearance of a neighborhood, raise property values, increase utilization of the existing parking supply, and are important for pedestrian safety and walkability. The 2018 Retail Action Plan, 2019 Downtown Parking Study, and the 2020 BuildDowntown Master Plan all specifically mention the importance of safe sidewalks and the need to prioritize sidewalk improvements to ensure safety, convenience, and comfort for pedestrians.

The DMC can show support of these plan recommendations through incentivizing commercial properties to repair key public sidewalks. In creating a sidewalk grant program, the DMC is able to prioritize sidewalk improvements in Downtown, specifically focusing on retail nodes and along signature streets.

According to the City of Memphis Sidewalk Repair guide, common sidewalk code violations include: missing panels, overgrown vegetation, uneven and damaged surfaces, tree and root damage, debris-blocked sidewalks, and impassable driveways or curb cuts not compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements. Repairing these violations will improve both walkability and pedestrian safety. Clear sidewalks create a cohesive retail environment, increase pedestrian access and convenience to the existing parking supply, and increase commercial property values.

Sidewalk repair is the property owner’s responsibility; however, the City sidewalk inspector responds to locations based on 311 reports, the major of which locations are in residential areas. Residential sidewalks are eligible for a grant program offered by the City of Memphis, however, the City does not currently offer assistance for commercial sidewalks.

Challenges & Opportunities:

The walkability of Downtown depends on its network of sidewalks. Damaged, missing, and impassable sidewalks negatively impact Downtown neighborhoods in multiple ways:

- **Prevents the utilization of the existing parking supply.** Sidewalk gaps create a barrier to establishing a “park once” Downtown and deter people from using other forms of transportation to make short trips, or from parking in existing facilities that are further from destinations.
- **Reduces population and pedestrian activity.** Poor sidewalk conditions result in less foot-traffic, which in turn affects local businesses and activation Downtown.
- **Reduces commercial property values.** Poor maintenance can lead to reduced property values, as direct paths to storefronts and businesses become less traveled when they are uncared for and feel inhospitable to pedestrians.

The DMC can use the Sidewalk Grant Program to incentivize Downtown commercial property owners to bring sidewalks up to City code. Not only are improved sidewalks beneficial to the commercial property owner and their property values, but they also contribute to the public good of the Downtown experience for everyone.

Creating a path to improve Downtown commercial sidewalk conditions in priority locations will:

- **Improve walkability and pedestrian safety in Downtown Memphis.** This incentive program will allow DMC staff to identify and prioritize rebuilding key sidewalk connections between destinations, signature streets, and in retail nodes where walkability is paramount to filling missing gaps.
- **Help commercial property owners make necessary repairs to their sidewalks.** Sometimes commercial property owners need assistance in making improvements that are also beneficial to the public good. This incentive program allows the DMC leverage to approach these owners to make changes on a faster timeline than just going through the conventional sidewalk improvement process.
- **Increase commercial property values Downtown.** Supporting pedestrian access and walkability is a direct recommendation of the BuildDowntown Master Plan, Retail Action Plan, and Downtown Parking Study and directly affects the success of other development incentives and infill projects of the DMC.

Proposed Downtown Sidewalk Repair Grant Program:

DMC staff recommends that the Downtown Sidewalk Grant Program be funded with an initial budget of \$50,000 for FY 2022. Staff is recommending that the DMA fund half of this program for a total of \$25,000. Staff has also requested a total budget of \$25,000 from the Center City Development Corporation (CCDC), which was approved on July 13 (contingent on approval of \$25,000 from DMA). The ultimate cost to repair a sidewalk varies based on the existing condition of the curb and other site conditions. According to the City of Memphis sidewalk inspector, the cost to repair an average sidewalk panel (size 5-foot by 5-foot) is approximately \$250 and completing panels in bulk is recommended to be both cost-efficient and attractive to contractors. It is unlikely that any repair would consist of less than three panels. There is not a City of Memphis list of Downtown commercial properties that require repair, but DMC staff has identified more than 60 parcels eligible for repair based on the City of Memphis Code of Sidewalk Ordinances.

Grant Amount:

The Downtown Sidewalk Repair Grant will provide a one-to-one match for the applicant’s contribution, up to a maximum grant of \$5,000. The following table is an example of the match amount:

Total Cost	Grant Amount	Applicant’s Match
\$12,000	\$5,000	\$7,000
\$9,500	\$4,750	\$4,750
\$5,000	\$2,500	\$2,500

Grant funds will be disbursed after the completion of the sidewalk repairs, following a site inspection by DMC staff. The final amount of the grant will be determined based on submitted receipts.

Target Areas & Priorities:

- The Downtown Sidewalk Repair Grant Program is only available for businesses located in the Central Business Improvement District (CBID).

- Priority will be given to ground-floor businesses located on the Main Street Mall, the Downtown Core, or within one of the DMC's targeted retail nodes.
- Contractor selection will comply with the DMC Equal Business Opportunity (EBO) program.

Eligibility & Who Can Apply:

- The applicant must be the owner of a commercial property with a sidewalk that needs repair or replacement.
- The applicant must be current on all City of Memphis, Shelby County, and CBID property taxes.
- All Downtown Sidewalk Repair Grant awards are subject to availability of funding and DMC priorities. The DMC reserves the right to reject any application or approve less funding than requested, which determination shall be final.

Eligible Uses for Grant:

- Sidewalk repair or replacement as necessary to be compliant with the City of Memphis Sidewalk Ordinance.
- Repair may include replacing or installing missing sidewalk panels, cutting back vegetation growth and repairing panels, replacing uneven surfaces, replacing damaged panels due to tree growth, removing blockages from sidewalks, and repairing unpassable driveways with ADA compliant design.

Timeline & Process:

- Contingent on DMA approval, staff will open the application process on August 2, 2021.
- Once approved, sidewalk work should begin as soon as possible depending on contractor availability and the sidewalk season, typically warmer months.
- Funding decisions will be made using the criteria listed below:
 - Location (preference for Main Street Mall, Downtown Core, and retail priority nodes)
 - Sidewalk condition
 - Adjacent land uses and level of pedestrian activity

Staff Request:

DMC staff recommends that the DMA approve a total budget of \$25,000 to fund the new Downtown Sidewalk Repair Grant program. The program will be available until June 30, 2022, or until all program funding has been allocated.