



Active Living Hennepin Communities Community Toolkit – 2009

Questions and Answers about Law Enforcement and Active Living

Pedestrians

Q1. *Why do we want sidewalks in our neighborhood?*

A. Sidewalks are used by everyone from young to old, physically fit to physically challenged. Sidewalks connect our homes, neighborhoods, parks, schools, churches, and businesses. They provide pathways for our elderly and bikeways for our youth. A safe and aesthetic sidewalk promotes neighborhood interaction and enhances property values.

Q2. *Won't crime increase in my neighborhood if we add sidewalks that connect us to other neighborhoods?*

A. There are no studies that have ever found this to be true – and several that found sidewalks actually reduce crime and promote safer walking conditions for pedestrians. The key factor to reducing crime is neighbors. Sidewalks encourage more people, including your neighbors, to be outdoors around your property. Neighbors notice strangers loitering in a neighborhood and quickly call police. Burglars and thieves prefer to work in neighborhoods where everybody is inside and can't see them enter your home.

Q3. *How can I be sure a sidewalk design is safe?*

A. Two elements: Sidewalks can be designed to increase personal safety through a program called “**Crime Prevention through Environmental Design**” or **CPTED**. This ensures that important factors like good lighting are incorporated sidewalk design, and that sidewalk areas are clear so people can see each other as they walk. The second factor is to reduce the possibility of being hit by a car. This “Complete Streets” design reduces the width of vehicle lanes to encourage slower speeds, makes curbs and sidewalks bigger at intersections for pedestrians and may include things like countdown timers so pedestrians know how long they have to cross the street.

Q4. *Will pedestrian accidents increase if we put in sidewalks?*

A. No! Sidewalks **decrease** vehicle/pedestrian accidents in metro and suburban areas. When planning sidewalks, it's important to look at places where vehicles and pedestrians will cross (like intersections). Marking pedestrian crosswalks and slowing traffic at intersections can reduce the danger to pedestrians and encourage more people to walk instead of drive.

Q5. *Can sidewalks be dangerous?*

A. Property owners and communities must ensure that sidewalks are maintained. Cracks and uneven sidewalks can cause accidents and liability. Most cities have a program to report and repair such damage.

Q6. *Are kids safe on sidewalks?*

A. Children must be taught to treat each driveway the same way they do a street – to look carefully all around before crossing. A person backing out of a driveway may not have a clear view, and small children running down a sidewalk are especially hard to see. Many organizations have materials that police departments can use to provide safety programs for schools or youth groups. Children on the sidewalk are much safer than children in the street.

Q7. *What can we expect from the Police Department when sidewalks are added to our neighborhood?*

A. Traffic enforcement in neighborhoods will remain critical to ensuring safe environments for families. Walking on sidewalks is safer than walking in the street but speed enforcement is important – as is driver compliance. Stop signs and speed limits are there for a reason; to protect you, your family and neighbors from being hit by a car. Report traffic concerns to your police department and work with them to reduce problems.

Q8. *Are seniors and women more at risk to become victims of crime if they are out walking?*

A. Common sense must be used. If a neighborhood has a crime problem, sidewalks don't make it more safe or dangerous, the crime does. If you're taking walks for exercise or to run errands, be sure to choose routes through neighborhoods that are safe. Every Police Department can provide crime information for specific areas to help you determine your route. If you must walk at night, be sure the route you take is well lit.

Q9. *There are strangers I don't want in my neighborhood. Won't sidewalks encourage them to walk here?*

A. Unless you live in a gated community, there is no physical barrier that prevents anyone from walking down your street. Some neighborhoods without sidewalks find that people use paths along the street and even through their property to get where they need to go. Sidewalks create a pre-determined path and keep pedestrians from entering your property when they go past.

Bicycles

Q1. *Should bicycles use sidewalks or the street?*

- A. Every community has different rules regarding bicycles. Generally a bicycle can “operate” on a sidewalk as long as the person riding the bike follows pedestrian rules. A bicycle operating on a sidewalk can only cross streets at proper intersections and must yield to elderly or handicapped persons on the sidewalk. On a city or county street the bicycle must act as any “vehicle in traffic”. Bicyclists must give signals for stops or turns, and move in the proper lanes and flow of traffic just like a car. Bicycles operating on streets must display front and rear lights at night. Bicycles can be restricted by city or state code from operating on certain roads or sidewalks. Many communities restrict bicycles on sidewalks in crowded pedestrian locations like business areas. And bicycles are typically prohibited from operation on highways and freeways ...It’s best to check local laws when planning a bicycle route.

Q2. *How can I tell if I should ride on the street, sidewalk or trail?*

- A. Sidewalks can be a safe place for younger riders, but adults may find that it’s tough to avoid pedestrians when riding on sidewalks. In residential areas, bicycling on the street (operating like a “vehicle in traffic”) is the best bet for most adult riders. If the trail or path is wider than a standard sidewalk, it may be safe to use as long as the rider is careful about passing pedestrians safely. The bicycle rider should call out “On your left!” when passing pedestrians walking in the same direction. This helps ensure that pedestrians know a bicycle is about to pass them, and is especially important if a pedestrian is walking a dog that may become startled and charge into the path of the cyclist. Some communities designate bicycle lanes on roads to provide cyclists with safe places to ride. Bicycle lanes are designated by a solid white line between the vehicle lane and curb, and are typically 3 to 4 feet wide. Vehicle traffic volumes, pedestrian traffic volumes and sidewalk widths or trails are all important to consider when deciding to ride a bike.