

NE 50th Street Sidewalk Installation - Safety and Community Connections

Applicant(s): Peter Ramels & Sarah Swanberg

Location: The proposed project calls for installation of sidewalks on the south side of N.E. 50th Street between 33rd Avenue N.E. and 30th Ave. N.E., and on the East side of 30th Ave. N.E. between N.E. 50th Street and N.E. Blakeley St. It is important to note that when walking or driving in this area, the portion of 30th Ave. N.E. that is part of the proposed project appears to pedestrians and drivers to be N.E. Blakeley St. However, the N.E. District Council High Priority Projects map that is part of the Seattle Pedestrian Master Plan depicts this portion of roadway to be 30th Ave. N.E. The N.E. District Council High Priority Projects map also identifies the proposed project area as a Tier 2 High Priority Area and more specifically as a Tier 1 Along the Roadway Project. The N.E. District Council High Priority Projects map for this area and photographs of this area will be provided as supporting documentation for this application.

Problem: N.E. 50th Street is a busy road that provides one of the main connections between the southern portion of the Bryant residential neighborhood and the commercial areas along N.E. Blakeley St. and at the University Village. It also provides a key connection for the neighborhood to the Burke Gilman Trail crossing near N.E. Blakeley St. The Street runs down hill from 35th Ave. N.E. to where it intersects with 30th Ave. N.E. (which when walking, riding or driving appears to be N.E. Blakeley St.). At 30th Ave. N.E. pedestrians can turn left and walk a short distance to N.E. Blakeley St. - also without sidewalks. And just across N.E. Blakeley St. is the Burke Gilman Trail. This route is busy with pedestrians, bikes and cars - yet there are no sidewalks on the south side of the lower portion of the Street between 33rd Ave. N.E. and 30th Ave. N.E., and on the East side of 30th Ave. N.E. between N.E. 50th Street and N.E. Blakeley St. The situation is aggravated because the upper half of the Street between 35th Ave. N.E. and 33rd Ave. N.E. does have sidewalks - which means that pedestrians are drawn to this route along the sidewalks but then have to navigate the unimproved area along the lower part of the hill.

There are many problems with the unimproved area. Pedestrians have to walk too closely to the road in many spots because cars have parked in the areas where a sidewalk would be located or the edge of the ROW has been landscaped in such a way that pedestrians are pushed to the edge of the roadway. In addition, the lack of sidewalks leaves a rough, uneven surface for walking, and creates uncertainty as to the proper route. Drivers also feel uncomfortable when using the Street because there is no clear path for pedestrians. Drivers going up the hill routinely move over into the oncoming traffic lane to give a wider berth to pedestrians - which is not a safe driving practice, especially below the crest of the hill where it is difficult to see whether cars are coming the opposite direction. Photographs of this area will be provided as supporting documentation for this application.

Proposed Solution: The proposed project would solve these problems through the installation of sidewalks on the south side of N.E. 50th Street between 33rd Ave. N.E. and 30th Ave. N.E., and on the East side of 30th Ave. N.E. between N.E. 50th Street and N.E. Blakeley St. The Burke Gilman trail is located across N.E. Blakeley St. The goal of the project is to create a safe sidewalk connection between the top of the hill at 35th Ave. N.E. down N.E. 50th Street to 30th Ave. N.E. and then to provide a short sidewalk connection to the Burke Gilman trail. The Burke Gilman trail offers pedestrian and bike connections to the rest of the City, and more specifically to this area, the trail is a safe place to cross over the road to access the University Village.

We anticipate that the cost of sidewalks for this complete route may exceed the grant limits. In that case, our priority is to bridge the gap in sidewalks along N.E. 50th Street between 33rd Ave. N.E. and 30th Ave. N.E. This is the most dangerous part of the route because pedestrians are forced to the edge of the Street in several spots. We view this as a critical first step to creating the full connection along N.E. 50th Street to the Burke Gilman trail and the rest of the N.E. Blakeley St. corridor. We also intend to follow up this project with a fuller planning process for the N.E. Blakeley St. corridor. These sidewalk improvements would substantially further the objectives of the Pedestrian Master Plan.

The project would satisfy Objective 1 because these improvements are recognized as a high priority in the Pedestrian Master Plan. In addition, these improvements are listed as Action Strategy Projects in the University Area Transportation Action Strategy report dated January 29, 2008. These improvements would further Strategy 1.1 by promoting walking in our neighborhood. A critical part of creating a walking ethic is to connect neighborhoods with businesses. The N.E. Blakeley St. corridor and the University Village are important commercial destinations for the residents in our neighborhood, but the lack of pedestrian amenities encourages driving. These sidewalk improvements would provide a key pedestrian route to connect people with businesses. The proposed sidewalk improvements would also substantially further Objective 2 by improving the walkability of the street. Specifically, the project would serve Strategies 2.1 and 2.2 by clearly defining the walkable zone, removing a barrier to pedestrian travel, and creating walking connections to the major destinations of the N.E. Blakeley St. corridor and the University Village. There are also fantastic opportunities to support Strategies 2.3 and 2.4 through the use of alternative sidewalk designs and integrating the sidewalks into an area that already benefits from a nice tree canopy. It is equally clear that the sidewalk improvements would serve Objective 3 by dramatically improving pedestrian safety. Objectives 4 through 6 will also be served by the project. This will occur because N.E. 50th Street can be converted to a complete street with comfortable walking conditions and landscape buffers, can become a vibrant public space that invites people to walk between their residences to local businesses, and can motivate more people to walk for transportation between destinations, for recreation through connections to the wider community and the Burke Gilman Trail, and for improved health.

In addition, this project has strong community support. It has been endorsed by the Ravenna-Bryant Community Association, which passed a motion to file this application. In addition, the public made comments about N.E. 50th Street in the recent Seattle Children's Livable Streets Initiative Final Report dated January 7, 2011. Here is one: "We are often asked about walking between the hospital and University Village in Family Resource Center, sometimes by parents who have already tried and failed to find their own way or use a map. I walk this route every day, and I always see many others using it, too. It's mostly a very pleasant and relaxing amble, but in places it's intimidating and uncomfortable. For those who don't know what's on the other side, these bad spots are real barriers. Please consider these 2 or 3 bits of sidewalk that would make a real difference for some families at the hospitals, and some of the hospital's neighbors."

Here is another: "All the way down NE 50th, the last stretch to the Village presents the biggest obstacles. There is a good crossing at the Burke-Gilman trail but first, you have to get through a three-way intersection where there is no obvious walking path. This is the opposite of a Dutch-style naked street. The path for high-speed vehicle is clearly indicated, while the pedestrian path from NE 50th to the BGT is unmarked, unpaved, and generally well hidden. We need a raised sidewalk from NE 50th, across NE Blakeley to the BGT."

Here is a third comment: "I frequently commute on foot from Bryant/Metropolitan Market neighborhood to University Village and UW via NE 50th alongside the cemetery. This stretch of NE 50th between 35th NE and NE Blakeley has no sidewalks, is hilly and slippery when wet, has lots of car traffic, and has no egress along the northern side because of Calvary Cemetery. On football game days, it is very busy and dangerous. Possible to nominate it for a sidewalk?? My commute options to UW for work are busing, walking, and driving. I do all three, but walking gets dangerous along that stretch in the winter wet and dark." Photographs of the area slated for improvements and excerpts from the most relevant citations to existing plans will be provided as supporting documentation for this application.

City Staff said to be contacted: Jenny Frankl - Neighborhood District Coordinator - North Team and Art Brochet - SDOT

Asserted benefits: Environmental Benefits, Economic Benefits, Neighborhood character, Quality of Life, Sense of Place,

Included elements: New sidewalk or sidewalk repair, new curb or curb repair, landscaping, crosswalk(s)