

From: [Megan Kogut](#)
To: [City Council](#); [Debbie Tarry](#)
Subject: [EXTERNAL] No on Prop 1 for sidewalks
Date: Monday, July 30, 2018 12:59:21 PM

Dear Shoreline Council,

I love sidewalks and alternative transportation in general. For 25 years I rode my bike or ran to and from work. I even ran from Shoreline to downtown Seattle and back for a summer. I was in really good shape that year. The only reasons I drive to work now is because I live five blocks from the pub and I park the car in front to save a spot for the food truck.

And as a former Prop 1 Levy Lid Lift PRO committee chair and campaign chair, I find myself in an odd position today arguing against a new Prop 1 for sidewalks. But I took two hours to write this letter in case it makes a difference for any of you.

First off, after my conversations with someone who is a friend of mine and who was a particularly active member of the Sidewalk Advisory Committee, I understand that the "Priority" list for new sidewalks was based on a matrix of binary values ranging from a history of pedestrian accidents to diversity of population. In this case, "Priority" doesn't mean that a street is aching for a sidewalk. It just means that of the streets currently without sidewalks, that street is among the top third. That is a very generous cutoff, and not a particularly meaningful one. So, I'd rebrand "Priority" to "Top Third" opportunities for new sidewalks. There are many streets without sidewalks in the Puget Sound area, and to my knowledge this is not a huge issue for most people.

I'm not a transportation professional, but I think common sense used sparingly is appropriate for determining which streets are really aching for a sidewalk. I wish some more time had been spent thinking about prioritizing in terms of pedestrian count per mile. I'm not talking about conducting pedestrian counts, which I realize is expensive. I'm talking about a final look at the "Priority" sidewalk map with a fresh eye. Some of the "Priority" stretches are not well traveled by pedestrians, nor would they be if they had sidewalks, because they aren't arterials or near areas commonly walked to. They might support ten people walking to the bus each day. Someone should do the quick math on taxpayer dollars per person. Is that what we want to pay for? This question deserves an answer.

I wish instead of applying the complicated binary matrix blindly to a big list, the approach had been goal oriented: creating walkable neighborhoods with community amenities in vibrant, functional central areas, as per Vision 2029. (I paraphrase, but I think that's fair.) I trot out my usual example: Downtown Ridgecrest, where we know that dozens or hundreds of people walk on sidewalks each night, either from the neighborhood or from their cars after parking. Business districts in general scream priority. It's the most step for buck, and you're enhancing areas that are of financial benefit to you because they bring in tax dollars from outside the City. Then when those areas are done, you radiate outwards along arterials and other good candidates for walking. This approach has been used before for schools that have received priority sidewalk funding in past. And I think this goal-oriented perspective would be well-received by the vast majority of voters, who are aching for walkable neighborhood centers.

Second, a sales and use tax puts a burden on small business owners who sell items or services with the sales and tax included, such as ours. Many business owners can't change their prices easily to pass on the extra expense to their customers. Therefore, business owners will take up more of the burden. This is not fair to business owners.

I know that you're limited in your mechanisms to tax for a Transportation Benefit District. But this would have been a great argument for depending solely on a direct car tab fee and/or finding a solution based on existing property tax revenue, perhaps by cutting a less important "Priority" currently funded. It is my understanding based on conversations with key City staff that the City does not undergo regular budget reviews to cut existing costs to refocus those taxpayer dollars on new priorities that are more important. That's not fair either.

I understand that what you're voting on is whether to put the decision on the ballot and letting the people decide. But as it stands now, you're giving people a really tough decision: a big list with a big price tag, or no action. I think that's not fair. As a member of the previous Financial Sustainability Advisory Committee, I remind you that we voted for a middle or nothing option, not an all or nothing option. It should be the same here, and the middle or

nothing option would be to focus on sidewalk repair now and work on a more strategic solution for new sidewalks. It's my understanding that this concept of all or nothing was a major point of discussion in the Sidewalks Advisory Committee as well. And it's my understanding that a middle option could be largely funded by the car tab fee increase and other sources of funding, eliminating a need for Prop 1 on the issue this year.

Finally, I would love to see a new policy that each Advisory Committee include one person who is business owner, preferably an owner of a brick and mortar location who can better represent the various concerns of all business owners. I know business owners don't have a lot of time for Advisory Committees, but it would be a good faith gesture on your part considering the outsized impacts on businesses of this and other proposals. In this case, it will be the business owners who collect the tax and in some cases pay the tax out of their own income rather than pass on the cost to the consumer.

And again, I'll make another plug for the return of the Economic Advisory Committee. I'm starting to run out of fingers counting the decisions made by staff and Council that affect businesses without meaningful input from same. We just seem to see things differently on so many issues, and I again argue that our perspective would be valuable to the City and to its residents. And we are your partners in making Shoreline a better city by creating more places for residents to walk to.

Sincerely,

Megan Kogut PhD