

WEST SIDE WALKS

Mobility and Responsibility in the Near Westside

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Mobility and Responsibility in the Near Westside

Gifford Street Community Press



Gifford Street Community Press

We, the members of Gifford Street Community Press, unite in the spirit of collective work and responsibility to coordinate a neighborhood press where the multilingual and multicultural voices of the people will be heard and shared. We hope to be a part of this community's kinship by sharing in personal and neighborhood struggles, triumphs, and producing collected works of creative expression. The Press wants to support conversation and to build relationships, which will foster greater civic awareness of local issues and when necessary, support resident driven change in the neighborhood. This press hopes to produce and showcase artwork, writings, and other meaningful cultural pieces that represent authentic voices from the community. The Press will gather local compositions through writing workshops, Westside community events, and forums. Our mission is to contribute to the promotion of love, healing, and respect within the Westside, and validate the existence of peoples and cultures represented in the Westside Community.

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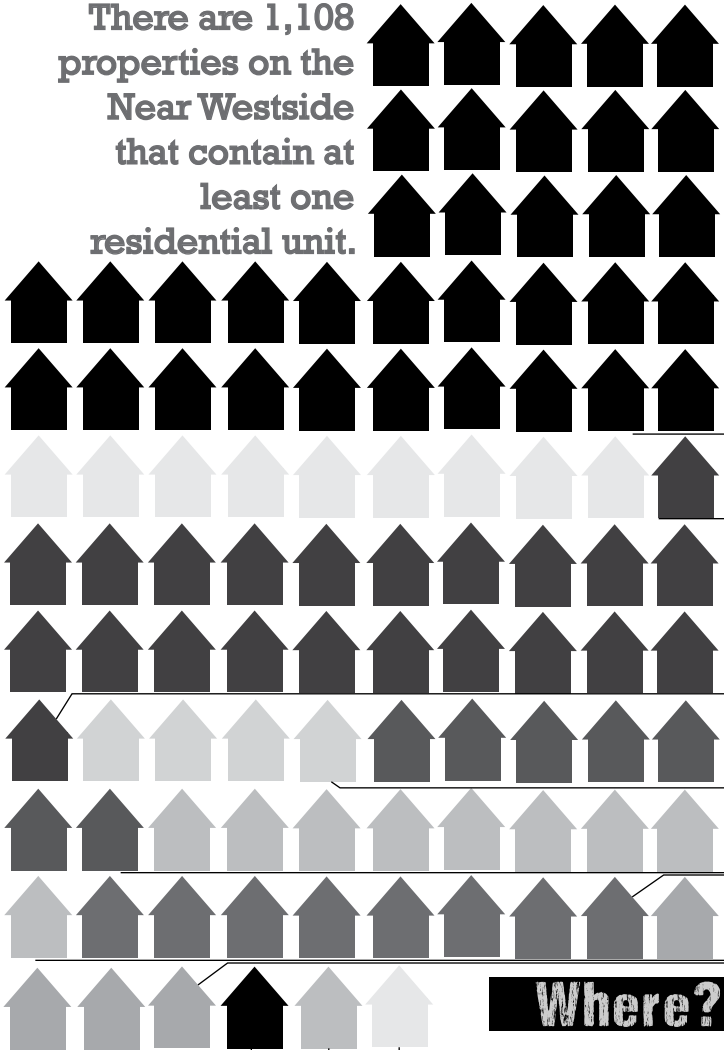
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Introduction

Who Owns the Near Westside?

Data compiled by Susan Hamilton

There are 1,108 properties on the Near Westside that contain at least one residential unit.



Where?

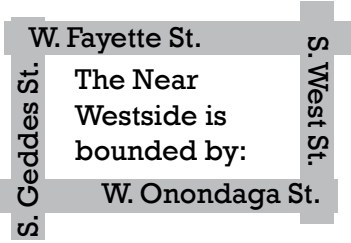
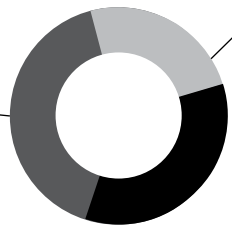
- 363 Owner Occupied Residences
- 74 Owned by Non-Profit Organizations
- 223 Owners in Undetermined Locations
- 36 Owners Live Elsewhere in the Neighborhood
- 72 Owners Live Elsewhere in Syracuse
- 163 Owners Live Elsewhere Onondaga County
- 106 Owners Live Elsewhere in New York
- 42 Owners Live in Other States
- 8 Owners Live in Other Countries
- 10 Residences Being Held in Estate
- 10 Residences were Foreclosed upon

What does it mean?

Figures suggest, despite negative connotations, home-ownership in the Near Westside has risen in the past decade. (Approximately 15%)

24% of neighborhood residents live under the relative security of renting from a non-profit organization, or the Syracuse Housing Authority.

33% of the neighborhood population occupies a house they themselves own.



This growing neighborhood needs the mobility safe sidewalks provide.

What About the Rest of the Westside?

By Robert Walter

I grew up over on Otisco street when I was a kid and then I moved away for a while. About three to four years ago I moved back and I couldn't believe the changes. The sidewalks on the Westside and around where I live on Sabine are bad. You start walking and the side walk is alright. Then about ten to fifteen feet from where I live, if you're going up towards Merriman and Oswego, there is a whole missing piece. It dips down and I've seen people trip. There is one girl that walks around with her baby in a stroller. She said that when she was walking down the sidewalk, the wheel got caught and it flipped and the baby had gotten scraped. I've even tripped myself. So most of the time we have to walk in the streets.

And on the Westside, we have the handicapped and people with walkers and scooters and they have a hard time getting on the sidewalk because they're cracked or completely missing. They have to go out in the road and it's not safe for them to be walking in the street. The Westside Residents Coalition came up with the idea to try to see if there's something we can do to get them repaired. With winter coming up we decided to get some residents together to go around and shovel. You've got to have a path for somebody to walk safely. People can't walk in the road because it gets icy. It's dangerous for cars and pedestrians to be in the street in the winter.

We figure if we can open up a small business to give kids and people that want or need a part time job, something to do in the winter, it will be a win-win situation. We will be giving people a job to shovel the sidewalks and on other hand they will be learning responsibility. Then in the spring when the snow melts, the residents themselves will see if we can find some way of repairing the sidewalks.

It's been too long for the way these sidewalks are and too long to fight with the city. The city will tell you the homeowners have to do it and the homeowners say the city needs to do it. But from my point of view, the sidewalk in-between the home and the street should be the responsibility of the city. It should fall under the jurisdiction of being public. Homeowners should be responsible for the part of the yard that goes up to their porches.

It's getting to the point where when you look around; only certain things are being fixed. It's like the city doesn't care about the sidewalks.

The thing of it is they're always passing the buck back and forth. Even if it falls on the homeowners, well, there are some owners that live out of town and it's like they don't care. They have abandoned these properties, so who is responsible for them now? The city is supposed to fine them but I haven't seen anybody do any fixing lately. Personally, I feel the city should be responsible for them. One suggestion that I made was why doesn't the city take back these properties, fix them and the sidewalks in front of them? But I just get a run around.

One of our members, Susan Hamilton, looked into a lot of this stuff for us. We tried to get a hold of who we needed to get a hold of. We got a hold of DPW and they came out and spoke at a meeting. We've had different people come to our meetings to talk about the sidewalks and what's going on. It's crazy because what they're trying to tell us is that it costs too much to fix them and keep them repaired and they want to figure out where the money would come from. It's got to do with politics.

It's getting to the point where when you look around; only certain things are being fixed. It's like the city doesn't care about the sidewalks. I see them building all these new houses, you know, and it's the only time the sidewalks in front of those houses are in perfect condition. If you've noticed Otisco Street looks really good with the new building project. I like the way they did it and that's the way all sidewalks should look. But what about the rest of the Westside? Like I said, it seems like they don't care.



Random Thoughts On Sidewalks

By Carole Horan

Sidewalks there are so many things to be said about sidewalks. I began the process of thinking about this piece by asking some of my kids about their memories of walking on the sidewalks in the neighborhood. My oldest daughter remembers walking in the street in the winter because the sidewalks were often not shoveled. My youngest daughter remembers learning to skate on our street between our house and a neighbor's house. She also learned to ride her bike between these two houses and recalled how she knew all the dips and cracks because she used it so much. One of my sons commented to me that when he would go into the James Geddes Housing complex to see his friends, it was frustrating because the sidewalks were not laid out in a straight fashion and he could get lost easily.

I wonder how I would feel about walking all year around if there were better sidewalks with appropriate upkeep?

Another daughter told me she had her route to Seymour School – going from crossing guard to crossing guard, always walking the same sidewalks. I asked her about her route to Fowler High School and she said she always went the same way. This prompted me to ask if she ever walked on the other side of the street and she said, “It never occurred to me.”



There's a difference between her and I (although we look very similar) – I dislike going the same way twice.

When I go for a walk I generally try to plan it out a little because I know where there are no sidewalks or where they are really poor and I try to use caution. Since I'm now in my 70's I do not want to take chances and have a fall, therefore I walk with my eyes more on the sidewalk than I used to. I do not particularly enjoy having to do that. And in the winter I have to admit I really don't like to go out walking; many sidewalks are not shoveled or are icy. I prefer to go when the weather is milder. I wonder how I would feel about walking all year around if there were better sidewalks with appropriate upkeep?

I love to go for walks these days just to see what is happening in our neighborhood. There are so many, many positive changes happening on a regular basis sometimes it is hard to keep up. We have such colorful houses now, both renovated and new, there are



more gardens, more trees, more neighbors out working in their yards. We have new businesses now with building going on all the time. Consequently we have a lot of new neighbors and many times when I am out walking I take the opportunity to introduce myself to them and begin to learn their story. I love that some of my neighbors are old friends and some are brand new friends. Another benefit to the new houses and new businesses is that almost always there will be new sidewalks installed. Gradually it is adding to our acceptable sidewalk stock. Now if only

One more thing I dearly love when walking on our sidewalks is the opportunity to observe nature. Do you know we have ground-hogs and skunks in our neighborhood? More than once I have seen them scurrying around. I also love watching the squirrels and birds, they are always up to something!

Connections. This is what sidewalks can be for us. Connect us to our neighbors, the natural world, the progress that is happening right before our eyes right here on the Near Westside.

Get Them Fixed!

**By Sterling Boston, Doris Button, Linda Porter
and Diane Hamilton**

Interviewed by Teresa, Jesse and Ben Kuebrich


Sterling Boston: My name is Sterling Boston, I'm a part of the WRC, the Westside residents coalition, I live in near the Syracuse housing association and some of the guests today that came with us came from Syracuse housing as well and we talked about these different issues and I thought it'd be good to have a discussion here so we could get some help and get some attention and maybe get some things prepared around here.

Teresa: My name's Teresa and I'm from Philadelphia and I'm here to find out everyone's opinion on the sidewalks here in Syracuse.

Jessie: Jessie is my name, I'm from Michigan originally but I'm an SU student and also a part of the project committee and I can't wait to hear what you guys have to say.

Doris: My name's Doris Button and I live at 338 Gifford Street in a high rise, in 606 and these sidewalks around here are really bad for the handicapped.

Diane: My name's Diane Hamilton, I reside at 312 Gifford Street along with Sterling, but in different apartments. And I'm glad that he invited me around because we do have issues with



**It's a good place,
good people, it's
really a nice
neighborhood."**

people getting hurt and we need to better our sidewalks and parts of our community and I appreciate you asking me, thank you.

Linda Porter: My name's Linda Porter I live at 312 Gifford Street along with these nice neighbors and I have had several incidents happen to me

in a wheelchair on the sidewalk and in the street. I recently fell out in a sink hole and fell in the street and it tossed me a couple of feet and over the curb like that. I wanted to know if they were going to do anything about the streets as well, because it's hard to find someone to talk to about what to do after that incident happens on the sidewalk or in the streets, so that's why I'm here.

Ben: Sterling, could talk a little bit about what the Westside Resident's Coalition is proposing and working on?

Sterling: It's a basic organization. I think the strength is in the numbers. I think we're trying to get our whole community together so we can push up on our elected officials to do the right thing for our community. I think it was the rain water project they just redid on Otisco Street. They did the whole block, did a magnificent job but that's the only street they are going to do. But they only had enough money to do just that one street, and it was called the Rainbow Project. It would be beautiful if they could do some other things in this community, they did a great job at this place right here at 601 Tully. Some things are being developed

and that's magnificent, more people need to be aware that these things are taking place. I believe the more we get the word out and the more y'all get the word out and once people pay attention to what's going on, that'll help get more support. That's what the WRC is about. Westside resident's coalition meets every other Monday at Brown Memorial Church on the corner of Davis and Geddes Street.

Sterling: Sometimes we also have our WRC meetings at La Liga. They allow different places for us to move around cause we don't have any income, so we don't have any money to pay nobody no rent, but people are stepping up to help us so they allow us to meet there. The WRC was the original group I was involved in that started doing something about the street signs, the sidewalks, and the cameras in the community.

Teresa: How long has everyone lived on the Westside?

Linda: I've lived here for over forty years.

Diane: I've been living here off and on for about fifty years.

Doris: I've lived here for about four, four and a half years. I've always lived on the Southside, I don't know why I've always been petrified of the Westside because I'm over here, you know, but that's always been my thinking I guess.

Sterling: When I was a child, I lived here back in the 60's. The Westside always had the reputation of being rough and hard but once you got the chance to come over here, the Westside was just a neighborhood that was just trying to develop, It's a good place, good people, it's really a nice neighborhood.

Doris : It is.

Jesse: Do you mind sharing some of your experiences actually using the sidewalks?

Linda: Me and my friend here, Dianne, and another friend of ours, were on our way back from getting lunch downtown. We were on the sidewalk, and noticed that there was a whole sidewalk missing. There was a tape, a crime scene thing, so we couldn't go that way and we had to turn all the way around and go back on the street.

So we're going along on the street alongside the parked cars down Clinton Street. I went over a lot of potholes. I was trying to avoid them and trying not to go in the middle of the road. Then, I came across a little hole, so I said, "Oh ok, I can go over that." so I went over it and it moved. It shifted down and caught my wheel. I tried to push it fast and by me doing that, I flew out of the chair on to the ground on the curb. I broke my elbow and rolled over on my side. My friends came and tried to get me to talk because I guess I was knocked out for a while. The ambulance came and it seemed like they stood over me for a long time. They took me to the hospital, when I got there I kept saying my arm hurts and screaming, and they were like, "It's nothing, It's nothing" and then they took an x-ray. They told me, "It's broken, put it down, it's broken". I said, "It's broke?" That made me scared.

I wasn't clear in my mind, and to this day I'm not clear in my mind because I hit my head. I had a small concussion. I didn't know what that was; I had to google it. I'm getting better, sometimes I forget things I'm trying to say from my mouth that don't come out right, so I have to go to the hospital today to be x-rayed head scan and I guess they will find out exactly what's wrong because I'm still not right and I don't feel right.

Sterling: And that just happened recently?

Diane: This summer in August.

Linda: Yeah it happened the day my mother died. So I was wondering, if something to me I just I got scared of going out. I got scared of going near the place where it happened and I have to go near there because I have to get to the community health center. I'm all in the street on the side, that could cause another accident. But I'm scared of that spot. They cover it up real quick. They tried to show it to her she got real scared.

Then when she finally decided she would take a look, they had covered it up.

Linda: I went there to look at the hole, you got to face your fears. I saw where I rolled and different things and I don't know how they would fill the hole with tar. It just seemed like you would have to do more than that or it will just keep falling. The hole was deep and if I had stayed there in the hole with my seatbelt on, I'd be down in the hole caught in there because it kept moving. And I'm just trying to get out of it. Right now I'm alright with the past I'm having problems trying to get someone to pay the ambulance bill and all that kind of stuff. They directed me to some people, like you, from Syracuse University who take care of people that directed them to lawyers; and they would help me. I don't know do a form claim or something to pay all the bills that I'm acquiring. Medicare, Medicaid won't pay it.

Sterling: The city ought to be responsible for that shouldn't they? We should do some research and make sure they cover you.



Linda: It's hard to get a lawyer I'll tell ya that. It's a personal injury and they don't want to take a personal injury so everyone kept telling me to go get a lawyer. I felt that if they just took care of the bills and the personal injury money for being hurt that would be alright. I didn't have to get a lawyer you know what I'm saying just take care of the stuff myself.

Ben: You still might need to get a lawyer just to get that taken care of.

Linda: Ms. Miner, the mayor, sent me a letter stating that they were sorry about what happened they sent me some papers called Hippa. Take it to all the doctors I go see, have them sign it, and send them papers back to her. So I guess that will help pay for whatever so that was a start.

Ben: Where are the sidewalk the worst in the Westside?

Diane: The sidewalks are pathetic on West Street.

Sterling: Yeah, Niagara Street.

Diane: Yeah that one too's got the big holes but West the sidewalks they sit up so, I didn't realize it till I hit it and went up and then came down.

Linda: A lot of times it turns the wheel around and you turn around and tilt over and you have to really get up out of the chair, try to move it. You know it's just scary

Diane: I hit that hole coming from church. I didn't realize I hit it till I went up and I'm surprised it didn't tear the chair apart because I'm telling you, it sure made a noise.

Teresa: What about the winters?

Linda: That's really bad!

Doris: In the winter time it's so hard to get up to Geddes Street to go to the Save-A-Lot.



Linda: I don't go nowhere in the winter I dun been stuck too long for hours in one spot trying to get through. When they come up with the plow, it closes the parking lot where the ramp is. Syracuse housing does a good job of cleaning the sidewalks but once the plow goes through and you're trying to cross the street you cant get through that. I have to literally sit there and move it with my foot, the snow, until I make a little dent in it or whatever. Still, it falls in and I'm stuck. So the men will come along from the neighborhood and they'll push the chair until it gets outta there you know from the stuck position

Teresa: So it's not just about the condition of the sidewalks it's the maintenance too, during the winters?

Collective: Yeah.

Ben: So you had mentioned going to Geddes and the Family Dollar, you shop there most of the time?

Doris: Most of the time I go to Save-A-Lot up here on Geddes Street.

Ben: How many blocks do you think that is?

Sterling: It's twelve blocks to be exact, about three quarters of a mile each way.

Doris: They keep fixing that hole in front of Sam's and it still keeps sinking.

Ben: I was wondering about how many people are in wheelchairs around the neighborhood?

Doris: There's a lot and I be looking out them windows, there's a lot of people in wheelchairs.

Linda: There's a lot of stores that we can't get in because of stairs, like at No Jams. It sort of intimidates me that I got to wait to call somebody to come out and unlock the gate then come in. They should have motorized doors that open up or a watch or something to watch whether or not people steal the carts or whatever.

Diane: The people there mess up because we had our own key so we could let ourselves in, but they dun messed up so now they've got a lock on with words and everything. They have to line up and they got to open it themselves. So you got to call them they have somebody to come in and out to open the gate. Where down at Save-A-Lot in the plaza down there I call and tell them I'm outside they be like "Okay, coming". So that's their main thing worrying about them taking them carts.

Ben: Why is it that you have to call somebody to get into No-jaims?

Diane: So that they can open up the gate for us to come in with our chairs.

Sterling: That's also where they let the wheelchairs come in.

Ben: So there's not a wide enough opening to go through the door?

Diane: No, not without them opening the gates.

Ben: Are there places that you can't go? Do you really have a plan when you go out to get somewhere, like certain streets are better than others?

Diane: Yeah we take shortcuts sometimes. But usually I ride the streets. When the incident happened with Linda, I stayed on the sidewalk because I said, be my luck somebody might be high or something, come around that corner, and knock me down. Some places are a little bit better than others; I mean we ride out to Western Lights.

Doris: Yeah, in our chairs.

Linda: The whole sidewalk is gone on the right hand side, but you get to a part where the rest of the sidewalk is fixed. They got a little park where you can look at the high grass I guess, and they said it's going to be filled with water. There's ups and downs and somehow they made it right, the ups and downs, the sidewalk. They did a good job with it, and we go there. But there's a lot of places that I want to go downtown, like the Armory Square. I'm an old lady, but I like to be around young people. You go there and you sit and just get out, go to The Most; that's about all we can do—you know we can't really get into the bank because there's steps. Gotta go through the back. We want to go into somewhere to eat; like Empire Brewing Company, there's steps. I think that they should consider handicapped people.

Ben: Do you have any other last thoughts about what needs to be done with sidewalks, especially in the Westside?

Doris: Get them fixed.

Diane: I mean we don't expect them to do them all at once but if they just took a couple of streets at a time so they could complete it, at least they're making an effort instead of just waiting till there's just no sidewalks period.

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Ben: How often—even on your way over here—were you on the sidewalk?

Doris: No we were in the road

Ben: The whole way up the road?

Linda: Yes we were. The sidewalks are bad on this side.

Linda: Even the housing side.

Jesse: Are there any particular issues about riding in the street, obviously the sidewalks have some problems, but there's also a problem being in the middle of the street with your chair.

Linda: There's nothing else, no greater quality of life, than to get out and see things, you know go to jazz festivals and things like that. And me, I try to get out, but I find I have to catch the bus more than riding around. In the wheelchair I feel free, I feel good. I can go to the zoo just riding. All the streets are fixed that way by Fowler. Yeah they fixed it, you can go up that way, but they don't have handicapped people in their schools. There needs to be more consideration.



The Sidewalk is Impossible

By Marty Yunggebuver

In the wintertime, I'm basically stuck in the house, because I can't even get down the street, never mind the sidewalk. The sidewalk is impossible, the street is not much better, in the winter. In the summertime, it is next to impossible on most of the sidewalks, especially near my house. I can't go on the sidewalk, so I gotta ride in the street which is not too safe. Especially with bikes and stuff like that. It's not safe on the sidewalk either, because of dirt bikes. You could get run over.

I really haven't, unfortunately, had any great experience with the neighborhood as far as sidewalk and accessibility to places. Leaving the new sidewalk, like at Mobil Station on Geddes, is so high that going to Shoppingtown Mall, they've made them so high on the street that my wheelchair can't get up. I've got to go back down Geddes on the main road, on the street like the cars do.

I can't use the street either because it doesn't get plowed. Peoples' footsteps and how much snow is on the ground, depends on how much is on the sidewalk. In front of my house, yes, we shovel the steps but nobody else does. In Eastwood they have a little tractor that goes through—upper North side and upper West-side they have that—but not down here, so nothing gets shoveled unless somebody shovels their sidewalk. Most people around here are either too old or too disabled or just don't do it, and the

people that can walk and they're fine, they walk in the snow and make tracks all the way just footprints or, you know whatever the amount of snow is, and my wheelchair can't go through that. Yup, just about. Even downtown, there's places downtown I can get up on the sidewalks and it's a little better but gettin' downtown there's sidewalks that are handicapped accessible, like on Onondaga, and then you get to the end and you can't get up because there's no wheelchair dip, not even one, there's just a giant curb. It's accessible at one end and not at the other right near the Rescue Mission, near the lights, so I have to ride in the street most of the time.

As I was saying, there's a lot—the trees and just the condition of the sidewalk—sometimes it's like downtown, just as you cross underneath the bridge and go over just before you get to North Salina, that sidewalk there I have to go in the street because the drop is so bad in the sidewalk, it causes so much pain that it brings me to tears, especially now with the cancer, it's even worse I mean it would jar my back so bad that by the time I was done, going to the doctors.

That's how bad the bump is off the sidewalk. On the sidewalk going downtown on Onondaga meeting Salina street, and Harrison and all that where it all comes together there. That sidewalk right near the parking lot—if I go on that, I'm done. It's damaged my chair, it's damaged me physically, and the sidewalks are like that around my neighborhood.

There too, but the sidewalk itself, going down the sidewalk there's like two to four inch drops in the pavement downtown. The rises are so bad, that a lot of times I have to go, you know,

where the red rock is, and that's bumpy. It bothers me, but you forget and you go up that thing on the sidewalk in the chair. It's phenomenal even a person without any back injuries or anything like that hits that, it's you know just has problems. You can't walk, whatever, you got issues. I mean it's not physically safe and like I said it's damaged my wheelchair, warped the axle on one of my wheelchairs, -- on my wheelchair is warped right now and I can't get it fixed because Medicaid won't pay for it right now. They already had to fix it once for the same problem, so I have to wait a certain amount of time so I have to contend with a chair that is not perfect working and it's a problem.

It's the fact that if I had to go to Stone Soup Garden or my house or to Nojaim's or to Rite Aid...

In the sidewalk. On my wheelchair, I have to ride in the street, which is dangerous because I've almost gotten hit by a car because they're going so fast and I'm really not supposed to be in the street with the chair. So I'm constantly on watch, throw my child to the side, so if I do get hit by a car in the Westside, and this is going to the parks and everything around here. On Geddes, Merriman, Shonnard, Gifford, it's phenomenal. The sidewalks are like that inch drop on the walk, even on the newer ones. They're settled, and by the time that they finish settling, it's ridiculous. I mean, I don't get it-why they're not being taken care of-and why it's an issue, but we've got children that walk in the street just so that they don't trip. People with their kids walk their little kids on the inside of the sidewalk, on the street, so that the child isn't tripping and the strollers aren't bumping along. I saw one stroller almost lost the baby. The baby wasn't buckled in and the sidewalk was so bad, it tipped the stroller over. This is the stuff I'm going through with my wheelchair, and other people are going through. That's why they're pushing strollers down the street

and stuff and it's-something's gotta be done. But the city don't care cause it's the West Side. I mean I can't get in my own driveway with my wheelchair because the concrete, the curbing is too high at the end of the driveway. I've gotta go down the sidewalk, which is terrible and that's why you get people pushing babies in the street and riding wheelchairs in the street and people gettin' hit. Right on Geddes an older lady was hit in a wheelchair and was killed because she couldn't ride on the sidewalk. Drivers get mad at you, even the cops tell me, "Oh well, you shouldn't be on the street." "I can't ride on the sidewalk. They tried to ticket me one time for being on the street, but I can't ride on the sidewalk, so where am I supposed to go? Stay in the house? They don't bother me anymore about that since I beat the ticket. I don't remember what judge it was.



It wasn't recent recent, it was a few years, but this has been an ongoing problem. I've almost been killed on Geddes trying to cross and having to be on the street. If I'm going to Save-A-Lot with my wheelchair, having to drag a cart behind my chair, with my groceries and stuff, and one of those carts to roll it down the street—you can't even bring those down the street. I'm having to do it during the winter and everything else. Fortunately now, I've got a vehicle that somebody can come and get me that my wheelchair can be put in, but still, even once I'm out—if I can get out—even the sidewalks themselves near businesses and stuff are horrible.

Everybody walks or rides wherever they're going on their scooters, or on their wheelchairs, or on bikes. There's no safe place for people to ride bikes, it's phenomenal. It's probably behind the hutch [?? 4:00}. It's a serious problem and people don't realize how serious it is until somebody actually gets killed. What's it going to take: a million times of being killed and flattened in the street? In the summer time, even if I did choose to take the bumping, on the Westside, they ride the dirt bikes on the sidewalk. Ivan and I, last summer, were almost killed on the sidewalk. The driver ended up crashing right in front of our house because he veered off next to the telephone pole before he hit us because he was going so fast down the sidewalk, he couldn't stop. So he had to veer off and got hit by a car. It's not just that the sidewalks are in bad shape, because they're great for dirt bikes, they've already got made in jumps. That's why they're flying down the sidewalks because there's already ramps that they can sail off of, because that's how uneven the concrete is. The dirt bikes will be sent into the air. Think about taking a child in a stroller or a wheelchair down that sidewalk, and the foliage is so far into the sidewalk that you get hit and scratched in the faces with branches.

Plus, you just can't get up on the side of it because the dip is so much that the wheelchair or stroller won't go up. If you're riding a dirt bike or even a bike, that's gonna be great for doing tricks and stuff, but it's really unsafe.

I mean, I don't get it- why they're not being taken care of- and why it's an issue, but we've got children that walk in the street just so that they don't trip.

I'm on disability and they want to try and fine me, they want to make me shovel. This is something that irritates me as well. They wanna make me shovel my sidewalk, but people up on Tipp Hill and the Eastside, they have that little tractor that goes through. None of them have to shovel their sidewalks or get fined if their sidewalk isn't done. Half the people

in this neighborhood can't pay a fine. I own my own house. I'm ready to sell my house and move away from the Westside because of all these issues and the sidewalk is one of the major issues that's making me think about giving up my house and moving. I've got a huge yard, I've got more benefits than most people do on the Westside for a home. Physically it's hurting me, physically it's unsafe for my child and for me. That doesn't have to do with just that piece of the neighborhood, that has to do with sidewalks and the street that aren't untaken care of. I mean if I want to get safely to the supermarket from my house, or safely to bring my son to Holy Rosary, up the street, I have to ride all the way through the street, even on Fitch, and Delaware, and Brady and all that, all the way up because there is no sidewalk that I can get on. So I've gotta take the chance every day.

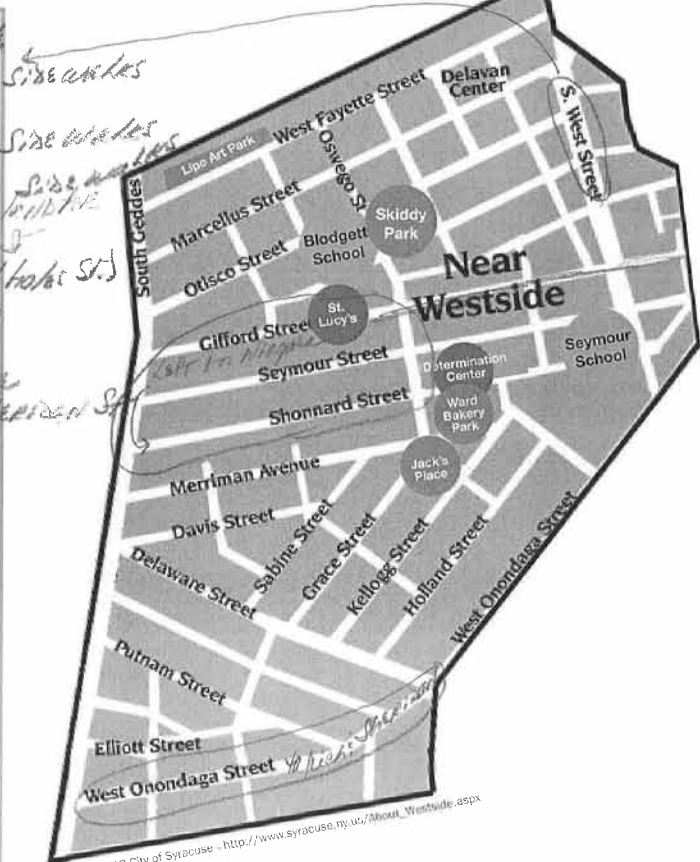
How am I gonna get my son to school in the wintertime? My wheelchair can't even get up sidewalks in the winter and there's no getting out. The streets don't get plowed over here, never mind the sidewalks getting plowed. The streets don't even get plowed. There's no way for me to get my child to school unless I have somebody who walks or drives. This is a serious issue. This is why people are leaving the Westside or why people just don't care anymore and aren't trying to change things, because it doesn't seem to help.

I'd like to stay. I'd love to stay. I love my house here and I love the West Side. It has a lot to offer, there's a lot of old things, there's a lot of beauty here that's been forgotten, like the ages of the houses. There's things here, but the bad things are really starting to...it just shows that the common council and the mayor and the city doesn't care about the Westside, and these police officers don't care about the Westside. The ones that do are few and far between, and it makes their jobs even harder, because they come up against a brick wall. Something's gotta break, something's gotta come even before something terrible happens.

WHERE DO YOU WALK?

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1. Bird all the way west to Onondaga
2. all of Griffith
3. Onondaga to S. Salina St
4. Left on (what St.) Niagara to Shonnard
5. Onondaga to Rich. Sherman St
6. Circle



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On the Same Page

Paul Mercurio,

City of Syracuse Transportation Planner

Interviewed by Elle Shimkus

ES: Together with the Gifford Street Community Press, we're putting together a book about the state of the sidewalks in the Near West Side. So we thought your expertise with sidewalks and transportation would be useful. What's been your previous experience in the West Side?

PM: Actually, my first job after my masters was to work as a neighborhood planner where I actually worked with the West Side neighborhood specifically and worked there with the TNT and got to know a lot of people there. So, that's been my previous experience with it. Also, for graduate school, my thesis was on the West Street Corridor, so I feel like I know that neighborhood a little better than other neighborhoods and I love it.

ES: Have you gotten to deal with a lot of the residents down there?

PM: I'm sure that there are many that I have not met, but I feel like, again, I know a bunch of the people over there.

ES: Have you been down there recently?

PM: I haven't been able to spend as much time down there recently as I'd like, but I do, every once in a while, drive by, I just haven't been able to walk around the neighborhood as much as I used to.

ES: So have you really noticed the sidewalks in your recent visits?

PM: I'm always noticing sidewalks.

ES: What were your observations of that?

PM: In some areas, like Otisco Street, we've had new sidewalks put in, but in some areas we have crumbling sidewalks. It's kind of the quilted, patchwork nature of the city sidewalks.

There has been research that shows [that] subtle signs of caring... does all these good things for the neighborhood.

ES: I've read that you don't always drive to work, but you bike and walk. Do you think your perspective as a user of sidewalks differs from your perspective as a transportation planner, or do you try to take it into account as both?

PM: I think I wouldn't be doing my job as a transportation planner if I weren't trying to walk and bike as much as I drive.

ES: Currently, who has the responsibility for fixing the broken sidewalks?

PM: I think you know the answer to this. It's the property owner. The property owner, I forget exactly how it says in the ordinance, but the property owner adjacent to the sidewalk has responsibility for maintenance.

ES: Is this a common practice in other cities, do you know?

PM: That's a good question. I believe Rochester has similar laws to us, however, when snowfall gets to a certain level, they do have a municipal sidewalk cleaning, but in general it still largely falls on the city in Rochester.

I've requested that our Regional Transportation Agency look at sidewalk maintenance and sidewalk responsibilities... The county's

concern was more about where do we put sidewalks, where do we need sidewalks? As opposed to in the city, our concern is that we already have sidewalks everywhere, how do we maintain them? But those questions of maintenance

have kind of gotten combined into

the regional question of where do we put sidewalks, what type of sidewalks do we want, and how do we maintain them? So that's something that, at the regional agency, they're starting.

ES: Some of the residents we've been talking to feel it would be more logical to have the city maintain them, what would you say to that?

PM: Well, I'm gonna take a step back from immediate city politics and just kind of address national trends.

And so once we've been informed in written fashion of "this sidewalk is in bad condition",

We have this tea party movement, we have all this big government stuff and, for better or worse, people are saying that government can't handle responsibility of these things. The government should not be in the business of doing more things. So that's something that certainly we're reacting to.

Locally, funding is certainly an issue. The mayor's been pretty up front that the city will probably be going bankrupt in a couple years and we're trying to make that not happen as much as we can. But you know, sidewalks, the idea of the city maintaining sidewalks is a question of how that would be funded.

**it then does
become the
responsibility
of the city.**

Conceptually, I think I'm on the same page in that I can see there being an economy of scale by having municipal forces look at these things, but at the same time, it's the logistics of having the city kind of take ownership, organize this, fund it. It's those kinds of questions. Five, given our fiscal climate and our laws. So it's what would

the laws look like to change that, how would we fiscally do that? These are all questions that I think should be asked, and I hope to answer as part of the pedestrian plan. So I think, conceptually I'm on the same page as a lot of the homeowners, in that. And I don't understand how we inherited this set of laws. I've only been in town ten years, so I don't know where this came from. Honestly, I guess I can only do so much, so I at least know the laws that I've been handed. I don't quite know where they all came from, [laughs]

ES: I think one of the big problems with this plan now is a lot of the vacant lots and absentee landlords. Do you think that would be a good place to start with the city taking control?

PM: I mean, again, it goes to this idea of the city having unlimited resources. I think we would love to have all these vacant lots, you know, be cared for, have signs of ownership, have signs of caring, sort of thing. There has been research that shows, environmental research that shows, subtle signs of caring enhance neighborhood security and does all these good things for the neighborhood. It's just, where are we going to find the funding, where are we going to find the resources? And so it's the thing where, conceptually, I'm on the same page. It's just practically, fiscally how do we make something like that happen, you know?

ES: Do you think that, right now, feasibly, could a resident fix his own sidewalk with his own materials and labor?

PM: Yeah, oh yeah. There are city standards that we have to follow which, honestly, I think are kind of good. We're requiring that, if this is going to be publicly used, it has to have a high quality to it. We don't allow people to just throw down asphalt, and with our sidewalks, we make sure actually when they get done the intention is that these sidewalks are supposed to last like fifty years. So it's like we have a very high quality that we expect in what we do in the public realm. I understand on the flipside that that can be cost prohibitive for the person that, after the fifty years are up or whatever, now that the sidewalk needs to be repaired, it can be more expensive than if it was just asphalt, but that's where we're at and maybe that's something that we do revisit. Maybe we don't build to such a high standard but it's a little more cost effective. I don't know.

But I do like, in principle, the idea that we have a very high standard about what we expect for our built environment for the public.

ES: To dually address sidewalks and the unemployment rate, there have been ideas floating around about getting some of the unemployed residents together to fix these sidewalks themselves. Do you think that something like that could work?

PM: I think that's a great idea. This goes back to, again, the high standards in the built environment, but to work in the public right of way you need to have insurance and you need to build things to our specifications, but if people can organize themselves, start their own companies, I think, why the hell not? I think that would be awesome. And then having the property owners be able to pay them, sort of thing. A lot of the problems with the vacant land is that the owners of this vacant land a lot of the time aren't paying taxes. It's the type of thing where we can put in the sidewalk—the city program where we will go property by property to put in sidewalks that have been identified to us as problems—we'll do that and then we'll assess it on the person's taxes. But if that property owner isn't paying taxes, we're never going to get that investment back on the city and then that's public dollars that just basically went... And it's kind of unfair to people who are paying taxes for that money to be, supposed to be recouped. Again, I like the idea, I think that's a great idea. I'm bringing up these issues not in a sense of shooting down the idea, but saying “here are some of the things I see as hurdles that we need to overcome.” Not necessarily as barriers that are going to stop it, you know?

ES: So it's mainly a financial thing that's sort of limiting us from getting to these ideal situations?



PM: I would, well, I would say right now it's a time thing for me to be able to develop a plan and answer these questions, but then once the rubber hits the road it's going to be about finances as well. Unfortunately, a lot of things come down to the laws and legal stuff. I mean, part of the reason we are complaint driven is because we have established legal precedent that if someone trips and falls and we're not aware of it, then it's not our fault. But if we are aware of the sidewalk being in bad shape, and we have written notice that we've been informed that this is a bad sidewalk, then it is our fault if someone should trip and fall. So right now we basically protect ourselves and protect the public dollar by not being proactive and not going out and doing a comprehensive assessment of which sidewalks are bad.

ES: How long does it usually take between receiving a complaint and fixing the sidewalk?

PM: You know, that's actually a really good question. It can be problematic. We have one, one sidewalk inspector for the entire city who goes around and reacts to complaints. And when he's on a site, he usually does look around the block so it's not like complete blinders, but it's more targeted like that. And it depends on the property owner. Because again the responsibility still falls to the property owner. We need to show that we're being proactive and we do need to be proactive, not just to show it. We need to be proactive in working with the property owner to address the issue. Usually we want to give the property owner some time to figure out, do they want to do it themselves, do they want to have the city do it on the city's program and put it on their taxes? This and that sort of thing.

That can take a couple months of back and forth, and So, I mean in the best case scenario I imagine it would probably take, I'd say about two months, but on a worst case scenario it could take up to a year.

I know that I have personally submitted complaints to the sidewalk inspector, and he's said "Yeah I've already gotten complaints about that one".

vigilant about it or complain about it more. So it's, I'm sure, highly possible. But I don't know, you'd have to ask the sidewalk inspector directly.

ES: Do you think you get a lot of multiple complaints about the same sidewalk because of that window?

PM: You know, that's a good question. I know that I have personally submitted complaints to the sidewalk inspector, and he's said "Yeah I've already gotten complaints about that one". So it might be in certain neighborhoods where people are more

Mariana Jones.

WHERE DO YOU WALK?

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When I walk down streets, sometimes it's safer to walk in the road. Especially in winter when no one shovels. There are a lot of cracks in sidewalks. On snow days when I have no school, I like to shovel sidewalks and make a little extra cash.



Let's Do This: **Residents Organizing a** **Sidewalk Project**

By Geoff Cummings

I grew up in Syracuse; this is my hometown. In fact, I spent the first six years of my life only a few blocks away from here. I come from a large Syracuse family; our beginnings were in this neighborhood. When I was six or seven we moved to Eastwood, another part of Syracuse. But this was where we came from in a very real sense. I went to high school in Syracuse and I went to college in New York City. I lived and bounced around in Virginia and raised my family down there. I returned a year ago back to my hometown. Part of this being personal is a little about me, but this is about a community, and an organization within that: The Westside Residents Coalition, which has been my reintroduction into my hometown.

At a meeting they were brainstorming for one of the projects, which they already had seen as a key project. This being a walking community, they were saying all winter the sidewalks are snowbound. We can all appreciate that we're looking at one of the snow capitals of the world--there's all kinds of records. The bottom line is there are 10, 12, 14 feet of snow in a winter and if you're a young active student you can sort of just bounce around. That won't throw off your lifestyle and what you're trying to do. But if you're a young mother with two little kids a senior citizen, to go outside in the winter becomes a very harrowing, difficult experience. The rest of the year the sidewalks are so shattered



that everybody--especially mothers with strollers and kids--is essentially forced to walk in the streets. The bottom line is it's treacherous. It's like mountain biking to move around the community.

So I thought that I could help. My approach to involvement is sort of project oriented and action oriented, and I said it immediately. Mother Earth was very simpatico. She just said, "Let's do this" because they had been talking about this for a while. They had a student intern research it and there was a valuable year of gestation. Can we get the city to come in to do this? How can we solve this problem? And it's not an easy problem necessarily.

Again, It's a walking community. Many of the folks in this community don't have the vehicles, and it's not like this sort of suburban community where you jump in your car and go to the store. The clearing of a sidewalk, as opposed to the roads, is the responsibility of the property owner. So whether it's La Casita, or a homeowner, or a business, the city doesn't clear sidewalks. This was one of the things early on. We said to the city, "Well you clear the roads, why don't you clear the sidewalks?" That's another whole issue at this point, but that wasn't going to solve the problem by just going to the city and trying to negotiate with them. They don't do that.

We're trying to build a community organization, which is part of what the residents are trying to do.



Part of this project is hoping to carry on next March and April to address the fact that a lot of the sidewalks are broken and are in very poor condition. Ideally, the project, which is starting in December with the clearing of the sidewalks, is looking to carry on and use the same local workers to create a local sidewalk construction business. Because what would happen now, if you owned a home near here and the sidewalk was totally in shambles, is that the city could come to you and cite you and say, "You have to fix your sidewalk." And you'd say, "Well, alright." And the city will say, "Well, we will fix it for you, and put that bill on your property taxes." Or you could hire a company and pay them, but the city will do it and put it on your bill and you can pay, you know, 500 dollars a year for 10 years. That's the way most people do it.

There are certain foundations in Syracuse, not-for-profit organizations, and that's La Liga, working with a local association, that's the Westside Residents; that could go in and apply for several thousand dollars as start-up money. We're trying, which I think is a little bit unique, to have an ongoing impact and use this start up money to recruit, train, and find people and put them together in an ongoing community benefit corporation which will have a board of directors from the community. Several members of the Westside Residents Coalition, people from La Liga, and people from the community will be on the board, so the community will own and control that benefit corporation. Half of the work is going to various businesses and individuals in the community and saying, "We'd like to offer you this service," and the other half of the job is to clear sidewalks for critical paths of the community so people can have a way to get to school. We aren't getting paid by anybody in particular; we're just looking to do something to

benefit the community, so there's this dual agenda which allows us to be self sustaining.

Recruiting is not going to be that hard. La Liga already has a list of 300 people looking for work and they're ready, willing, and able. You don't need social media or anything. The Westside residents just told a few people: "Hey, there's going to be work." In a month or so we'll have a few local opportunities where people can come in and basically say, "Yes, I want to work here." We aren't looking for resumes; we're looking for people. So it really becomes much more difficult to decide on 12 or 15 fifteen people for a program for a community of that size, so that's not the problem.

We're trying to build a community organization, which is part of what the residents are trying to do. They're trying to get more people involved. So when you're looking at something as hands-on as clearing a sidewalk, then you don't have to say too much. People understand, it's very straightforward. You've got jobs, so that's obviously a hook to getting people's attention. So, hiring locals to do local work, to ultimately make life easier and safer for everyone. I thought that was a very appealing part of the project.

Nuts and bolts: We were very fortunate that La Liga had a fenced-in yard behind their space where they keep a few vans and that sort of thing. They immediately said, "Hey, if you need a place to keep your equipment you can keep it here." So, again, we didn't have a building, or a space and all that. And La Liga has, in a true neighborly spirit, said, "Yes, we'll help you, we'll give you a space." We may end up getting a small space at the

habitat for humanity restore, which is nearby. ProLiteracy has a brand new building just opening and they have a facility there that they want to open to the community, which has computers to help to train people in not only literacy, but also computer literacy. Part of what I'm looking to do is train several people on how to run a small business on a computer. My role, as I see it, is to basically get the project started, get it up and running, and train the people to be able to carry that and I'll move on to another project.

We're hoping come spring, when the snow melts in March or April, we would evolve the same companies and the same workers to be able to do that work, so that it's a year-round project. But looking at when we were realistically going to be able to start, and saying "ok, we can start this late fall," and when it was a little simpler problem of clearing we said, "alright, we'll start in December." We'll look to get shovels and snow blowers, which are pretty efficient, and hire local people to provide a service, not just for paying customers. Again, there are an increasing number of not-for-profit organizations that do need their sidewalks cleared.

It gets into what it takes to start a small business; that's how I look at it. It's not what it takes to start a not-for-profit, a not for profit now includes everything from Syracuse University to the medical center. Half of Syracuse is not-for-profit based; between churches and schools and hospitals and various things of that nature. Part of what is interesting is everywhere throughout the country if you will, the increasing desire to connect the not-for-profit world with the for-profit world. Every community has a development corporation and this and that. This building was

restored by the Near Westside Initiative, which is out of SU, and is a not-for-profit. So there's this whole blending of those two spheres, and I think part of what you might take away from this is what a B-corporation is in that I see that as the bridge between the not for profit world and the for profit world.

Basically what a B-corporation does is it legitimizes and documents that the purpose of your company is to take care of your employees, your community, and your environment. It's known in the trade as the "triple bottom option," so it expands the concept of a private company. A B-corporation is still a company and it still can make money, and if it makes profit, it pays taxes on that profit. I would suggest that the B-corporation that we're going to make is not going to make profit. If we have extra money from the business we're doing for our customers and the community, we'll just hire more local people to clear more stock. So the goal of our B-corporation is not to make profit, but to be self-sustaining; it's to do half private business and half community service.

At this point in my life I've worked with non-profits, I've done a lot of everything from work in publishing for Doubleday for a few years in New York and that sort of thing. What I find enjoyable is working with community organizations to solve problems and help them put together sustainable plans so that it can be ongoing. That's where I see my role. What I'm a part of is a group of 20 folks, many in the community, who are looking to do the best they can to improve the quality of life for their neighbors. It's that simple.

Kicking Off

By John Burdick

In the late afternoon of Sunday, December 16th, fifty residents from the West Side gathered at the Boys and Girls Club on Shonard Street to eat pasta and salad and talk about one of Syracuse's favorite things: snow. But the topic of the two-hour meeting, hosted by the West Side Residents Coalition (WRC), was not skiing or snowmen: it was the problem of unshoveled sidewalks, and what the community can do about them. With support from the Gifford Foundation, Proliteracy, The Near West Side Business Association, and the Spanish Action League, the WRC called the meeting to kick off a winter-long campaign to clear paths so that more people can move around their neighborhood this winter. Susan Hamilton, who lives on Holland Street, and Karaline Rothwell, who lives on Tully, led the meeting. They pointed out that although the city requires homeowners to shovel their sidewalks, snow often remains unshoveled in front of houses that are vacant or whose landlords live far away. Everyone at the meeting chimed in. "I can't go anywhere in the winter," said Linda Porter, who lives on Gifford Street and is in a wheelchair. "I've been stuck too long for hours in one spot trying to get through", said another resident. "When I want to go to the corner grocery store, I am literally stuck."

Others spoke of having to walk in the street. “That’s scary,” said one, “because the streets are icy and you have to walk with the car traffic.” Some mentioned that in the wintertime children often must walk to school in the street because the sidewalks are impassable.

Then Susan and Karaline presented WestSide Walks, the WRC’s campaign to address this problem. The idea is simple: to form volunteer teams of residents, and when the snow falls, distribute hats, gloves, sand and shovels to them, keep their insides warm with delicious hot chocolate, and assign them to areas with the most need, such as blocks with many seniors and people with disabilities.



Showing a map of the neighborhood, Susan and Karaline asked people to identify areas that go unshoveled. Hands shot up all around the room, and people kept Susan and Karaline busy drawing circles on the map. Then Susan and Karaline asked for volunteers to sign up as part of the team. They explained that people who put in time as volunteers will get coupons for goods at local businesses, and some will be able to earn shovels.

People signed up all over the room, for various tasks: snow shoveler, hot chocolate maker, phone caller. Everyone who volunteered received a gift bag with mints, candy, hot chocolate and letter of thanks. Then the group was treated to a wonderful dinner of ziti and salad, served by residents Obdulia Boston, Sterling Boston, and Mother Earth, followed by a wonderful youth dance performance.

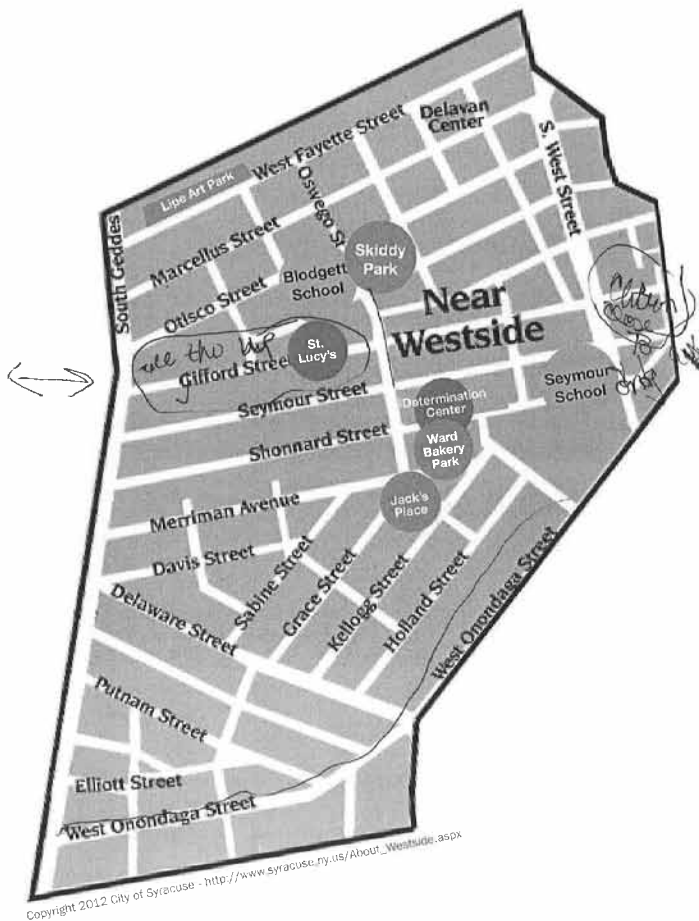
The first meeting of snow removal teams is planned for Saturday, December 29th, at 9:30 am, at Brown Memorial Church at Davis and Geddes Street, where there will be free hot chocolate, florescent yellow hats and gloves emblazoned with the WestSide Walks logo, and (of course) shovels. Volunteers may earn gifts and coupons, but most of all, they will get the good feeling that they are helping to make their neighborhood a safer, more accessible community for everyone. As resident Robert Walter said, "I think of mobility as a human right. Residents shouldn't have to walk in the road. It's dangerous for pedestrians to be in the street in the winter. But if we work together as a community, we can solve this." If you would like to be a part of the WestSideWalks campaign, call Karaline Rothwell at 263-1423.

WHERE DO YOU WALK?

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This part of the street is bad all the way up. Sidewalks are well

parts west on.



Getting Into Action: The Progress of WestSide WalksThusfar

By Susan Hamilton

Our WestSideWalks program is going pretty well so far. We've had from 12 to a high of 19 shovelers, a mixture of neighborhood people and some folks from SU—but definitely neighborhood people, some as young as six and seven all the way up to my age. So, it's been fun. When we first started out, we thought we would break up into smaller groups to cover more areas, but we find that it is really more effective to go as one big group. We do this because we are noticed more, and that's a big part of our mission. We are trying to clear snow from some of the sidewalks, but the goal behind the project is more than simply shoveling snow. We are looking for recognition so people will say, "how can I help, how can I join?" This is why we have the neon-yellow hats. The idea was to have something very visible, and it has worked well when we are out as a group and everyone's wearing the same hats. We get a lot of attention.

WestSideWalks works like this. We bought 50 shovels, which turned out to be more than we needed, but it's probably better to have too many than too few. We have decided that people who show up regularly to help, but may not have a shovel at home, can take a shovel with them. That way they can earn a little money shoveling someone's driveway or something like that. Ultimately we would like to turn WestSideWalks into a job-creation program so that people could start a small business.

We haven't figured out exactly how this program will work, but we are beginning to talk to groups in other parts of the city, other neighborhoods, who are concerned about sidewalks. We want to try to get a city-wide coalition where we can all sit down and talk about how we can deal with this on a city-wide basis and what role the city should play. Many of us believe—and I don't want to speak for everyone—but many of us believe that just like the city takes care of clearing the street, they should take care of the sidewalks. It should be a civic responsibility. And there is a lot of economy of scale to be gained that way. The problem is when you get individual people doing the job, even if they are very faithful about shoveling their own sidewalk, you still have the vacant house next door and the empty lot beyond it that never get shoveled. Unless you have the city saying, “OK, we need to have a clear path from one end of the street to the other,” people won't be able to get around. And so ultimately it would be nice if there was a city program to contract with individual small businesses, some of which would probably get started in response to this opportunity. Those businesses could shovel or use a snowblower or one of those “bobcats” that they have around campus; they could take on something like five streets and just clear everything at once, early in the morning, so everyone can get around. That way you could employ people who may not have a whole lot of job skills, or who still may be in school and have no money, to get paid working on something that really needs to be done.

Our activities may have inspired another community in Syracuse to take action and follow our lead. We haven't really talked to them, so I can't say for sure that they got the idea from us. But almost as soon as we started, we got some nice press from the Post-Standard. The first time we went out shoveling, an article was published in the newspaper, and several of us got an e-mail

and Facebook message from a Common Councilor who represents the Valley area. He questioned us about the project, and I got the impression that in the Valley they were still thinking about a shoveling project and were wondering about liability and being sued. We responded that we had decided to just get out and shovel. And then after a couple weeks, there was something in the newspaper about that group organizing a shoveling effort. So

You [could] get people who may not have a whole lot of job skills, who still may be in school, working for someone with no money, who could get paid to do something that really needs to be done.

I guess they either figured out their liability issue or decided not to worry about it.

The problem with sidewalks is two separate issues, and because there is snow on the ground now, we are dealing with the shoveling. However, when the weather warms up, we are going to get back to strategizing on the condition of the sidewalks. When comes to snow removal, the city policy says that property owners are supposed to shovel their sidewalks,

but there is no enforcement. It is up to Ordinance Enforcement, which is a division of the Police Department that deals with abandoned cars and a number of other issues as well—and they frankly don't have the time or inclination to cite property owners for not shoveling. And in the case of a vacant lot, what are they going to do?

They can't even leave a notice, a citation. So the reality is that the city never enforces shoveling, as far as I can tell. They don't even cite businesses. This is one of my pet peeves, and I don't want the city heavy-handedly enforcing the shoveling ordinance on a disabled neighbor, but I think that a business that pays to have its parking lot plowed should also do the sidewalk. And at the very least, if they are not going to clear the sidewalk, the plow should not leave a huge ridge of snow that buries the sidewalk, making it worse rather than better. I think if the city is going to enforce anything, they should send Ordinance Enforcement out to cite businesses that move the snow from their parking lots onto the sidewalks.

In terms of sidewalk conditions, the city's transportation planner is very sympathetic. We have some areas where the sidewalk is nonexistent—is has literally disappeared, and you are walking in mud and roots. The city's rule is that if someone brings it to their attention, if there is a complaint made, the city is then obligated to deal with it. So as sort of an experiment, I put in a complaint about a year ago. There is a stretch of sidewalk in front of 413 Massena Street, where a house was torn down and the demolition equipment just chewed up the sidewalk. What remains are gravel and pieces of cement sticking up and a whole lot of mud. I reported this to the city's new online complaint system, and I have gotten no response for about a year.

But I think now the city has condemned the sidewalk. Obviously the owner of the tax-delinquent vacant lot is unlikely to do anything, so the city will add the cost of replacing the sidewalk onto the unpaid tax bill. This is not necessarily the best way to deal with the situation, but at least that section of sidewalk eventually will be fixed. We wouldn't want to go around citing all of the bad sidewalks; it could be a situation in which the property owner does not have the financial resources to deal with it. The city can have a contractor replace the sidewalk and add the cost onto your tax bill, to be paid off over seven years. And though that may not seem like a whole lot of money, for some owners, it could be enough to cause them to give up, saying, "I can't afford to live here anymore" and abandoning the house.

