

## Updating Augusta sidewalks could cost \$105 million

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The results of a \$589,522 study are back and it will cost an estimated \$105 million to get Augusta's sidewalks and curb ramps in compliance with federal laws.

Mitchell Murchison, the project manager with Cranston Engineering, presented a survey of the study's findings, including the projected costs, to the Augusta Commission on Tuesday.

The firm and two subconsultants catalogued every sidewalk, crosswalk, curb ramp and other pedestrian way around the city, rated its level of accessibility under the Americans with Disabilities Act, and held public hearings on what is now a draft self-evaluation and transition plan, Murchison said.

Engineers evaluated about 235 miles of sidewalks and recommended adding 203 more, according to his presentation.

In all, he said, about 12,800 structures were catalogued and rated, including 4,802 curb ramps, 2,386 crosswalks, 550 bus stops, 574 traffic signals and 57 parking spaces.

The city's aging streetscapes have long been criticized for their lack of accessibility as the disabled population has grown.

Disabled Air Force veteran Tim Hollobaugh threatened a year ago to file a class-action suit accusing the government of ignoring the needs of the disabled, but the suit hasn't materialized.

City Engineering Director Abie Ladson said the consultants determined where sidewalks were needed by looking at the amount of pedestrian traffic and, in some cases, where pedestrians had worn footpaths through the dirt.

Commissioner Bill Lockett, who leads Augusta's "Age Friendly" effort, said updating the sidewalks is also important for senior citizens and children who walk to school.

"We have four that have been hit by automobiles," he said.

Other impediments include utility poles erected in the middle of a sidewalk and sidewalks built at steep angles, Lockett said.

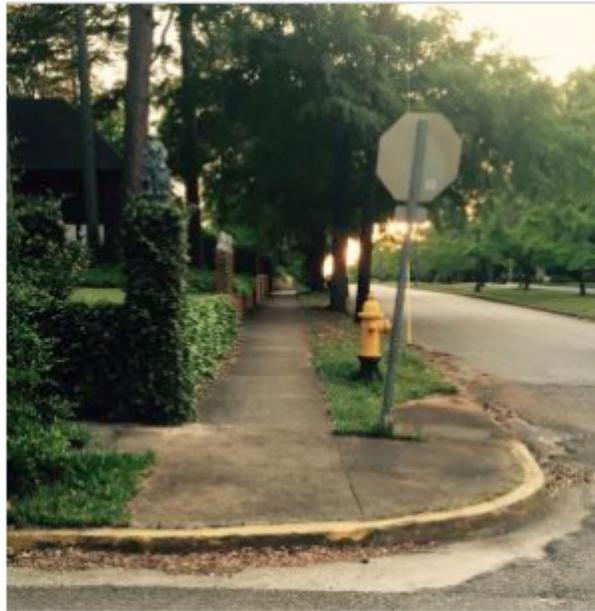
The study determined the work could be divided into between 70 and 90 projects, with "high priority" projects expected to cost \$31.3 million. Transportation Investment Act funds can be used to cover an estimated \$8.2 million of the high-priority work, the report said.

Commissioner Marion Williams questioned what would happen to large trees whose roots have upended sections of sidewalk. Commissioner Sammie Sias asked whether the study had looked at city playgrounds and parks. The study did not look at parks, Murchison said. Commissioner Bill Fennoy asked whether crosswalks near senior housing could allow more time for seniors to cross.

The city used sidewalk funds from the sixth round of the special purpose local option sales tax to pay for the study.

The seventh round of the tax includes \$2 million for sidewalk rehabilitation and replacement, "just a drop in the bucket," City Administrator Janice Allen Jackson noted.

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Augusta sidewalks such as this one that terminate without a curb cut sloping to the road might be addressed with what a new city study estimated was a \$105 million package of repairs.