

## Sidewalks add to Livability and Healthy Lifestyles

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Every week I walk a couple blocks to my church. They are sometimes the most precarious roads in Princeton since there are no sidewalks, I must either walk on the road or walk in someone else's yard. Sometimes speeding cars turn the corner heading directly toward me and sometimes, when I have no choice but to walk through someone's yard, I might be their guard dog's breakfast. And sometimes these homeowners are pretty protective of their lawns when they come toward me with baseball bats and yes, even shotguns, in their hands.

What would save me from such dangers? A sidewalk. If the city fathers of Princeton were to undertake a block by block study, they might find Princeton residents favor having sidewalks on every city street. All because they, too, want to have safe neighborhoods and perhaps walk daily to exercise or even to get to know their neighbors better. Sidewalks are a major part of enhancing the livability of an area. They allow for and encourage the existence of pedestrian traffic that could to a pleasant eatery or department store or even the grocery store in their neighborhood.

Let me back up a bit. I am not trying to make the city fathers of Princeton squirm here; I merely used Princeton to illustrate what I wish to say about sidewalks in general. I'm not the world's premier expert on sidewalks but I have had the pleasure of walking on many sidewalks from New York City to Albuquerque and Los Angeles. All of these major cities offer different types of sidewalks, from their suburban pathway to arterial sidewalks and to the busier and more dynamic routes in commercial districts.

Sidewalks and crosswalks will be helpful to Princeton and Bluefield in many ways, and especially ensure the safety of pedestrians. Our cities are lacking especially in the arterial sidewalks, which link residents from one major area to another area such as sidewalks connecting neighborhoods, shopping centers, and eateries. Commercial sidewalks, on the other hand, are not prevalent except in the downtown areas of Bluefield and Princeton.

Another kind of sidewalk, the destination sidewalk, such as The Hollywood Walk of Fame in Los Angeles, couldn't possibly be replicated in our area. However, we can see that the Princeton Mile follows the formula for showing tourist sites.

What are the challenges that Bluefield and Princeton face when it comes to sidewalks? Many roads do not have the space needed for sidewalks. And I'm sure that many homeowners would be reluctant to give a part of their front or back yards.

This begs the question, what makes for a safe sidewalk? Pedestrians will use a well-maintained sidewalk. And they will use those that ensure their safety. They should not fall into disrepair. The cracks should be filled in immediately. During winter, ice and snow should be removed even as the snowplows are clearing the roads. Weeds and grass should be cleared. If the sidewalks are not lit at night, pedestrians will be wary of putting themselves at risk of the threats from people that hide in the shadows. Such preventive measures will help avoid lawsuits.

But the one thing that the city fathers cannot guarantee is safety from pedestrians with their noses stuck in their cell phones or their ears plugged up.