

The Newport Way Sidewalk Committee: Background, History, and Accomplishments

Documented by Kristi Weir for Feet First. December 2014

GENERAL DESCRIPTION AND PURPOSE:

A 0.9 mile section of SE Newport Way from SE Allen Road to 150th Ave SE lacks sidewalks and bike lanes. In some places the shoulder is reduced to 18". Newport Way Library, South Bellevue Community Center, and Eastgate Park are all located along this segment of Newport Way. Currently there is no safe way to bicycle or walk to these public facilities. This area was annexed into the City of Bellevue in 2012. Bellevue City Council recognizes the need for sidewalks and bike lanes along Newport Way, but a project to remedy the situation must compete with many other capital requests.

It is up to us, the people who live in this community, to convince the Council that this project should be given the highest possible priority. 2014 is the year Bellevue City Council will be meeting to hear budget proposals and review funding priorities before voting for adoption of the Capital Investment Program (CIP) budget. It will be another 2 years before they do this again. Our committee was formed to convince the Bellevue City Council to give the Newport Way Sidewalk project highest possible priority in the CIP to be voted on in December.

HISTORY OF THE NEWPORT WAY SIDEWALK COMMITTEE

1. INITIAL IMPETUS: In 2005 Barbara Spindel, President of Newport Way Library Association, started investigating how to get sidewalks along the section of SE Newport Way in which the library was located. This section of Newport Way was in Eastgate, an unincorporated part of King County and while the County acknowledged the need for sidewalks, they did not have funds to build them. Bellevue also acknowledged the need but while they had funds, they did not have jurisdiction.

2. IN 2012 EASTGATE WAS INCORPORATED INTO BELLEVUE. Barbara began talking with Bellevue Transportation Dept. personnel about the need for sidewalks and bike lanes along this section of Newport Way. She formed an ad hoc subcommittee from the Newport Way Library Association of interested board members—they were Kristi Weir, Jane Kato and Dorris Martin. The City of Bellevue was helpful and said it recognized the need for sidewalks but such a project had to be funded through the City's budgetary process. We continued to query the City about what we needed to do to initiate the process of getting the desired sidewalks.

3. JANUARY 30, 2014 NEIGHBORHOOD WORKSHOP: LIFE OF A TRANSPORTATION CIP PROJECT—held at Newport Way Library.

To help us and others understand the process of funding and implementing a new construction project, the Transportation Dept. (Eric Miller, Kristi Oosterveen, Tresa Berg and Carol Ross of Neighborhood Outreach) presented a well-crafted program with several cases studies. There were handouts—one very important one was a time line for adoption of the CIP. Two Transportation Commissioners (Scott Lampe and Janice Zahn) also attended the meeting and answered questions. The message we got was that we would need to continually lobby for the Newport Way sidewalks if we wanted this project to get a high priority. The idea of supporters wearing matching T-shirts came from this workshop. The workshop was extremely helpful in educating us on the budgeting process for CIP. Many of the attendees from this workshop became active in the Newport Way Sidewalk Committee.

4. FEBRUARY: FIRST ORGANIZATIONAL MEETING OF THE NEWPORT WAY SIDEWALK COMMITTEE.

Barbara moderated the meeting and ideas were floated as to how to proceed in order to achieve City funding for Newport Way sidewalk and bicycle lanes in the 2015 budget. The committee developed into a very efficient, effective, and collaborative group.

- We decided we needed to attend both Bellevue City Council meetings and Bellevue Transportation Commission meetings.
- We decided to order green T-shirts with “Newport Way Sidewalks—for a Safer Community” written on them.
- We decided to communicate via a Google Group for emails.
- We decided to have a Website. www.newportwaysidewalk.org
- We decided to have a positive message—not complain about the lack of sidewalks. We would offer facts and testimonies from various user groups of Newport Way.

MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE

Curt Allred
Randy Brown
Vicki Heck
Micki Larimer
Dorris Martin
Jan Medley
Phil Moser
Gayle Niendorff
Joe Pham
Barbara Spindel
Sylvia Vasilik
Kristi Weir

RESULTS OF COMMITTEE ACTIVITIES: (All described in more detail on our website www.newportwaysidewalk.org under the NEWS tab) FROM MARCH 2014 TO NOVEMBER 2014

- Sought endorsements from 14 organizations
- Requested Bellevue to do a traffic study which it did.
- Described to Transportation Commission on March 13th how other cities evaluate and prioritize sidewalks construction projects, and how Newport Way sidewalk project ranks high using those evaluation metrics.
- Described traffic and safety issues along Newport Way.
- Two different Boy Scout Groups, Tye Girls Cross-Country Coach, the pastor from Aldersgate Methodist Church as well as many of the Newport Way Committee members all testified to the Bellevue City Council why it is imperative to have safe sidewalks.

OUTCOME AND ACCOMPLISHMENT AS OF DECEMBER 3, 2014:

On December 1, the Bellevue City Council unanimously adopted the 2015-2016 Operating Budget and 2015-2021 Capital Investment Program Budget. Included in the capital budget is funding for a sidewalk on Newport Way (\$7 million).

The link to the press release is <http://www.bellevuewa.gov/11509.htm>

KEYS TO OUR SUCCESS

Assuming the City Council approves the budget, here are the keys to our success

1. Leadership by Barbara Spindel on the issue since 2005.
2. Dept. of Transportation has been very forthcoming and cooperative in providing information to us.
3. Our Newport Way Sidewalk Committee was focused and dedicated. Each member brought ideas to the table and the initiative to carry the ideas through. I interviewed the members to glean why we were such an effective team. Most of us originally only knew one or two people on the committee. We came from various neighborhoods (Somerset, Monthaven, Whispering Heights, Eastgate, and Cougar Hills). The main unifying factor that drew us to the committee was the fact that Newport Way is dangerous for pedestrians and cyclists. Here are some of the reasons members gave for joining the committee:
 - About 7 years ago, I saw a grandmother and toddler come frighteningly close to being hit by a car while walking along the shoulder of Newport Way, at the curve just west of 150th. (See my testimony to the city council in May: [April 28th City Council Video](#) at 25:00)
 - As Block Captain, Somerset North Slope, safety is one of my highest priorities.
 - My commitment is based on the real need for a safe way to link the public institutions located along Newport Way. Watching the young and the old walk along the narrow shoulder and seeing cyclists competing with speeding cars around the blind curves, makes me fearful of a tragedy in the making.
 - I always felt unsafe about walking to the library on Newport Way and instead walked along Allen Road and cut thru the Aldersgate parking lot. As much as I disliked the lack of sidewalks, it never occurred to me to talk to the City Council about adding one. I also did not know until a year or so ago that the road was previously under the jurisdiction of King County. I incorrectly assumed it was always maintained by City of Bellevue. I was so pleased that others had the same concern for safety and were actually working to make a change.
 - Having lived in Somerset since 1968, I was well aware of this stretch is Newport Way. My second son (now 43) had a bad fall off his bicycle as a youngster, and we always suspected he was tagged by a passing car. My kids were no longer allowed to ride or walk that stretch - for 30 years!
 - My concern was first, for safety, and second, for getting people out of cars where possible. I recalled that a community effort in the 1970's had led eventually to the construction of sidewalks and bike lanes on the part of Newport Way from the middle school to the high school. That project incorporated drainage solutions to an existing problem with runoff and flooding in the creek behind my house and led me to recognize that more than one problem could be solved when the community came together with the staff and elected representatives of Bellevue.

- I've strongly believed there should be a sidewalk on that stretch of road since we moved to the area in 1999. We purposely bought close to the library, but quickly discovered how dangerous it was to walk there. Once South Bellevue Community Center went in, it became outrageous that there isn't a connecting sidewalk in that community, *but* it was King County territory, so what are you going to do?? . . . The annexation gave me great hope the City would be inspired to act, but it wasn't until Barbara formed the group this year that I understood how a group of people can enact change. It's been inspiring working with this group. It's been a pleasure to work with such dedicated and talented people. It seems everyone has pitched in with their unique talents and always provided a kind, encouraging, welcoming place for everyone to share ideas and suggestions whether it be online or at meetings. The group's commitment fueled my own commitment
- In addition to the safety issues, I think it's a shame that such a beautiful stretch of road has no provisions for walking and cycling. I want to do all I can to support getting people out of their cars, and enjoying their neighborhoods on foot or bike.
- Safety of people using the many public facilities that are not linked and a feeling that the project's scope was a size that would allow a small citizen group to really make an impact