



Rhinebeck Village - Worth Walking

A Report of the Rhinebeck Village Pedestrian Task Force Assisted by the Dutchess County Department of Planning and Development February 24, 2011

Sidewalks are at the heart of Rhinebeck's community life.

They connect friends and neighbors as places to meet, they provide a pedestrian network to retail places, schools, and community facilities, and they are settings for parades and other village events. Sidewalks are also central to the Village's economic vitality. Rhinebeck draws thousands of visitors and local residents to its historic district, landmark sites, and commercial center. Good safe sidewalks are a must!

Planning Process - Recognizing that many sidewalks need to be repaired, and to expand Rhinebeck's walkability, Mayor James Reardon asked Dutchess County Planning and Development to survey all sidewalks within Rhinebeck's 1.6 square mile area. The Village Board also appointed a nine-member Pedestrian Task Force in July 2010. Comprised of local citizens with related expertise, the Task Force was charged with evaluating sidewalk issues, seeking input from residents and businesses, and reporting its findings to the Village Board.

The initial County Planning inventory gathered data from August 9 - 13, 2010 on a variety of attributes, including sidewalk conditions, materials, crosswalks, curb ramps, median widths, and accessibility factors. Village maps and geo-coded photos were compiled to show and locate specific sidewalk problems. Of the 11 miles of sidewalks in the Village, 54% were rated excellent or good, with 34% deemed deficient and 12% damaged. Uneven surfaces, often from tree roots, and severe cracking were the most common sidewalk problems.

Task Force members formed subcommittees to research, evaluate, and make initial recommendations on key topics. Subcommittee reports on Research and Public Outreach, Trees and Sidewalks Issues, Village Codes, and Construction and Finance Issues are included in the full Task Force report.

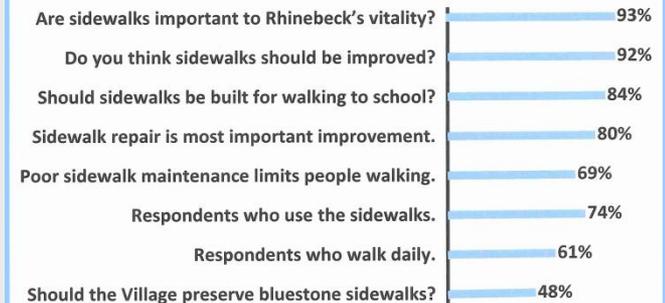


*Rhinebeck is pedestrian-friendly,
but many sidewalks need repair.*



Public Outreach – Among several initiatives used to enlist public input was a questionnaire mailed to Village residents, businesses, and organizations. Of the 1,716 questionnaires distributed, 441 respondents completed the surveys. High percentages of residents thought that sidewalks were important to the Village, use the sidewalks regularly, and agreed that they needed to be repaired. The Library and Recreation Park, schools, and hospital were the highest ranking destinations for new sidewalks. Respondents were generally split on potential funding options. A summary of various questions is presented in the chart below, shown as a percentage of positive responses.

Questionnaire Highlights – Positive Responses



Task Force members also discussed the project with the Rhinebeck Chamber of Commerce, Rotary, Lions Club, Rhinebeck Historical Society, and other interested groups. And finally, the Task Force and Planning Department held two widely publicized Public Workshops to provide Village Trustees with progress reports and listen to public comments.

Pedestrian Enhancement Projects - The fronts of the historic Beekman Arms and the FDR-inspired stone Post Office next door form a landmark greenspace at the Village crossroads. This central green should be seen as a unifying symbol of Rhinebeck's history, from its use as a Revolutionary War militia training ground to FDR's Post Office dedication speech to an overflowing crowd in 1939. Working with property owners, the green should be reconfigured into a single integrated space, framed by the surrounding historic buildings, street trees, and pedestrian paths as an actively used centerpiece for the Village and its visitors. The space should be kept simple. Historic additions to the existing flagpole, Civil War cannon, and Sepasco Trail stone marker might include a return of the post and chain edging along the front sidewalks and the old hand water pump on West Market Street. An outdoor patio for the Beekman Arms, rear connecting walkway, and more sitting places should also be considered to activate the center of the green.

Other recommended improvements for the Village Center include shorter crosswalks at the main intersections and diagonal parking along the south side of West Market Street to expand commercial parking options and slow traffic on this overly wide street. Extended sidewalks into the parking lanes at central crosswalks would have multiple benefits, such as shorter safer crossing distances, extra areas for landscaping, the prevention of illegal parking too close to corners, and better pedestrian and vehicle visibility.



Rhinebeck's re-imagined Village Green

Highlights of the Pedestrian Task Force's Recommendations

Code Changes:

- Create joint Tree and Sidewalk Commission to promote both safe sidewalks and healthy trees.
- Adopt specific tree and sidewalk repair standards and enhanced enforcement procedures.
- Attach the Task Force Report as an amendment to the Village's Comprehensive Plan.

Materials:

- Residential owners in the Historic District should retain/repair existing bluestone sidewalks.
- All other sidewalks should be concrete, except in front of the Beekman Arms and Post Office.

Implementation:

- Schedule future sidewalk improvements based on the three-phase strategy shown on Map 4.
- Notify property owners of their liabilities and responsibilities to maintain adjoining sidewalks.
- Residential owners will be notified to repair deficient/damaged sidewalks within 18 months.
- Commercial owners will be notified to repair deficient/damaged sidewalks within 12 months.
- Planning Board will enforce sidewalk standards and recommendations in all site plan reviews.
- Use Highway Department labor to help repair sidewalks, whenever appropriate.

Funding Alternatives:

- Private financing from individual property owners through enforcement of existing laws.
- Increased annual general fund budget for sidewalks/crosswalks, using existing tax sources.
- Long-term bonding and Capital Improvement Fund for sidewalk repair and new construction.
- Three-year Sidewalk Assistance Program offering up to 50% match for residential repairs.
- Point-of-Sale law requiring sidewalk code compliance as part of property closing process.
- Sidewalk Improvement District taxing parcels with existing or planned new sidewalks.
- Federal and State funding or private grants, although all budgets are very tight right now.