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From: cvm <cvanmaren@protonmail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, April 3, 2024 9:31 PM
To: ZZ Council Members; ZZ City Clerk External
Subject: #24-0348 Hintgen sidewalks
Attachments: NoSidewalks.doc; current.jpg; livetrial.jpg; streetmix.jpg

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Dear Council Members,

I am emailing about the sidewalk resolution, #24-0348. I've attached what I sent to the BPW last month which didn't get into the official documents. I hope you will have a chance to read it. I'm sorry this is so late. I keep rewriting. It's very hard to describe a big issue in a few words.

And, I am asking you to consider things from a different perspective and with different priorities. This may look like an inconsequential sidewalk project, but I think it's an important fork in the road that challenges how we've done things in the past. But you have to look at it differently. I think the committees that have already weighed in didn't have the information or time to make that shift. Plus, I think they misunderstood it as a request to outright ban sidewalks. It is not.

And, please remember that our neighborhood is not your neighborhood. We have very low traffic counts, sometimes only a few cars per hour. We have very few people parking on a wide mostly vacant streets. I invite you to come and walk around here before you decide.

This resolution does not say we will never install sidewalks. And it doesn't say we don't want safe places to walk. It says, pause the current program. And, to me, the reason is because it needs to be rethought in light of real solutions to the problem of speeding cars, finances, and climate action.

Our perceptions, perspectives, and priorities affect how we view a situation, what we consider a problem, and what we include in the possible universe of solutions. Sometimes, our perspectives are the result of cultural biases or even marketing, and they maintain a status quo that may not be the most equitable, or the most healthy or economical or the most sustainable. Sometimes, when

harms are caused, the only solutions considered protect the powerful and require those experiencing harm to make accommodations.

For example, not long ago, you had to breathe in others' cigarette smoke if you went to a restaurant or bar. As more complained, the solution was to clean out some little closet back by the kitchen and call it the NO SMOKING section which you had to specially request. The standard and normal was that every place was the smoking section. Finally, after a long fight to change the perspective, we have smoke-free indoor spaces. Another example: companies pollute drinking water, but the solution seems to be that those with undrinkable water have to use bottled water or the government has to pay for filters or new wells, not that those polluting the water are forced to stop. The victims must accommodate those causing harm. There are millions of such examples. And that's especially true for cars.

If you have 1/2 hour, I encourage you to watch a February program given by the co-author of the book MOVEMENT (which I can lend you): [Why Was John Lennon In Bed With a Bicycle?](#) The talk and book describe “auto logic” which others have called car-centrism or “car brain.” The given is that cars have priority, not human health and safety, not sustainability. The perspective hierarchy limits the possibilities we consider for our public space. The presenter quotes Donella Meadows (Thinking in Systems) “The language of an organization is not an objective means to describe reality – instead it defines what its members see and which actions they undertake.”

I am asking you to consider this issue from a different, non car-centric perspective in light of our current situation which is we don't have a lot of extra money and we must reduce carbon emissions. We can continue to prioritize car travel, driver convenience, and “flow,” or we can start to make cars move over for people. This is the thing. Cars or people. (I am a car driver so this is not an anti-car call to action.)

In our neighborhood, we already have a wide paved public space – enough for two whole lanes for parked vehicles and two whole lanes for moving vehicles. Why can't we share that space as we have done for the past 50 years? We could install low-cost, temporary lane narrowers at intersections, diverters, planters, bollards, boulders and other traffic-calming devices to make it difficult for cars to whiz through at 35 miles per hour where they should be going 15. If we must have delineated lanes, we could easily block off one lane currently

held in waiting for people to park and re-designate it as a space for people to walk. We have more than sufficient pavement already. It's just mis-allocated.

The 2018 city Transportation Demand Management plan (<https://www.cityoflacrosse.org/your-government/departments/planning-economic-development/planning/transportation/transportation-demand-management>) specifically mentions the importance of reducing vehicle miles traveled, encourages looking at the NACTO shared streets and traffic calming methods (referenced in the attached letter), committing to Vision Zero, and banning school drop offs. Here's a chance to work with a motivated neighborhood to make those parts of a six year old plan happen. That's one reason we want a pause. There are new and better ways to do things. There are new priorities. There are new opportunities.

If instead we have to sidewalkize everyplace. it's going to be pretty expensive because a lot of the city east of Losey has no sidewalks. In fact, I think the cost to do the sidewalks covered by this resolution would almost pay for an extra half hour of bus service for a year. Is this the best use of limited funds when other, less expensive options could be tried? Why can't we try other options? If it works here, it could be a solution for other areas in the city where residents also don't want sidewalks but do want to tame cars. Who is looking at our projects through the climate action lens? Can we pause this until we are sure that new priority is being considered?

As I mentioned, even if we must have sidewalks, we must not have and continue to have *these* sidewalks – ribbons of carbon-emitting concrete that require removal of healthy, mature, carbon-storing, shade-giving, habitat-providing trees. There are other materials and more climate-friendly ways to do sidewalks. Has anyone even considered these? Can we pause the program to find better options? I have heard some say, passing the resolution would set a bad precedent. I say, continuing to do sidewalks like we have been is a bad precedent if we are serious about climate action.

Yes, sidewalks are included in the climate action plan, too, but this is not a Bible verse-off. To me, healthy, mature trees are most important, especially when, with a fresh perspective, research, and creative thinking, we can have safe places to walk and trees.

The rest is in the attached. But, mostly, I want to emphasize that, from my perspective, every decision, small or large, is a climate action fork in the road.

Again, if we PAUSE this now, we might be able to find a great, positive, solution that could be a model for future actions. And, if we pause the sidewalks and still can't find that alternative, there's always next year.

I hope this was short enough. Please let's look at other, better options.

Cathy Van Maren

Sent with [Proton Mail](#) secure email.

Dear Board of Public Works members,

I am emailing about sidewalks in the Hintgen neighborhood which will be discussed at Monday's Board of Public Works meeting (24-0299). I plan to attend and hope to speak at that meeting but wanted to send this ahead of time since I know I will not have a lot of time to speak. There is some background material here, too.

I believe this issue is important for more than just Hintgen neighborhood. There are other La Crosse neighborhoods without sidewalks and with similar concerns. So, this might be an opportunity to (re-)look at the whole process, from involvement by residents to City priorities.

I bought my house here in 1983 and many of my neighbors then are still my neighbors now. We like it here. We raised and are raising our families here. I think we all share the same goal of maintaining a pleasant, quiet, and safe environment for ourselves, our neighbors, our children and grandchildren, and everyone else.

Our neighborhood is almost exclusively residential. There are a few businesses on the edge, along Mormon Coulee Road or Losey Boulevard, but there are not shops or businesses within the neighborhood and there are several dead end streets. So, most traffic should be residents and their visitors. Increasingly, though, some drivers seem to be cutting through (maybe to avoid Losey) at unsafe speeds. We have few controlled intersections and our streets are wide and mostly empty.

Our neighborhood has never officially requested sidewalks, And no one from the city has ever had or requested a neighborhood meeting about installing sidewalks on 28th Street. For several years, neighborhood members have asked for better pedestrian lighting, more controlled intersections, lower speed limits, enforcement of existing "No Stopping or Standing" signs near Hintgen Elementary School, better enforcement and/or lane narrowing at the four-way stop near the school, speed limiting bumps or table, and more. None of those suggestions have worked out. But, suddenly we are getting sidewalks.

I would like you to consider pausing the existing sidewalk program including any sidewalks scheduled for construction this year. Here are a few of my reasons.

Safety. I am in favor of pedestrian and bicyclist safety. As I mentioned, our main street safety concern is speeding cars, especially at intersections. We have a lot of walkers and children riding bikes and playing. Sidewalks do nothing to slow down speeding cars or to make pedestrians safe at intersections. In fact, I think that in our situation, sidewalks may actually invite more speeding by moving the slow, annoying humans out of the way. And, of course, sidewalk "safety" does not extend across intersections at all. (See [The Myth of Pedestrian Infrastructure](#).)

Safety of children going to and coming from school is also very important. But, there are less costly, possibly more-effective options for increasing student safety that have not been tried including enforcing existing traffic restrictions near the school, installing (movable) lane narrowers near the school and along 28th, trialing a "school street" (temporary street closure with limited as-needed access) on 28th during school drop off and pick up times (See [Reimagining Streets](#)) or doing volunteer-led group walks or bikes to school.

Climate Action. After its September 2019 carbon-zero resolution, in September 2022, the City Council declared a "climate emergency." And, for the whole of 2022, the City spent a lot of consultant money, time, and staff and volunteer effort to create a comprehensive Climate Action Plan (CAP), approved in early 2023, which includes several "action steps" ([summary below](#)) to reduce carbon emissions and make our community more resilient and better able to cope with predicted extreme weather events. These sidewalks are the exact opposite of what is needed for climate action and what is called for in the CAP. They use concrete, an impervious and high-emissions material. They require the removal of lawns and gardens that support insects and pollinators and absorb rainfall. They are likely to require the removal of existing trees whose carbon-storing qualities cannot be replaced by new plantings. (See [Rate of tree carbon accumulation increases continuously with tree size](#)) If we must have sidewalks, they should not be concrete ribbons and they should not take priority over trees and flowers. I understand the city has a right of way, but that space should be managed, as noted in the plan, to minimize removal of soil, ground cover, and native shrubs, and protect existing and promote increased tree canopy cover. In fact, what we have now is what many communities pay lots of money to install. The City should really be supporting existing boulevard plants and trees being lovingly cared for by residents.

One size does not fit all. Different situations require different solutions. High-traffic business streets should have

sidewalks plus separate, protected space for bicyclists. But in a residential neighborhood with few or no businesses, the only reason people should be driving is to get to or from a home, so the streets take on a different character and purpose – not car bowling alleys, but part of the public space. For environmental, equity, and safety reasons, we need to stop car-centric projects meant to increase car speeds and unimpeded flow, especially in residential neighborhoods. The new paradigm is people-centered design. (See [Shifting Gears: Toward a New Way of Thinking About Transportation](#)). [Narrower lanes](#) and [lower speeds](#) increase safety. In the U.S., shared streets, modeled after the UK's low-traffic neighborhoods and "living streets" in the EU, repurpose public street space to prioritize people, with cars as guests. The National Association of City Transportation Officials (NATCO) has a whole paper devoted to "[Residential Shared Streets](#)." Ironically, that's what we already have in our neighborhood and have had for the past fifty or so years and that's what many of us want to keep.

Here's an opportunity for the city to protect and enhance the highly-desired, climate-friendly shared streets that are among the "new" solutions for equity and climate action.

Money. Our city is so poor, we have just closed a library. Building new sidewalks (especially those that are not needed or wanted) is wasteful. We already have lots of sidewalks and streets that are in bad shape and need repairs right now. Use the money to take care of what we have already along Losey Boulevard and other high-traffic business streets or to clear sidewalk snow on priority walking routes in winter. Even if these sidewalks are paid for by a grant, the costs to our climate and for future upkeep and repair will be up to us.

Common Sense. Our neighborhood streets, including 28th, are very low-traffic streets, wide, and unmarked, with mostly uncontrolled intersections. Twenty-eighth is wide enough for two car travel lanes and two lanes for the storage of cars (plus trailers, boats, campers, dumpsters, and more). In my five day random sampling of traffic rates, I find that we average 25 cars or fewer *per hour* on 28th (at Highland). So, we already have lots of pavement that can be shared by all users as it has been for the last half-century. Spending this money and taking out plants and trees to provide even more pavement is silly and overkill. Plus, the sidewalks will end at Diagonal Road. Then what?

Every decision made now helps or hinders our efforts to reduce community-wide carbon emissions and heat and rain effects of global heating.

Customer Service. We have had many great meetings and discussions with the Police Department, City Planning, Parks Department and others about other neighborhood issues. This summer, Tim Acklin, City Planning, went way above and beyond in meeting and talking with us about neighborhood projects. But in this case, the whole process has led to bad feelings. Our neighborhood was never consulted about these sidewalks. A couple of years ago, we did hear about planned work on 29th Street, but have not heard more about that. Residents whose properties were and are affected by the 28th Street sidewalks received poorly written notices at the last minute, in some cases not even through the mail. Efforts by neighbors to stop or pause the actions have failed; some of us didn't even know sidewalks were coming until they were already installed. As I mentioned earlier, we have asked for solutions to our actual safety issues but have been met with many nos. Many of us feel as if we are just ants at the picnic rather than the people paying the bills and voting to have our interests heard in city government. We are grateful that Council Member Happel has listened to our concerns and taken action to give us a voice in the matter (finally).

I urge you to think about what we are really doing and how it will affect our future. As I said, every decision today will have a consequence tomorrow. We need solutions that address our actual issues in a cost-effective, reasonable, and sustainable manner. And, for climate action, the longer we delay changing, the harder it will be to reach our goals. If this is truly an emergency, as our elected council members have declared, then we need to act like it's an emergency, not wait several years for some book of protocols to be updated.

You may think this is much ado about a few sidewalks, but these sidewalks are connected to many important issues. I appreciate your taking time to consider my reasons for asking you to pause and rethink the sidewalk program starting today.

Thank you.

Cathy Van Maren
2815 Highland St.
La Crosse

The Myth of Pedestrian Infrastructure by Joe Cortright, September 10, 2010, Strong Towns
<https://www.strongtowns.org/journal/2020/9/9/the-myth-of-pedestrian-infrastructure-in-a-world-of-cars>

Reimagining Streets for Safe, Active, and Joyful Trips to School by Amanda O'Rourke, October 13, 2023 in StreetsblogUSA. <https://usa.streetsblog.org/2023/10/13/reimagining-north-american-streets-for-safe-active-and-joyful-trips-to-school>

Rate of tree carbon accumulation increases continuously with tree size Stephenson, N., Das, A., Condit, R. *et al.* Rate of tree carbon accumulation increases continuously with tree size. *Nature* **507**, 90–93 (2014).
<https://www.nature.com/articles/nature12914>

Shifting Gears: Toward a New Way of Thinking About Transportation webinar with Dr. Susan Handy, Distinguished Professor of Environmental Science and Policy Direction, National Center for Sustainable Transportation, UC-Davis. February 21, 2024 <https://youtu.be/01wSizeli84?feature=shared>

Narrow Lanes Save Lives Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, Bloomberg American Health Initiative. <https://narrowlanes.americanhealth.jhu.edu/>

Cheap, Rapid, and In Our Control: How cities are making streets safe quicker and more easily than ever before by Jenny O'Connell in Medium (Originally Vision Zero Cities Journal) October 19, 2021
<https://medium.com/vision-zero-cities-journal/cheap-rapid-and-in-our-control-e37a9f368839>

Residential Shared Street. NATCO Urban Street Design Guide
<https://nacto.org/publication/urban-street-design-guide/streets/residential-shared-street/>

Curbing Traffic: The human case for fewer cars in our lives by Chris and Melissa Bruntlett (Island Press, 2019) Overview on YouTube: <https://youtu.be/9dxOOctVYv0?feature=shared> I donated this book to our are planners last year and can lend you a copy if you wish.

Why Cities, Not Individuals, Should Clear Snow From Sidewalks by Kathi Valeii, January 11, 2019.
<https://usa.streetsblog.org/2019/02/21/more-cities-are-taking-responsibility-for-clearing-sidewalks-of-snow>

City of La Crosse Climate Action Plan (<https://www.lacrosseclimateactionplan.org/the-plan>)
(Related action steps)

CC (Cross-Cutting) 1-4: Establish and implement a policy to review existing and future City of La Crosse policy and ordinance changes as well as building and zoning variance requests against the goals, strategies, and actions of this Climate Action Plan to ensure alignment of changes with this plan.

CC 1- 5: Fund and support sustainability staffing required to: (selected for this letter):

- Support City of La Crosse department managers and staff as they implement CAP actions within their service area or area of expertise.
- Convene the internal City of La Crosse CAP Team.
- Engage City boards and commissions to ensure the CAP is integrated into their work plans.

TM (Transportation & Mobility) 5-2: Update City's existing Complete Streets ordinance to reflect current best practices and Federal Highway Administration guidance; see Local Policy Workbook and Best Complete Streets documents.

TM 5-10: Identify streets where a "road diet" (a reduction in the number of travel lanes and/or effective street width) would achieve systemic improvements; then, implement road diets.

TM 5-12: Implement recommendations of the 2020 Safe Routes to School Plan. (see # below)

LH (Land Use & Housing) 1-1: Engage underrepresented community members in identifying underused paved areas and coming up with ideas for their conversion to sustainable green space or infill development that will mitigate heat islands or address affordable housing needs.

LH 1-3: Include land use strategies to advance mobility alternatives in City's redevelopment initiatives wider sidewalks, bike lanes, reduced off-street parking, and transit-oriented development. (See ## below)

LH 1-8: Strengthen and enforce existing development design standards that make biking, walking, and busing easier than driving.

LH 2- 1 Protect and restore natural systems that protect the community from flooding, including parks, wetlands, riparian areas, and natural drainage ways/swales.

LH 2- 2: Require and/or incentivize the use of green infrastructure such as bioswales, permeable pavement, rain gardens, rain water catchment areas, and other previous surface strategies to reduce flood risk and minimize sediment entry into creeks from trails and roads.

LH 2- 3: Conserve and restore natural areas that slow or store floodwaters, including forests, floodplains, and riparian areas.

LH 3-1: Develop and use a transparent and inclusive decision-making framework designed to achieve climate, equity, safety, health and prosperity goals when making major infrastructure, transportation, land use, community development and project development plan and investment decisions.

LH 4-1: Based on the City's Ground Cover, Tree Canopy, Heat Island, and Carbon Sequestration Study, identify vulnerable urban tree canopy and street tree sections and develop policies to incentivize, encourage, or require strategic tree planting for heat island mitigation (e.g., around heat islands and in areas that need air conditioning such as schools or city facilities).

LH 4-2: Add or modify park and boulevard plantings with a priority focus on areas with high heat island potential and those currently underserved by park and green space.

LH 4-3: Decrease impervious surfaces to mitigate heat island effects, especially in neighborhoods with a high proportion of vulnerable populations.

LH 4-4: Increase maintenance to sustain mature tree canopy, decrease tree hazards and delay tree replacement needs.

W (Water and Wastewater) 3-1: Increase the use of permeable pavement and other green infrastructure (e.g., swales, rain gardens, urban tree canopies) to reduce overland flow and increase detention and infiltration that address stormwater before it enters the sewer system, and prioritize the use of these strategies in areas at higher risk of flooding.

GS (Green space, Trees & Ecosystems) 1-1: Review city ordinances and zoning, including boulevard tree requirements, to identify impediments to tree planting and for opportunities to increase tree requirements or encourage tree planting.

GS 1-5: Increase street tree planting along bicycle routes to provide comfortable, shaded travel, especially in low-income and minority neighborhoods. See the City's 2020 Ground Cover, Heat Island and Carbon Sequestration Study for priority areas. Set a percentage maximum of each City-planted tree species to improve diversity ...

GS 1-7: Develop neighborhood tree goals and create guidance and training to increase community stewardship of trees (e.g., opportunities for residents to learn about and take care of their neighborhood trees).

GS 1-8: Adopt a tree preservation ordinance that requires obtaining a permit for tree removal on private property (with exceptions for diseased and nuisance trees), and develop a fee structure that does not place a burden on low-income property owners.

GS 1- 9: Establish codes that minimize removal of soil, ground cover, native shrubs, and require planning on site solar utilization in a manner that minimizes conflict with existing trees.

GS 1-10: Create and/or update a comprehensive street tree/urban forest management plan focused on in-

creasing canopy cover, tree species diversity, and equitable distribution of urban forest benefits as well as promoting carbon sequestration and resilience to future climate impacts.

GS 2-2: Promote Carbon Gardening and "landscaping for absorption" practices among residents for lawns, ornamental gardens, and produce gardens. ...

GS 2-10: Incentivize the conversion of traditional lawns and non-native landscaping into pollinator friendly food gardens, permaculture, wildflowers, or native grasses to support endangered native pollinators.

GS 3-2: Promote and require urban design and redevelopment approaches that incorporate natural systems and green infrastructure into site improvements, rights of way, green corridors and other infrastructure facilities.

GS 3-4: Reduce concrete on parklands (encourage construction of water permeable park lots and walk-ways), and encourage the most sustainable surface material.

GS 3-6: Incentivize/award projects that reduce heat islands, prioritizing areas with the highest heat island coefficients as identified in the City's 2021 Ground Cover, Tree Canopy, and Carbon Sequestration Study. ...

GS 4-7: Conduct scenario planning exercises focused on land management under novel future conditions to ensure that management decisions reflect the full range of potential impacts and are based on the best available science.

HS (Health & Safety) 1-16: Incentivize building owners to increase the resilience of existing and new buildings, such as ... maintaining shade trees, installing permeable pavement ...

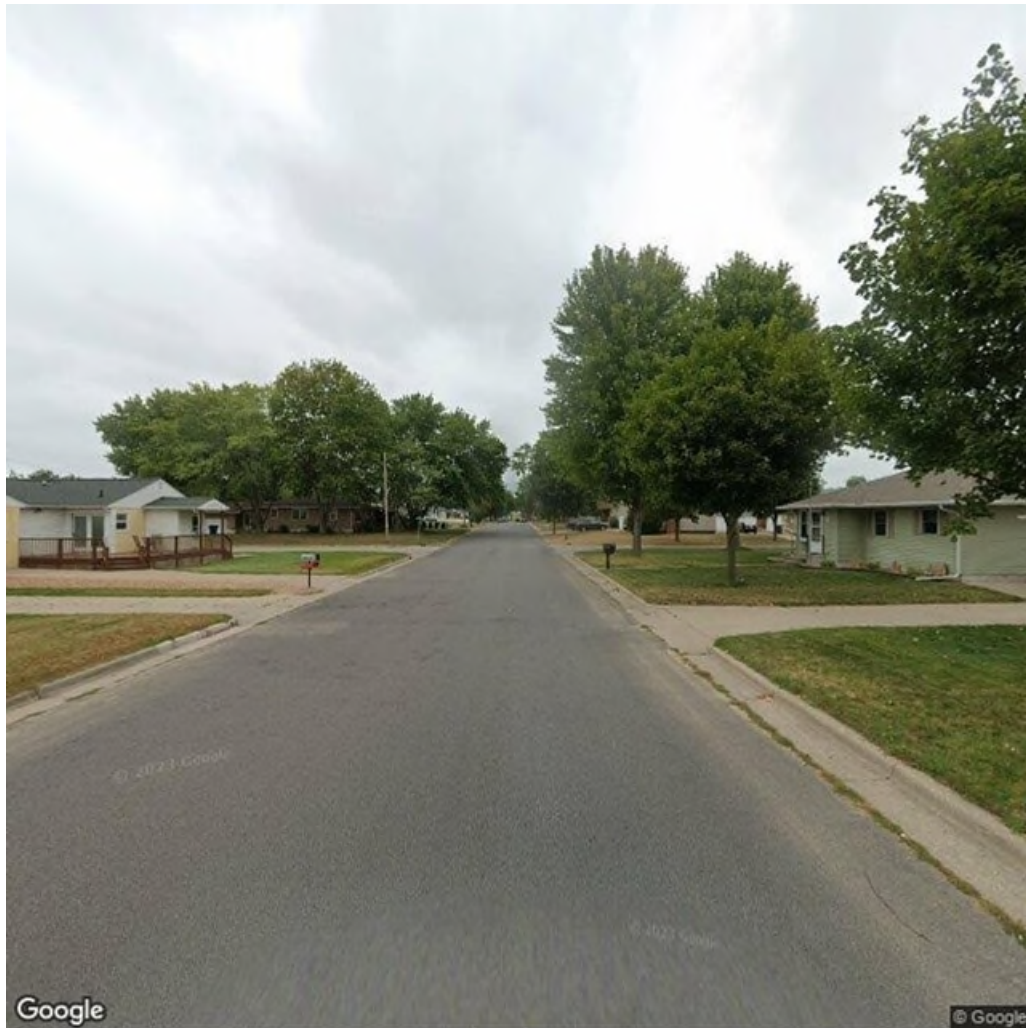
HS 1-17: Incentivize the use of strategies that improve air quality by reducing commercial emissions, particulate matter emissions, or other harmful pollutants. Within this incentive program, prioritize neighborhoods or census blocks with high percent of low-income and minority populations.

HS 1-18: Nurture community-lead initiatives for equitable climate action that reduce resident's carbon footprint and increase climate resilience, such as transportation without cars (biking, walking, transit), tree planting, and climate friendly yards.

E (Economy) 1-1: Identify economic benefits derived from the implementation of the CAP, especially those which can provide opportunity for the city vulnerable populations.

While sidewalks are included in the climate action plan, to me the priority should be reducing carbon emissions. If the choice is between an existing carbon reduction system (trees) or potential carbon savings in the future that will have to pay off the carbon "debt" of producing the new infrastructure (sidewalk), trees win.

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