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City takes new look at its sidewalk policy

Some say not all streets need a walkway.

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Posted: Sunday, Sep. 07, 2008

A battle over sidewalks in one south Charlotte neighborhood has the city re-evaluating how it decides which roads get sidewalks and which ones don't.

At issue: Some residents say the city should pave a sidewalk all the way from one end of the street to the other, not stopping mid-way.

Others say such paving can be wasteful and costly. If a street is quieter at one end, they say, that block shouldn't get sidewalks.

The debate is simmering in Madison Park, a neighborhood with more than 2,200 homes. The city decided four years ago to put sidewalks on Murrayhill Road, a major neighborhood thoroughfare.

Fighting among neighbors, however, has held up the project, and now the city is re-evaluating its decision.

Murrayhill is a 1 1/2-mile-long road that stretches south from Scaleybark Road and intersects East Woodlawn Road. From there it bends east, eventually ending at Wedgewood Drive, not far from Park Road.

The city determined that Murrayhill needs sidewalks between Woodlawn and Wedgewood because it carries more than 1,000 cars a day. It also is a main artery for getting to Pinewood Elementary and some nearby parks.

Residents such as Madison Park Homeowners Association president Marty Doss support the sidewalks.

"We have so much retail that's developed around our neighborhood over the years that people want to walk," he said. "This will help the neighborhood for many years."

Many residents living in the easternmost block, between Lamont and Wedgewood drives, don't want sidewalks there.

Resident Miles Whitson said homeowners on that block aren't against sidewalks where they are needed, such as near a school or where traffic volume exceeds 1,000 cars per day.

His block, however, meets neither of those criteria.

“We don't think it is prudent to spend tax dollars or bond dollars to place a sidewalk where it is neither needed nor wanted,” Whitson said.

The city's pedestrian program manager, Vivian Coleman, was on vacation last week and could not be reached.

In e-mails to residents, Coleman has said that city policy has been to lay sidewalks on an entire stretch of road, whether one section of that road was busier than the other.

City officials reconsidered the policy, however, when they did a study of the final block of Murrayhill and discovered it has significantly less traffic than the rest of the road.

Fewer than 300 vehicles travel that block each day, far below what would normally be required for a sidewalk.

CDOT now says it is reconsidering the matter.

“We are puzzled why CDOT wants to push forward with a sidewalk on our block where there are other areas that are begging for the sidewalks,” Whitson said.

Doss said many residents believe that for the good of the neighborhood as a whole, the city should stick with its prior ruling.

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