

Manhattan Community Board 4 General Sidewalk Policy May 2009

Manhattan Community Board 4 (CB4) has developed – in consultation with its residents - the following policy for how to allocate sidewalk space on the avenues and wide streets in our district. This policy informs how various committees will weigh competing sidewalk demands and guide Board advocacy on sidewalk usage.

Sidewalks are the pedestrian arteries of our cities and neighborhoods, carrying thousands of people in a clean, efficient and healthy mode of transportation: walking. Our schoolchildren, senior citizens, transit users, workers, tourists, and businesses depend on them for survival. Unfortunately, our sidewalks occupy only approximately 25% of the public space, even though 77.5% of Manhattan households¹ did not own a car in 2000. The narrowing of 9th Avenue’s sidewalks, 50 years ago, to make space for the Lincoln Tunnel’s anticipated vehicular traffic, exacerbates a situation already difficult due to the numerous trap doors, which are an historical fixture of our district’s sidewalks. On Eighth Avenue, the subway grates make a portion of the narrow sidewalks unfit to walk on, and an ever-expanding panoply of amenities and commercial endeavors further restrict pedestrian movement.

At the same time, the Hudson Yards rezoning and West Chelsea rezoning will bring thousands of new residents to our sidewalks. The increased reliance on public transportation, combined with major projects like the #7 subway line extension and the new rail tunnel from New Jersey, add numerous commuters who use our Avenues to reach major transportation hubs located in our district. In some areas, the problem has become so critical that pedestrians have no other option than walking in the street, especially during peak hours.

Clear Pedestrian Path

Sidewalk space will be allocated to prioritize a “Clear Pedestrian Path”, which is an unobstructed “walking lane” designed to efficiently carry the number of pedestrians corresponding to an acceptable Level of Service.

- **A minimum 8' clear pedestrian path** should be maintained along the Avenues and large Streets, unless the pedestrian level of service for that location is rated D or worse, in which case a 9'6" clear pedestrian path should be maintained . There is precedent for both measurements – an 8' pedestrian path for sidewalk cafes and a 9'6" path for newsstands (Subchapter G of Chapter 2 of Title 6 of the Rules of New York City).

¹ 2000 census

- It is preferable for the **clear pedestrian path to be in straight line from intersection to intersection** to allow for efficient walking and improved sidewalk safety for persons with strollers or disabilities. Obstructions for those with disabilities would include grates, ventilations and cellar doors as well as tree pits, even when they are covered with grates.
- A **10' clearance should be maintained between the “Corner Quadrant” and any obstructions** (furniture, signs, light posts, etc). This will provide a reservoir space for pedestrians waiting to cross the street, a clear access point for pedestrians crossing and it will maintain a clear line of sight between turning vehicles and pedestrians thus allowing for safe and efficient pedestrian crossings. The Corner Quadrant is the area delimited by the curb and the lines projected from the corner building’s facades.

Amenities Priorities and Placement

- **High Value Amenities** that provide essential services and contribute to an improved transportation experience **will take precedence**. High Value Amenities include **trees, wastebaskets, bus shelters and bus stops** including the space necessary for commuters to wait, step on and off the bus. When approving any new amenity, CB4 will ensure it does not preempt the installation of a planned High Value Amenity.
- **The cumulative length of sidewalk occupied by all amenities (except trees) will be limited to 50% of the total length of an avenue block from corner quadrant to corner quadrant**. This should ensure proper access between the street and the sidewalk for deliveries, emergency vehicles and Access a Ride. This will also reduce the clutter on specific blocks.
- **Frequency of other amenities should be limited and their placement carefully assigned** to ensure free access from the street to the sidewalk and to prevent clutter. The frequency of other amenities (sidewalk cafes, canopies, bike racks, benches, storefront extensions, storm vestibules, curb cuts, pay phones, newspaper boxes, bike shelters, street vendors, newsstands, info kiosks and taxi stands) should be limited as they may encroach on a straight line, Clear Pedestrian Path if placed improperly on the sidewalk.
- **The amenities should be located in the proper buffer zones** to minimize their negative impact on pedestrian movement. The following are the three buffer zones:
 - **Building Line Buffer Zone**; is the space between the building line and the Clear Pedestrian Path where sidewalk cafés, trap doors, ventilations, storm entrances, store extensions, ramps and small phone booths should be located.

- **Curb Line Buffer Zone**; is the space between the Clear Pedestrian Path and the curb where small street furniture, tree pits, bus shelters, planters, wastebaskets, safety and regulation signs, lights, benches, and pedestrian lighting should be located.
- **Parking Line Buffer Zone**; is the space between the curb and moving vehicles where currently cars are parked. Anywhere parking is allowed 24 hours a day, bike parking and certain amenities such as large garbage receptacles may be located in this buffer zone .However, the preferred location would be on side streets near the intersections with the Avenues, where curb extensions or reclaimed parking spaces could hold various amenities (newsstands, bike parking, wastebaskets, etc.). The pedestrian safety improvements associated with the resulting neck-downs would be an added benefit.
- **The specific spacing and placement restrictions for each amenity** (bus stops, trees, sidewalk cafes, canopies, bike racks, benches, storefront extensions, storm vestibules, curb cuts, pay phones, newspaper boxes, bike shelters, street vendors, newsstands, info kiosks and taxi stands) can be found in other CB4 policy documents and in the respective city agency guidelines.

On avenues and wide streets, where walking space is very scarce, this policy will ensure that pedestrians have the priority. On side streets, the specific sidewalk width and existing obstructions will dictate how to apply these policies and amenity priorities.

We believe instituting these policies is an important first step in ensuring our sidewalks remain vital and active and continue to encourage the active pedestrian use that has been a core to the quality of life in New York City and within Manhattan Community Board 4.

Reference Information:

Pedestrian Level of Service (Highway Capacity Manual by the Transportation Research Board):

LOS A: Pedestrian Space > 60 ft²/p, Flow Rate = 5 p/min/ft

At a walkway LOS A, pedestrians move in desired paths without altering their movements in response to other pedestrians. Walking speeds are freely selected, and conflicts between pedestrians are unlikely.

LOS B: Pedestrian Space > 40-60 ft²/p, Flow Rate > 5-7 p/min/ft

At LOS B, there is sufficient area for pedestrians to select walking speeds freely to bypass other pedestrians, and to avoid crossing conflicts. At this level, pedestrians begin to be aware of other pedestrians, and to respond to their presence when electing a walking path.

LOS C: Pedestrian Space > 24-40 ft²/p, Flow Rate > 7-10 p/min/ft

At LOS C, space is sufficient for normal walking speeds, and for bypassing other pedestrians in primarily unidirectional streams. Reverse-direction or crossing movements can cause minor conflicts, and speeds and flow rate are somewhat lower.

LOS D: Pedestrian Space > 15-24 ft²/p, Flow Rate > 10-15 p/min/ft

At LOS D, freedom to select individual walking speed and to bypass other pedestrians is restricted. Crossing or reverse-flow movements face a high probability of conflict, requiring frequent changes in speed and position. The LOS provides reasonably fluid flow, but friction and interaction between pedestrians is likely.

LOS E: Pedestrian Space > 8-15 ft²/p, Flow Rate > 15-23 p/min/ft

At LOS E, virtually all pedestrians restrict their normal walking speed, frequently adjusting their gait. At the lower range, forward movement is possible only by shuffling. Space is not sufficient for passing slower pedestrians. Cross- or reverse-flow movements are possible only with extreme difficulties. Design volumes approach the limit of walkway capacity, with stoppages and interruptions to flow.

LOS F: Pedestrian Space = 8 ft²/p, Flow Rate varies p/min/ft

At LOS F, all walking speeds are severely restricted, and forward progress is made only by shuffling. There is frequent unavoidable contact with other pedestrians. Cross-and reverse-flow movements are virtually impossible. Flow is sporadic and unstable. Space is more characteristic of queued pedestrians than of moving pedestrian streams.

Community Board 4 - Sidewalk Amenities Survey – November/December 2008

Manhattan Community Board 4 performed two surveys, one of CB4 board members and one of community members at large in CD4.

To the first question “Please rate these amenities in order of importance for the quality of life in our community”, both the CD4 community and CB4 board members agreed on the following rating:

Trees, Waste Baskets, and Bus Shelters were rated as the top three sidewalk amenities. Planters, Benches and Bike Racks were ranked the next top amenities, Sidewalk Cafes, Newsstands, and Bike Shelters were ranked below that. The nine lowest ranked amenities were Storm Vestibules, Curb Cuts, Storefront Extensions, Canopies, Pay Phones, Taxi Stands, Street Vendors, Info Kiosks, and Newspaper Boxes.

To the second question “Please indicate the proper spacing for each amenity” overwhelmingly, both the CD4 community and CB4 board members wanted to have :

1. Two or more Trees and at least two Planters and Waste Baskets per one side of an avenue block (block)
2. Only one of each of the following per block: Canopies, Sidewalk Cafes, Bike Racks, Benches, Storefront Extensions, and Storm Vestibules
- 3- Curb Cuts and Bus Shelters should be at every other block.
- 4- Pay Phones, Newspaper Boxes, Bike Shelters, Street Vendors, and Newsstands should be at a spacing of no more than one every three blocks.
- 5- Fewer than one Info Kiosk or Taxi Stand should be placed at every three blocks.