Background

The city’s new comprehensive plan, Map for Mobile, involved identifying strong and weak places around the city through community workshops. These strong places were meant to serve as role models for future development, while weak areas were templates to be avoided or marked for future improvements.

Strong Places Marked by Amenities
- Historic districts
- Recreation facilities, such as theatres, sports venues, and other areas of local cultural significance
- Natural areas, such as parks and rivers

Weak Places Struggle with Accessibility
- Heavy traffic or congestion
- Low-income or blighted communities
- Highways and other inherently auto-oriented areas

Pedestrian Infrastructure Inventory

Downtown, Midtown, and other areas that were heavily developed before the rise of the automobile have both a well-developed sidewalk system and excellent connectivity along the street grid. However, as the city expanded westward, the only areas with a sidewalk system lack the inherent connectivity required to access resources.

Weak Places Are Still Walkable

While many of the areas marked as weak during the community workshops suffer from poverty, blight, and other social issues, their location near the downtown gives them a solid existing infrastructure, laying a promising foundation for potential development and accessibility improvements.

Sidewalk Waivers

Sidewalk waivers are allowed for in the city’s subdivision regulations, permitting property owners to develop a piece of property without building a sidewalk if the land is inherently unsuited for the reasonable construction of a sidewalk. However, the sprawling nature of the city leads many property owners to apply for a sidewalk waiver simply if they believe that the sidewalk would not be used. Under this level of scrutiny, roughly three-quarters of sidewalk waivers are approved unconditionally.

Current Pedestrian Activity Influences Number of Waivers
- Along interstates, highways, and major roads
- Sprawling annexations
- Industrial-zoned properties

Identify Strong Parts of the City Based on Replicable Traits

Most of the areas identified by the comprehensive plan as role models for future development have weak pedestrian navigability and none of them can realistically be duplicated across the city. Safe, walkable areas of various densities need to be identified to provide realistic goals to capture that accessibility on a larger scale.

Reconcile Basic Connectivity with Substantial Accessibility

Large areas of the city have a well-developed sidewalk system, but as a part of large, single-family residential subdivisions where the sidewalks do not lead anywhere. The strategic construction of sidewalks that connect the places people live to the places that they work, shop, and enjoy recreation is vital to turn sidewalks into a tool for an accessible community.

Evaluate Sidewalk Waivers by Zoning, Land Use, and Population Demographics

The most commonly cited reason for applying for a sidewalk waiver is that no one walks in the area. While the construction of sidewalks in the city’s heavy industrial sites may be an unnecessary hardship, traits such as current traffic counts are a less meaningful excuse in an attempt to promote pedestrian accessibility or a walkable community.

Recommendations