

Sidewalk brigade stumbles

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Officials opt for a \$10-million survey rather than a civilian crew

STEVE LOPEZ

Like lots of people, Peter Griswold of Marina del Rey was flabbergasted when he read that City Hall wanted to spend \$10 million on a three-year survey of cracked and crumbling sidewalks in Los Angeles.



He sent me an email titled: "VOLUNTEERS FOR SIDEWALK BRIGADES." "There are so many community and social organizations that could do the survey for nearly no costs," Griswold wrote.

But judging by his neighborhood, he said, something needed to happen. Griswold suggested I meet up with him on the 800 block of Coeur D'Alene Avenue in Venice to check out some of the bad pavement that the city should be dealing with.

I got there a minute before Griswold on Thursday, but I didn't need him to spot the half-block stretch of sidewalk — outside an elementary school, no less — that looked like a Himalayan passage, with pavement dangerously peaking and plummeting.

As I surveyed the chaos, Griswold, a 70-year-old retiree, sped up on a Schwinn bike and hopped off, wearing shorts and a floppy blue Coast Guard Auxiliary hat, reporting for duty. He grabbed a portable GPS out of a bag and began punching the controls as he stood over a spot where tree roots had lifted the sidewalk 10 inches.

"You hit this here," he said, "and you go over there."

Anyone of average intelligence, he said, could be taught in one hour how to use a GPS to record the precise location of bad sidewalk.

"I could do a whole neighborhood in two days," said Griswold, who sus-

pected he could recruit the Knights of Columbus, Shriners and Neighborhood Councils to join the ranks of his civilian sidewalk brigade.

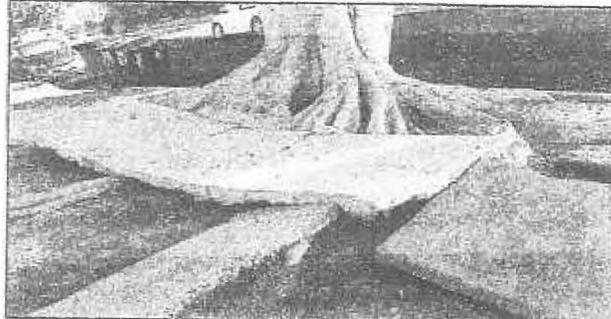
An editorial in The Times, following an article by my colleague David Zahniser, suggested that very thing. And several council members have asked the Department of Public Works to consider a range of options that might get the job of identifying problem sidewalks done in less than three years without spending \$10 million.

A Department of Public Works representative told me that using volunteers could get complicated for many reasons, including lack of expertise on the part of volunteers and the challenge of evaluating the information they submit. But the department hasn't ruled out some form of public participation.

Whatever course is chosen, it would be nice to get things moving. Los Angeles has 5,000 miles or so of bad sidewalk, and the fix could run as much as \$1.5 billion. But this being the era of budget crunch triage, no money has been set aside, despite the fact that disabled access is a problem and about 2,500 claims are filed against the city each year from people who have taken a tumble.

It's a sorry state of affairs when City Hall falls down on the job of a basic service like sidewalk maintenance, delaying the inevitable for years until it becomes a crisis. Are we headed for a day when, if you want a pothole fixed, you'll have to grab a rake and do it yourself?

But Griswold, who worked as a construction estimator for the Department of Water and Power for 32 years, thinks enough people will volunteer to get the survey job done when they realize it could save them \$10 million. I noted that their good deed might ultimately be punished with a tax down the road if a



Miriam Holzman-Sharman

PETER GRISWOLD wants to use volunteers to report broken sidewalks across Los Angeles.

bond measure is floated to pay for the sidewalk fixes, or with a big bill to pay if city officials go with a proposal to make homeowners responsible for their own repairs.

But Griswold was still ready to lead the brigade.

"I'm a volunteer," he said, telling me he has pounded nails with Habitat for Humanity and taught boating for the Coast Guard Auxiliary.

Griswold and I went on our own little patrol, driving north of Venice Boulevard on the east side of Lincoln Boulevard. Parts of Maplewood Avenue's sidewalks looked like broken roller coasters, with cheap asphalt patchwork used as a temporary fix on the worst spots.

Ellen Cox, who was riding her bike in the neighborhood, gave a thumbs-down on a \$10-million survey.

"You could get one person on every block to take pictures," she said.

Cox directed us to the nearby intersection of Appleton Way and Maplewood Avenue, where the sidewalk looks like a mogul run. Bernard Matier, who sat on his porch, said he can't afford to fix the sidewalk, and when he called downtown for help, he was told City Hall is broke too.

His next-door neighbors, Jason Sharman and Miriam Holzman-Sharman, have a 50-foot stretch of sidewalk that looks like it was hit by a major earthquake. To Sharman, spending \$10 million to

tell him and other people they've got a problem is "just ludicrous."

Sharman called City Hall and offered to cut down a tree that's destroying a sidewalk and threatening a gas supply line. He said he was referred to a city arborist who told him that would be illegal.

"We are stuck, and it's so dangerous," said Sharman, who fears someone will go head over flip-flops and sue him. "You pay your taxes and that seems to be the most elementary thing you would want taken care of, that they keep the sidewalk clear and safe. It seems like a basic government function."

Once upon a time, maybe.

Sharman's wife sent me a photo of a sidewalk in her neighborhood that's worse than her own. Bill Gaidzik, the homeowner, told me his problems got worse three years ago when a city crew trimmed one of the trees causing all the damage.

What, that didn't help?

No, said Gaidzik. The city used heavy equipment that ruptured more sidewalk.

Gaidzik, who works in tech support, said he's all for a citizen-run survey, and said it would be easy for City Council district offices to set up a database where residents can send information.

Or, said Gaidzik, if the city still wants to hire a contractor for the job, "I'll do it for \$9 million."

steve.lopez@latimes.com

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Item No: 1
PUBLIC

Hello Los Angeles City;

Nov-2012

Many who have read reports by LA-Times reporter Steve Lopez 16-sep-12 (and others on this topic). Proving your sincerity to consider volunteers you should invite some interested and capable persons to consult and perhaps even perform the survey as well as add input for the preparation of specifications. The tree-sidewalk problem is an example of municipal neglect. After lawsuits we at LADWP repaired about 28 conditions around the Hope Street office building. After many years in Civil Service and the Construction Industry I am aware how docs + specs can confuse otherwise capable contractors. Using Work Grids for single or multiple contracts can simplify and prioritize the work scope. My emails below show those examples. Although doubtful I pray you will consider volunteers for this work.

Thanks Peter Griswold 41 years American Society of Professional Estimators

My plan can win the best value for the least cost to repair the City sidewalks.

As a retired 41 year construction estimator I offer to volunteer all my service to create a better work-scope to repair the City sidewalks in multiple phases or zones contracted by priority or sequence according to need and budget requirements.

Area zones can be described by exact geographic perimeter.

Slab repairs within the zone can be described by exact location.

Slab exact location by street address, latitude-longitude or other description.

Project Programs

A= Easy to train all-volunteer effort to locate, photograph and document locations.

B= Volunteers learn fast to define the work especially with IPHONES, IPADS, GPS.

C= Write City Standard Specifications that best fit the need and the budget.

D= Use multiple phase zones for multiple contractors to bid.

E= More bids by more contractors who will employ even more workers.

F= Tree surgeons with separate authority to repair tree or roots as needed.

G= Bidding contractors are aware that some work locations can be deleted.

Work scope and quantity to be performed exactly per specifications.

Day-1= Secure the area for slab + tree with perimeter barricades.

Day-2= Mobilize, cut, demolish + remove concrete slabs

Item-3= Leave and wait up to X days for tree repair by others.

Day-4= Prepare soils and compact ground as needed.

Day-5= Install new slab concrete or substitute materials as needed.

Day-6= Repair any irrigation to six feet beyond repairs if needed.

Contracts described per Area, Zone, Grid or other useful name.

Slab replacement work scope described for work location or other name.

Sample bids for work locations within Contract Area or Grid or Zone 101

\$ _____ for location 101-1

\$ _____ for location 101-2

\$ _____ for location 101-11

\$ _____ for location 101-15

\$ _____ Total contractor bid for all work locations within Area-Grid-Zone 101

*Bidders informed that some slab replacement locations might be deleted.

*Bidders informed tree repair work is Not In Contract (NIC).