

Audit at a glance



Neighborhood Sidewalk Repair Program

NOVEMBER 2020

ABOUT | The Department of Transportation & Infrastructure implemented the Neighborhood Sidewalk Repair Program in 2018, as requested by City Council, to proactively address sidewalks across the city that are “damaged, uneven, or sloping excessively.” The goal was to ensure the city has a well-maintained sidewalk network for all Denver residents and visitors. The Denver City Council passed a bill to establish the Sidewalk Repair Revolving Fund in 2017, which included \$4 million from the city’s General Fund in 2018.

Time frames for sidewalk repairs — and who is responsible for completing and paying for them — are outlined in city ordinance. The city was divided into 11 regions, and Transportation & Infrastructure planned to complete inspections and repairs in one region per year.

In the report

FINDING 1: The Department of Transportation & Infrastructure Needs to Improve the Design of The Neighborhood Sidewalk Repair Program

- The department inadequately designed the sidewalk repair program, including by not aligning it with other Denver initiatives that focus on ADA compliance. The department provided limited documentation and had limited historical knowledge regarding the program’s design.
- When designing the program, the department did not document a process to proactively communicate and coordinate sidewalk repairs with other city agencies and local utilities.
- The program design does not offer affordability options to all Denver residents. This results in residents having unequal access to safe and accessible sidewalks and places an undue and inequitable financial burden on some Denver residents.
- The program lacks key elements of an internal control system as part of its design — such as policies and procedures or clear performance measures — and as a result, the department cannot ensure the program is meeting its intended goals.
- The department failed to perform a needs assessment in order to determine the appropriate number of staff needed to keep the program on its intended timeline.

ABOUT THE NEIGHBORHOOD SIDEWALK REPAIR PROGRAM

- The Neighborhood Sidewalk Repair Program has eight staff positions — three of which were vacant as of May 2020.
- When inspecting sidewalks, the program’s inspector looks at whether sidewalks are uneven, whether there is a wide gap between sidewalk panels, whether a tree is causing damage to the sidewalk, and whether a panel — including a flagstone one — is damaged and in need of repair or replacement.
- Sidewalk repair and maintenance in the City and County of Denver has been the responsibility of the owners of adjacent properties — such as homes or commercial buildings — since at least the 1950s.
- Under city ordinance, within 45 days of the notice, the property owner can choose to either appeal the notice within the first 30 days or repair the hazardous condition. Property owners can view a copy of the inspection notice online and see photos of what needs repair.

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