



WALK TORONTO SUBMISSION RE: MIDLAND AVENUE SIDEWALK CONSTRUCTION, PW 8.11 ¹

To: Councillor Robinson and Members of the Public Works & Infrastructure Committee
 From: Michael Black and Dylan Reid, Steering Committee, Walk Toronto
 Date: Oct. 6, 2015
 Version: Two

The following comments take account of the staff report, "Sidewalks on Midland Avenue"², and are a revision of Walk Toronto's Sept. 21, 2015 submission for PW7.15

STREET GEOGRAPHY

The section of Midland Avenue presently under consideration is situated in Cliffside, a neighbourhood in Ward 36 near the Scarborough Bluffs. Transportation Services issued a *Sidewalk and Walkway Inventory* ¹ based on an aerial survey of pedestrian infrastructure in Toronto. Of all the wards in Scarborough, Ward 36 has the highest proportion of roads without any sidewalks, in the range of 33- 40%. (In comparison, roads without any sidewalks in Wards 38, 39 and 41 are in the 9-16% range.)

Kingston Road is the great divider in Ward 36. Generally, local and collector streets to the north of Kingston Rd. have a sidewalk on at least one side of the street, while most of those to the south are not provided with any sidewalks at all. In order to bring safety levels and walking conditions in the southern part of the ward up to the same standards as exist in the northern part, **Walk Toronto strongly supports the installation of new sidewalks** – particularly whenever watermain work, road repaving or reconstruction offer opportunities to do this economically.

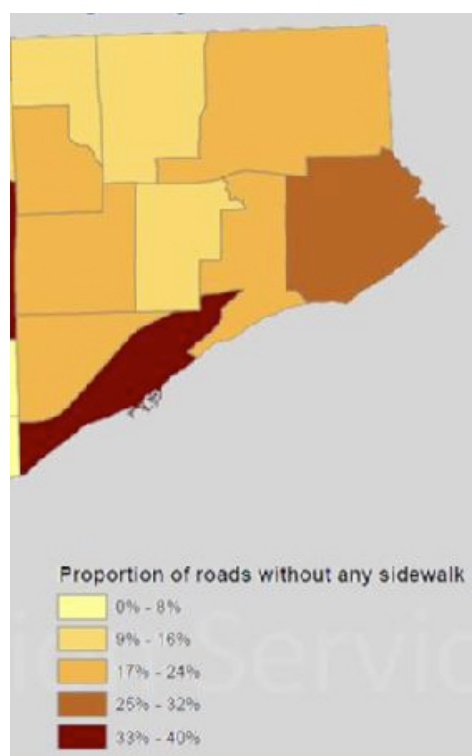


Figure 1 - Scarborough sidewalk density map. Cliffside is in the middle of Ward 36, coloured dark brown

TORONTO PUBLIC HEALTH REPORT

A couple of years ago, Toronto Public Health commissioned a study of the Cliffside neighbourhood that focused on pedestrian issues. The report notes that some progress has recently been made in adding pedestrian infrastructure to areas that are poorly provisioned with sidewalks. However, lack of sidewalks is mentioned

¹ <http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2015.PW8.11>

² Report from the General Manager, Transportation Services, "Sidewalks on Midland Avenue", Sept. 22, 2015
<http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2015/pw/bgrd/backgroundfile-84162.pdf>

as “a major issue around schools, particularly Cliffside Public School.” Furthermore, “some specific streets named as being in need of sidewalks include Midland Avenue . . . [which is] an important link to parks in the south of Cliffside and that pedestrians should be protected along this route.”³

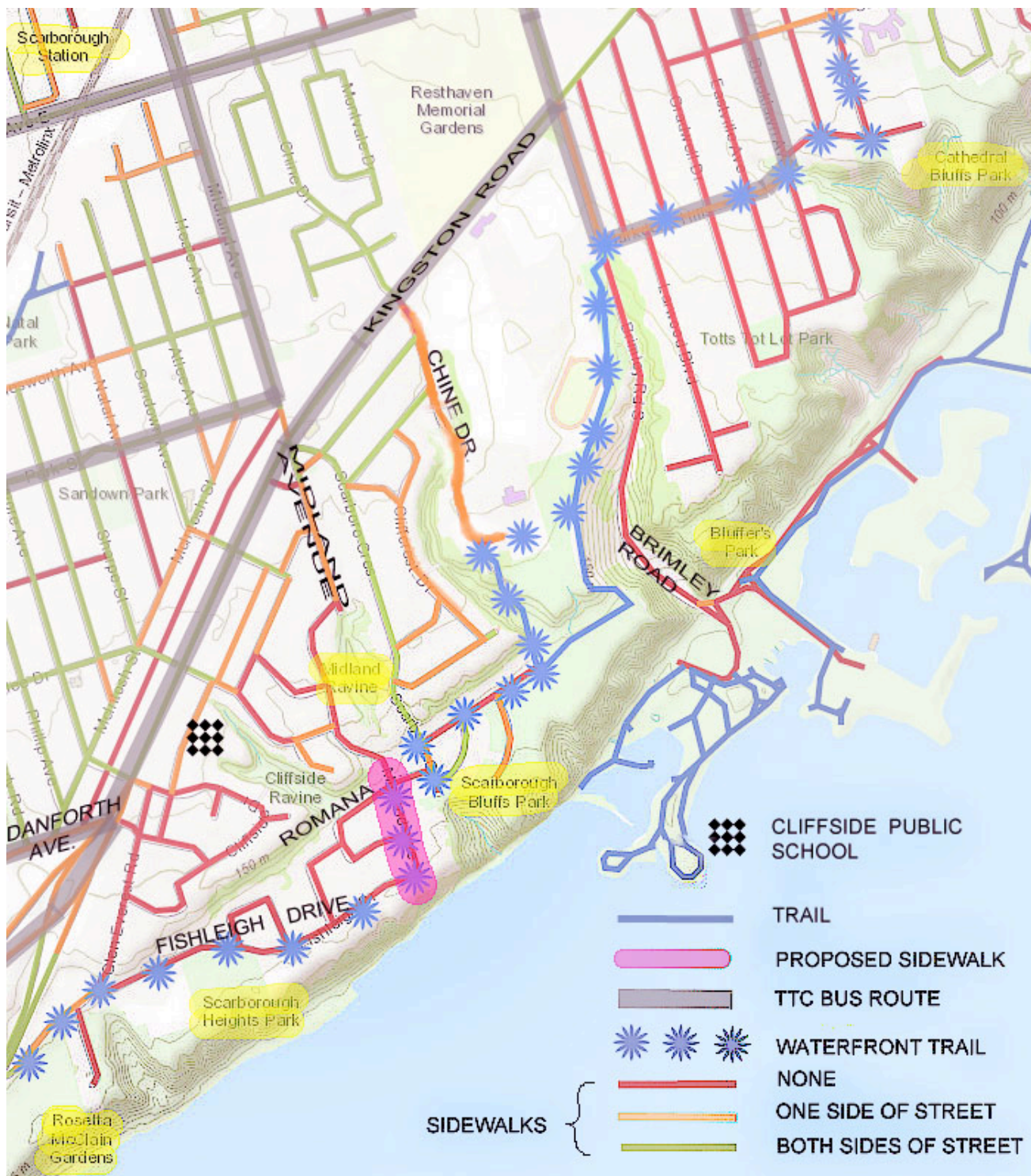


Figure 2 - Sidewalk Inventory map of Scarborough Bluffs area, with TTC bus routes and Waterfront Trail added. Note the number of roads south of Kingston Rd. without any sidewalks (coloured red)

³ Toronto Public Health. Cliffside Final Report, Gladki Planning Associates (May 2014) p. 16-17

SOUTHERN SECTION OF MIDLAND AVE.

The City should not pass up the opportunity to build a sidewalk at the southernmost extremity of Midland Ave., between Romana Drive and Fishleigh Drive. Although only two blocks long, this stretch is crucial for many reasons, including the following:

- 1) It serves as a part of **a walking connection between two important groups of local parks:**
 - a. Scarborough Heights Park and the Rosetta McClain Gardens (to the west) and;
 - b. Bluffer's Park and Scarborough Bluffs Park (to the east)
- 2) An on-street portion of the 450 kilometre long **Waterfront Trail** is routed on these two blocks. The Scarborough Bluffs are one of the most magnificent features of the Waterfront Trail and attract not only local walkers, but also Torontonians from across the city – as well as tourists from farther afield.
- 3) Midland Ave. is also used as **a route by schoolchildren to walk to Cliffside Public School** (a short distance to the northwest). Our goal should be a safe, continuous sidewalk on Midland that will form part of the sidewalk network in southwest Scarborough. Connectivity is essential for the success of walking to school programs.
- 4) Crashes that cause harm to pedestrians are twice as likely to occur on roads without sidewalks, in comparison to streets with sidewalks on both sides. The substandard level of pedestrian facilities in the Cliffside neighbourhood was brought to the fore in 2013 by the tragic **death of five-year-old Kayleigh Callaghan-Belanger**, who was killed by a garbage truck at the intersection of Cliffside Drive and East Haven Drive (400 metres west of Midland Ave.).
- 5) Several **TTC bus routes**⁴ serve Kingston Road and the area to the north of it. However, the TTC does not offer any transit service in the Cliffside neighbourhood to the south of Kingston Road. Whether south Cliffside pedestrians are going to the bluffs, school or shops on Kingston Rd., they often must walk a long distance. Not having sidewalks makes the absence of TTC service even more problematic.
- 6) The **Toronto Walking Strategy**⁵ recommends sidewalks on both sides of the street. Seen in this light, the present proposal for a new sidewalk on just the west side of Midland is not unreasonable.
- 7) Constructing the sidewalk as part of the **watermain replacement project will minimize costs**. Years will probably elapse before the City has another comparable opportunity on this section of Midland.

NORTHERN SECTION OF MIDLAND AVE.

We would like to correct a misconception that appears in Councillor Crawford's letter of Sept. 8, where he requests "relocating the planned sidewalk to the northern portion of Midland Ave." By their very nature, concrete sidewalks cannot simply be rolled up and laid down in another location. More to the point, since a sidewalk does not presently exist on Midland between Romana and Fishleigh, "relocating" it is a logical impossibility.

We would also like to remind Councillor Crawford that, unlike the section south of Romana, the Waterfront Trail is not routed along the section to the north. Even so, we agree that a sidewalk should be built on the latter for three reasons:

- 1) Pedestrians will be best served by **a continuous sidewalk** along the entire length of Midland
- 2) The serpentine course of Midland Ave. north of Romana produces **bad sightlines**. Sidewalks will greatly help in keeping walkers out of harm's way.
- 3) Fortunately, this is not an either/or situation. Transportation Services staff have confirmed that **funding is available** to build sidewalks on both sections of Midland.

⁴ Bus routes 12 (Kingston Rd.), 20 (Cliffside), and 69 (Warden)

⁵ *Toronto Walking Strategy*, p. 24

<http://www1.toronto.ca/wps/portal/contentonly?vgnextoid=380f7e5921f02410VgnVCM10000071d60f89RCRD&vgnextchannel=d90d4074781e1410VgnVCM10000071d60f89RCRD>

PROPERTY RIGHTS

Building a sidewalk on the west side of Midland Ave. will not necessitate the expropriation of any privately owned land. In fact, the reverse is true. The City of Toronto's right-of-way extends approximately 5.7 metres on each side of Midland Ave. On the aerial view below (showing Midland Ave. just south of Romana), the magenta lines demarcate property boundaries. **Land owned by the City of Toronto occupies wide boulevard⁶ strips that account for about half of residents' front yards.** Ironically, the City's unused land bordering this section of Midland Ave. is actually greater in area than the roadway itself.

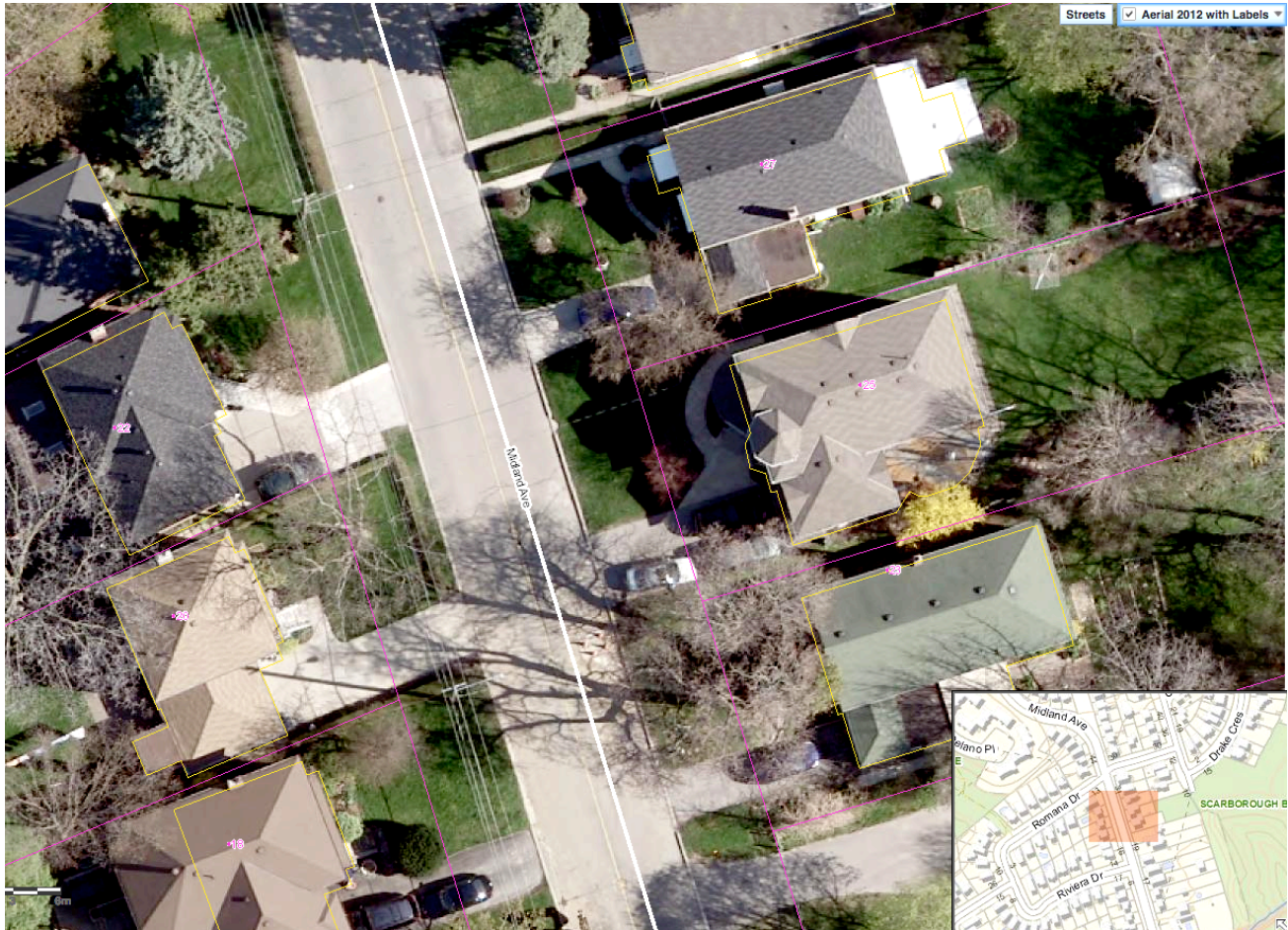


Figure 3 - Satellite photo of Midland Ave. south of Romana Dr., with property lines coloured magenta

The City of Toronto has been holding this land in reserve, until such a time as it is necessary to expand road infrastructure. That time is now. If we allow local residents to block the development of a strip of land owned by our municipal government, then (to all intents and purposes) they have appropriated property that they are presently enjoying 'on loan'. **This will set a worrying precedent that will make it more difficult for the City to tap hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of boulevard real estate across Toronto that it is holding in reserve.** Prudent financial management dictates that we do not set such a precedent.

By-law 743-36⁷ sets out the responsibilities of property owners to maintain the City-owned boulevard land they are temporarily enjoying. Crucially, By-law 743-39⁸ grants the City of Toronto authority to make use of boulevards for its own purposes. "Nothing in this chapter shall prevent the General Manager from altering, opening or otherwise using any boulevard for municipal purposes."

⁶ Defined in By-law 743 as "that part of a public street that is not used, or intended to be used, for vehicular travel by the general public, and is situated between the travelled roadway and the adjoining property line." In other words, the boulevard on Midland Ave. is the strip of land located between the road curb and homeowners' land parcels.

⁷ http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/municode/1184_743.pdf, p. 67

⁸ *ibid.* p. 69

Despite local residents' opposition, the City was able to install a sidewalk on nearby Chine Drive that has a width of 1.7 metres. Assuming that a similar sidewalk is constructed on lower section of Midland Ave., homeowners will still be able to enjoy – as an extension of their front lawns – a strip of land owned by Toronto's taxpayers that is 4 metres wide. This can hardly be considered a hardship.

LOCAL RESIDENTS' CONCERNS

We have not received any communications from the residents of 13 homes on Midland Ave. who oppose the installation of a sidewalk near their property. Two years ago, Scarborough Bluffs area residents used several arguments to oppose the aforementioned construction of a sidewalk on Chine Dr. These are relevant to the proposal for Midland Ave. because of the proximity of the two streets.

- 1) **Removal of mature trees** is not a factor on Midland, as none are located on the west side, where the sidewalk will be put in.
- 2) **Wildlife** will not be significantly disturbed by a new sidewalk, which will encourage people to walk rather than drive. Needless to say, motor vehicles (not pedestrians) are responsible for roadkill.
- 3) Building a sidewalk at the south end of Midland will hopefully result in an **increase in local foot traffic**. Rather than disrupting what locals see as a secluded haven, more 'eyes on the street' will improve street safety.
- 4) In the mid-20th century, Southwest Scarborough was situated at the periphery of Toronto. It now lies reasonably close to the heart of the GTA. Stressing "**rural ambience**" is less appropriate at a time when Torontonians are considering the expenditure of billions on bringing subways to Scarborough.
- 5) Some locals have expressed a preference for **open landscapes**. They feel that sidewalks constrict a street. In actuality, making a street appear to be narrower is desirable, as this has been shown to calm traffic and improve safety for all road users.
- 6) The **defined edges** that sidewalks introduce to a streetscape also help seniors, children and people with visual, cognitive and mobility impairments to walk in a safe zone without straying into the path of motor vehicles.
- 7) Some local residents have said that they **do not want more concrete** in their neighbourhood. However, less driving ultimately results in fewer parking lots and paved surfaces, which account for about ¼ of the city's total land area. Sidewalks are one of the most space-efficient components of our transportation network. Building more of them, in the long run, will create a greener, more livable city. Concrete is not necessarily a bad thing.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. For reasons of pedestrian safety and connectivity, we support plans by the City of Toronto to proceed with the installation of a new sidewalk on the west side of Midland Avenue between Fishleigh Drive and Romana Drive; we therefore recommend that this installation **NOT** be removed from the planned work for Contract 15ECS-LU-03SU.
2. We oppose the redesignation of the southernmost portion of Midland Ave. from collector to local street.
3. We are in favour of Councillor Crawford's suggestion that a sidewalk be installed on the section of Midland Ave. situated to the west of the Midland Ravine. We are amenable to the plans by City staff to have construction accelerated.
4. The goal should be having in place by 2018 a continuous sidewalk on the west side of Midland Ave., from Kingston Road to the bluffs. In the longer term, as opportunities arise, we would like to see additional sidewalks constructed on nearby sections of the Waterfront Trail, namely on Fishleigh Drive, Romana Drive and Undercliff Drive.

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