

PEDESTRIAN ZONE

The **Pedestrian Zone**, also called the Sidewalk Zone, of the street is one of the most dynamic and economically vital portions of the overall street right-of-way. The pedestrian zone is generally defined as the portion of the street between the curb line and the property line; although this zone may also extend into the street (such as with bulb-outs or crosswalks) or influence the private realm (such as with active frontages, parks, or plazas).

The pedestrian zone consists of many of the fixed features of the street including street trees, street lighting, utility boxes, bus shelters, bicycle racks, public seating, and building projections (such as awnings or bay windows). The pedestrian zone must provide space for people to walk through, and places for people to visit, gather, and wait. Economic exchange occurs in the pedestrian zone at outdoor cafes, street vending and parking meters, which serves as the interface between public and private spaces. The pedestrian zone is an intermodal space as people shift from walking to transit or from a personal vehicle or bicycle to pedestrian travel.

The Pedestrian Zone consists of three distinct subzones:

- » **Frontage Zone:** Running parallel to and abutting the property line, the frontage zone is the transitional zone between the private realm and the public realm. The frontage zone is generally not a zone of through travel and is excluded from sidewalk width calculations.
 - In residential areas, this zone may consist of little space beyond the fence line, while in some older areas it may include front yards, porches, stoops or stairs.
 - In business or commercial areas, the frontage zone is generally narrower and consists of doorways, entries, signage, awnings and building projections, outdoor seating, and other such uses.
- » **Through Zone:** Also known as the walking zone or pedestrian clear zone, the Through Zone is the portion of the street that allows pedestrian travel. The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) refers to this as the “effective sidewalk width.” This is generally the only area of the street that is included in sidewalk width calculations.
- » **Parkway/Amenity Zone:** Also known as the furnishing zone or landscape zone, this area is located between the pedestrian through zone and the curb. In predominantly residential or other low intensity areas, this zone is mostly trees, grass, and other open planting area referred to as the “Parkway Zone.” In higher intensity areas, such as downtown and other commercial districts, this zone is generally paved hardscape with trees in pits or planters and referred to as the “amenity zone.” Most street features are located in this zone, including street lighting, traffic signal poles and control boxes, signage, parking meters, bicycle racks, bus shelters, fire hydrants, and other features. It is also the preferred location for green infrastructure features such as rain gardens and bioswales in addition to street trees and other plantings. Given the number of features and obstacles in this zone, the parkway/amenity zone, similar to the frontage zone, is not a zone for through travel and should not be included when calculating required sidewalk widths. The parkway/amenity zone is often utilized for temporary snow storage. The boundary between the parkway/amenity zone and the adjacent static zone within the roadway of the street may blur.

Each of these zones is vital to the overall function and vitality of the pedestrian zone. As such, each zone must be afforded sufficient space to serve its purpose. The summation of each of these zones instructs the minimum setback necessary between the curb line and build-to line.

“Pedestrians tend to travel in the center of sidewalks to separate themselves from the rush of traffic and avoid street furniture, vertical obstructions, and other pedestrians entering and exiting buildings...Thus, the effective width of a sidewalk, not the design width, constitutes the sidewalk area needed to accommodate anticipated levels of pedestrian traffic.”

— Federal Highway Administration¹

¹ Federal Highway Administration. “Designing Sidewalks and Trails for Access: Best Practices Design Guide.” Chapter 4. (2001). Out of print. Available online only http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/bicycle_pedestrian/publications/sidewalk2/pdf/05chapter4.pdf

PEDESTRIAN ZONE DIMENSION TABLE

Street Type	Frontage Zone		Through Zone		Parkway Zone	
	Minimum	Standard	Minimum	Standard	Minimum	Standard
Neighborhood Residential	1'	1'+	5'	5'	4'	5'+
Link Residential	1'	1'+	5'	5'	4'	5'+
Network Residential	1'	1'+	5'	6'+	4'	4'+
Neighborhood Business	2'	3'+*	6'	6'	4'+**	5'+*
Maker/Industrial	0'	2'+	6'	6'	4'	5'+
Crosstown Connector	1'	2'+	6'	8'+	4'	6'+
Urban Center	2'	3'+*	6'	8'+	4'	6'+*

* NOTE: Café dining or sidewalk vending may occur in either the Frontage Zone or Parkway Zone. Where these activities occur in the Frontage Zone, the zone allowance must be significantly increased. Activities in the Frontage Zone must not extend into the Through Zone.

** NOTE: When on-street parking is present, parkway zone dimensions may vary from the minimum.



Despite these many activities and demands, **pedestrians** are the priority of the pedestrian zone. This zone must be accessible to pedestrians of all types whether walking of their own accord or traveling with the assistance of canes, walkers, friends, wheelchairs, or strollers. The movement and circulation of pedestrians should not be compromised by the installation of other street features, private construction activities, or blocked by snow or ice.

The pedestrian zone is the economic driver of cities and the defining experience of “place.” It is complemented by active ground floor with doorways, windows, and storefronts. In general, blank walls or dark stretches of street should be avoided where possible. Street lighting and shade gives the area a comfortable and inviting feel throughout the day and through Michigan’s four distinct seasons.

The pedestrian zone is typically separated from the street by a raised curb and recessed gutter or a drainage ditch. In urban areas, curb and gutter is generally preferred. The curb or ditch serve to both manage stormwater runoff from the street as well as to physically separate the pedestrian zone from the vehicle zone of the street.² The pedestrian zone should be complete and connected along every street in the city. When traversing cross-streets, the pedestrian zone should be clearly demarcated by access ramps and crosswalks.

Maintenance of the pedestrian zone is a shared responsibility. While the city is responsible for building and maintaining sidewalks and they are a key component of Vital Streets, residents and property owners share the day-to-day responsibility for ensuring a clear and accessible path of travel. This includes snow and ice removal, sweeping debris, maintaining adjacent landscaping so it does not encroach into the sidewalk area, and trash removal.



² Shared streets, also known as woonerfs or home zone streets, are the exception. Shared streets are very slow speed, low volume streets that do not provide a distinct zone for pedestrians, static activities or vehicular travel – all uses mix together and share the space.