City of Northampton
MASSACHUSETTS

In City Council, February 5, 2015

Upon the Recommendation of City Councilors Jesse Maureen T. Carney, William H. Dwight, Jesse M. Adams, and Councilor Marianne L. LaBarge

Resolution to Support Vibrant Sidewalks

Whereas, Urban Planning Professors Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris and Renia Ehrenfeucht identify five essential purposes of sidewalks in their compelling article, "Vibrant Sidewalks in the United States: Re-integrating Walking and a Quintessential Social Realm[1];" and

Whereas these essential purposes can be described as follows:

Movement – Sidewalks facilitate the movement of people from one place to another, and should afford us unfettered access to venues and locations – commercial, formal, and informal, that we wish to enter.

Encounter – Sidewalks are the places where we congregate and meet people: people we know, people we don't know, and people we may not want to know. And sometimes, this purpose of the sidewalk trumps the "movement" purpose, as in when a street fair temporarily closes a pathway to normal traffic. Sidewalks are where, "Spontaneous and planned festivities break the rhythm of everyday life and give collective expression to people's joy, sorrow or aspirations."

Expression—Free speech, assembly, and expression must be accommodated in public, even if some consider these activities disruptive, uncomfortable, or confrontational. Discussion, debates, disagreements, protests, rallies, and sit-ins, are all forms of expression that take place on democratic sidewalks. Under Article 16 of Part 1 of the Constitution of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, it is stated that "The right of free speech shall not be abridged."

Survival – for some people, the sidewalk is "home," and the only place where they can carry out ordinary activities of daily life. Sidewalks are also, often controversially, the places where some people go to earn a living.

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[1] Loukaitou-Sideris, A. & Ehrenfeucht, R. "Vibrant Sidewalks in the United States: Re-integrating Walking and a Quintessential Social Realm" in *Access*, No. 36, Spring 2010. http://www.uctc.net/access/36/access-36vibrantsidewalks.pdf

Beauty – sidewalks can be a place of lush beauty, with trees, plants, street furniture, art, and other items that give the sidewalk – and the community it serves – its own identity; and

Whereas a 2011 Nelson/Nygaard Design Charette focused on downtown Northampton called for sidewalks markedly widened and Main Street narrowed to shorten crosswalks, increase safety, increase public space for foot traffic and in front of local businesses, and provide an opportunity for more benches; and

Whereas in 2005 a study entitled Northampton Streetscape Improvement Plan – Main Street and Pleasant Street was prepared by Denig Design Associates, Inc. and called for, in addition to improving and widening sidewalks, increased seating along Main Street and Pleasant Street;

Whereas people are more likely to walk in areas that host a diversity of uses; and

Whereas the sound infrastructure and ongoing upkeep of sidewalks and crosswalks keep them safe for, and navigable to, all; and

Whereas the Northampton City Council supports the Northampton and Florence business communities and believes that vibrant, democratic sidewalks and public spaces can enhance the experience of visitors, and wishes to provide unfettered access to commercial establishments along our sidewalks; and

Whereas trees enliven the sidewalks, purify the air, control erosion of topsoil, and provide shade and beauty for those traversing, gathering, and lingering on the sidewalks; and

Whereas street furniture allows for a city to be more of a community, and area to gather, share and experience life together; and

Whereas benches provide pedestrians with an opportunity to sit and rest, wait for a bus where there isn't adequate bus shelter space, meet a friend, or read the paper;

Now therefore be it resolved that the Northampton City Council envisions sidewalks as spaces that can accommodate a variety of activities, and calls for the City to honor both the spirit and language of this Resolution by installing or placing additional street/sidewalk furniture along the entire length of Main Streets in downtown Northampton and downtown Florence, as well as along other commercial streets in the city; ensuring access to commercial establishments along our sidewalks; ensuring upkeep of sidewalks and crosswalks to allow for universal access; encouraging the creation of artwork on our sidewalks; and increasing the number of shade trees on our downtown and commercial streets throughout the city.