

City of Germantown

HOMEOWNER GUIDE TO SIDEWALK MAINTENANCE



Hello, neighbors! Let's chat about something we all use every day but might not think about too much – sidewalks in our beautiful city. These pathways aren't just a convenient way to stroll through the neighborhood; they're a vital part of our transportation system, and it's crucial to keep them safe and well-maintained. **Here, we address some of your most frequently asked questions.**

What's an unfit or unsafe sidewalk?

If you spot sections that are sunken, lifted or have some hefty cracks, those might be signs that a sidewalk is unfit or unsafe. Now, we get it; sometimes sidewalks may not look perfect, but as long as they're physically sound, they're not considered unsafe. Common culprits behind sidewalk issues include tree roots, settling ground, illegal sidewalk parking and the passing of time.

Who maintains sidewalks in the right-of-way?

Here's some info that might surprise you – did you know that the property owners are responsible for maintaining the sidewalks in the right-of-way? The City has an easement that allows public use, but the responsibility for repairs falls on the property owner. If you want to dive deeper into sidewalk regulations, check out the City of Germantown Code of Ordinance Sections 16-49 and 11-36.

Why did I get a notification letter and what happens if I ignore it?

Ever received a notification letter about your sidewalk? It probably originated with a concerned citizen who noticed something amiss. The City checked it out and found the sidewalk in question to be unfit or unsafe. Because we're all about working together, the City asks for voluntary compliance to fix those flagged sections. But if repairs aren't made voluntarily, the City can step in, make the fixes and then assess the cost to the property owner. We'd rather avoid that – cooperation is key.

I don't think my sidewalk looks bad. Why should I replace it?

Unfortunately, even minor defects can lead to pedestrian injuries. Sidewalk maintenance isn't just about appearances; it's about preventing accidents and keeping everyone safe.

What's the process to replace the sidewalk?

If you're thinking of replacing a sidewalk, first, you need a permit that's obtained by a licensed and bonded contractor, as per the Germantown Municipal Code. Don't worry; you can double-check their credentials with a quick call to the City of Germantown Engineering Department.

To help you plan, the permit cost depends on the amount of sidewalk being replaced. For an estimated cost, reach out to the Germantown Engineering Department at (901) 751-5720 or Engineering@Germantown-TN.gov.

I just moved in. Why didn't the previous owner take care of my sidewalk problem?

Even if the previous owners left a sidewalk issue untouched; unfortunately, you're still responsible for it. As of January 1, 2024, all sidewalks must be inspected before property ownership transfers within our city limits.

The tree in the planting strip damaged the sidewalk. Why do I have to fix it?

If you have trees on your property, it's your responsibility to ensure that the trunks, branches or roots don't create hazards for the public. Even if the trees were planted by a previous owner, exercising reasonable care is the name of the game.

Working together, we can all play a role in keeping Germantown safe, beautiful and walkable.

If you have questions, don't hesitate to call (901) 757-7281.

PRE-SALE SIDEWALK INSPECTION

A sidewalk inspection is required before any sale or transfer of ownership of any property located within the city limits of Germantown. An inspection application is available at the Economic and Community Development office, 1920 S. Germantown Road.

No permits or inspections are required for the sale of condominiums or homes without sidewalks.

My sidewalk has been marked, what should I do? If a sidewalk panel has been marked, the necessary repairs or replacement must be completed before closing on the property. If any related arrangements - such as escrowing the bid amount for the required repairs - have been made, the City must be notified.

Sidewalks marked with white paint can be caulked with approved concrete caulking. The approved brand is MasterSeal NP1, a commercial-grade caulk which can be found at hardware stores. After caulking has been completed, a reinspection of the repair is required.

Sidewalks marked with orange paint must be replaced. Before replacing, contact the City of Germantown Engineering Office at (901) 751-5720 for a permit.

The cost of a sidewalk inspection is \$100.

For additional information, call (901) 757-7281 or email CodeCompliance@Germantown-TN.gov.

CAULKING INFORMATION AND INSTRUCTIONS

If sidewalk panels have been marked with white paint, it means you're allowed to caulk the cracks in the concrete with MasterSeal NP1, a commercial-grade caulk available at hardware stores. After you've caulked the concrete and it has cured, contact the Code Compliance Office for reinspection.

INSTRUCTIONS:

- **Prepare the surface** - The surface must be clean and dry. To clean the crack, use a wire brush or sandblast it to remove all dirt and loose particles.
- **Install backer rod if necessary** - If a crack is over ½-inch deep, use a backer rod (flexible lengths of foam used as a "backing" in joints or cracks to help control the amount of sealant/caulking used). Install it before caulking.
- **Apply the caulk** - Fill cracks that are at least ¼-inch deep. Using a caulk gun, apply consistent pressure to force the sealant into the joint and completely fill the crack.
- **Dry tool the crack** - Use a putty knife or other tool to dry tool (smooth) the crack for maximum adhesion and a neat joint. Make a concave joint or level joint, but don't allow the sealant to puff up above the concrete. Raised sealant can pop out and create a trip hazard.
- **Allow time for the caulk to cure** - The cure rate varies depending on the size of crack, the temperature, humidity and the product used. At 75 degrees, the caulk in a ½-inch crack will usually skin over within a few hours or overnight, but it won't be fully functional for walking or driving for three days. Colder temperatures or high humidity will increase the cure time. Don't walk on the caulk until it cures - if so, it can be pulled out of the cracks.