Columbia to improve sidewalks to meet ADA standards

By: Melody Cox

COLUMBIA - Columbia City Council is trying to get the sidewalks within the city up to the Americans with Disabilities Act standards.

The council approved funds for interns to take inventory of the nearly 3.5 million feet of sidewalk at the meeting on April 16.

While checking the sidewalks, the interns need to be on the lookout for curb cuts that help those who use wheelchairs access the sidewalk from the street, if there is enough space for a wheelchair to make it through and if the sidewalks are level or have bumps and cracks in them.

Luke Hutchinson, a Columbia resident and someone who uses a wheelchair for almost two years now, said the city’s sidewalks are in poor condition.

“Uneven pavement, potholes on the sidewalk, that can cause big problems,” Hutchinson said. “Downtown’s pretty annoying. There are a couple places downtown that aren’t really that easy to get to.”

Adam Kruse, the ADA coordinator for the city, said the age of the sidewalks is usually the issue.

“Sidewalks that haven’t been replaced in a while will always be an issue,” Kruse said. “So what will happen is the ground will shift or roots will upend the sidewalk.”

Kruse said the biggest problem is keeping the sidewalks as level as possible.

“It can be really uncomfortable if it’s really bumpy. So you want to look at the condition it’s in and that’s one that can really deteriorate over time,” Kruse said.

Hutchinson said the bumpy sidewalks prevent him from going to certain areas in Columbia.

“On College Avenue and South Park, it’s been hard to get around when I’m trying to get to places in that area. So most of the time, right now I just kind of have to call friends and hope they can pick me up otherwise I just avoid that are,” Hutchinson said.

He said he’s glad Columbia is finally taking action on the sidewalk problem, but the effort shouldn’t stop there.

“I could think of three different places that they’re not necessarily handicap-accessible by ADA code standards they are normal, but for what a handicap person actual needs it’s not right,” Hutchinson said. “[The] lack of handicap accessibility whether it’s getting in the door in general or being able to move around inside the place because it’s just so small.”

Kruse said he doesn’t know how much money will be allocated to the effort, but keeping the sidewalks maintained to the ADA standards will always be an ongoing effort.

Columbia’s 2018 ADA Transition Plan said some of the repairs and improvements will go into 2020.