

## Group wants safer school routes

Written by Elizabeth Barrett

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GIC looks at installation of sidewalks, other safety measures.

Maggie Lafuze walks to and from school.

Until she reaches the Gothenburg Public School campus, Lafuze is often in the street along Avenue I because there are no sidewalks for several blocks.

Lafuze says the trek is dangerous as is walking around town on all streets without sidewalks.

“I baby sit and my kids have to walk in the street,” she said. “It’s unsafe. If I look away and one of my kids runs into the street, they could get run over.”

Many school officials and community members agree.

For years, school and city officials have discussed how to make the drop-off and pick-up areas around Dudley Elementary safer.

A committee of the Gothenburg Improvement Company is serious about making routes to school safer and recently asked the city to apply for a federal grant through a Safe Routes to School Program.

Calling themselves the GIC Way of Life committee, members are looking at ways to improve quality of life.

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Committee chair Amber Burge said they discussed the need for a trail system in and around Gothenburg, eventually narrowing the idea to making routes safer for kids around and near the school campus.

At the Nov. 19 city council meeting, Burge, committee member Sarah Hecox and Dudley Elementary principal Jim Widdifield talked about an immediate need for sidewalks along Avenue I at the Nov. 19 city council meeting.

“We’re looking at small chunks,” Burge said because of the expense of sidewalk installation.

A preliminary estimate to install sidewalks along Avenue I, from Highway 30 to 22nd Street, is \$284,000, she said.

More than \$500,000 could be available through the grant that has an application deadline of Dec. 20 and must be applied for by cities.

Widdifield described the elementary school area by Avenue G as a debacle, noting the elementary has grown from 435 to 500 students in the past nine years.

“There are more cars, people and bikes,” he said. “We’re very fortunate no one has been hurt in front of the elementary and around the school.

Burge said it’s a great opportunity to not only address sidewalks but other issues.

City administrator Bruce Clymer said the city would like to help and that drawings, drafts and concepts of the plan will be needed.

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“It will fall on Travis and the GIC people,” Clymer said.

City engineer Travis Mason, who works for Miller & Associates Consulting Engineers, said he would help with the application, noting he’s done several already.

Mayor Joyce Hudson suggested that the group survey parents of children who attend school and include that data in the application.

Burge said the GIC committee plans to pursue safer routes to and around the school whether the city receives the grant or not.

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