

Opinion

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OUR VIEWS

A push for sidewalks

Amid talk of big projects don't forget about small, people-moving plans

The quest of three Greenburgh men who are petitioning to get a sidewalk built on a steep, dangerous hill that they walk every day to work is nothing short of inspiring.

Jason Kingsley, Yaniv Gorodischer and Raymond Frost Jr., who each have Down syndrome and walk the treacherous strip of Chatterton Parkway from the group home they share down to Central Avenue, are likeable and persuasive guys. Their efforts have been endorsed by many of their neighbors, some of whom were reluctant to part with front lawn for the public project, and others who feared they would someday be required to shovel the newly laid paths. The three, who call themselves the "Three Musketeers," plan to present their petition at a Greenburgh Town Hall meeting Feb. 28.

These Musketeers are on to something. In communities from Irvington to Chappaqua, Mount Vernon to New City, residents are pushing for more walkable communities. If the Greenburgh three succeed, and even if they don't, their actions should encourage other sidewalk advocates to renew their calls for walkable streets throughout the Lower Hudson Valley.

Getting there

Sidewalks aren't cheap. As staff writer Rebecca Baker noted in a story Wednesday, putting a sidewalk on a half-mile stretch of Chatterton Parkway would cost more than \$158,000. And municipalities aren't always eager to embrace them.

Robin Winter, a Chappaqua resident, last year tried to persuade school and

New Castle town officials to create a network of sidewalks so that children could walk or bike to school. Her idea received lukewarm response, with officials saying the semi-rural roads were never built for walking or biking and it would be too expensive to upgrade them.

But the long-term cost of living without sidewalks is even higher. With no safe ribbon of walkway, set back from speeding and oblivious drivers, many Lower Hudson Valley residents are simply unable to walk anywhere. We've engineered walking out of our lives. The result: escalating obesity, increasing traffic, accumulating air pollution and a lower quality of life.

Those who do buck the car trend and walk do so at their own peril.

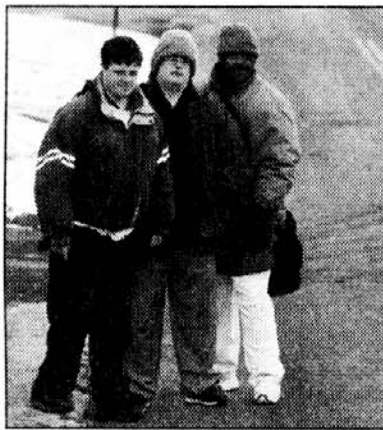
A safety concern

In Ramapo, where sidewalks are scarce and pedestrians crowd the streets during the Sabbath, from Friday night to Saturday evening, the number of people hit by cars has increased dramatically in recent years. In 2004, 19 people were hit by cars in Ramapo. In 2005, the number jumped to 47, and in 2006, 49 pedestrians were struck and four of them died. The streets in some Ramapo communities have become so dangerous that police have begun walker-education classes.

Neighborhood to neighborhood, people want sidewalks. But sidewalks are not just a local concern. They are a regional one.

While engineers tinker with major construction plans for the Tappan Zee Bridge corridor and the Route 22 expansion in Southeast, they, too, should keep in mind that providing sidewalks and bike lanes can reduce traffic, cut down on air pollution, promote healthier lifestyles and make for safer streets.

Those are savings we can't do without.



Seth Harrison/The Journal News
Jason Kingsley, left, Yaniv Gorodischer, center, and Raymond Frost Jr. stand on Chatterton Parkway in Hartsdale.