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Walking in city gets a bit safer

Designating Hendersonville's first Walk Wise route is another step in making the city a more walkable community. Walk Wise routes are laid out with older adults in mind. The 1.5-mile route features improvements to make it safe and walkable, including marking areas where sidewalks might be narrow, cracked or overgrown by shrubbery. Orange paint warns walkers of areas where they might need to use extra care to avoid tripping or other hazards. The city was smart to help the Council on Aging lay out the route, which begins fittingly enough at the Council's Sammy Williams Center for Active Living. The route continues west on Third Avenue to Whitted, where it turns north, then east on Fourth Avenue, South on Main Street and finally west again on Third to return to the center. "We are very pleased with the city's partnership on this effort," said Karen Smith, director of the Council on Aging. "When you realize that almost a third of Hendersonville residents are older residents, then the importance of this work is clear." Even more encouraging is that the city and the agency plan on laying out additional routes in the near future. The route designation also dovetails nicely with the city's ongoing efforts to improve sidewalks in the city. The city has already spent \$1.8 million on fixing cracked and broken pavement and filling in gaps in neighborhoods. In October, the City Council approved the sale of another \$2.1 million in bonds to finance new sidewalks. The money will be used on 11 projects based on the city pedestrian plan and recommendations of the volunteer group Bi-Peds. The projects include extending walkways out N.C. 191, along Old Spartanburg Highway and Blythe Street, plus new sidewalks on Four Seasons Boulevard, Spartanburg Highway, Asheville Highway and North Main Street. These new sidewalks, when in place, can connect to Walk Wise routes, or become part of new Walk Wise routes, that will make it possible for people to walk to the downtown, or to the Southside Square on Spartanburg Highway, where a new Harris-Teeter and Rite-Aid Drug Store are planned, or to the South Market Village on Greenville Highway, where shops and restaurants are planned. Just as roads move people, so do sidewalks. They give people an alternative to hopping in the car to run to the store, go to the doctor or pick up a prescription. And they invite people to get outside and enjoy the outdoors, something they can do here -- current weather excepted -- pretty much year round. It makes good sense to fix up deteriorating walkways and build new ones where there were formerly none. It makes even better sense to let people know which sidewalk routes are safest.