

# Tampa Bay Times

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## Your Voice: Sunset Park needs traffic, flooding fixes

Carrie Grimail, Sunset Park

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Sunset Park is a beautiful neighborhood that reflects much of the good and not-so-good of old Tampa. For the good we have mature growth trees, grid pattern neighborhood streets, a variety of large- and small-sized homes, great schools within walking distance, recreational and green spaces, churches and an eclectic mix of nearby shopping and restaurants.

For areas that need attention, we still have flooding due to poor stormwater drainage, Tampa Bay canals that need dredging and many residential streets without sidewalks.

In addition, we have perennial traffic problems on West Shore Boulevard, which could be alleviated by adding more left-turn lanes and thereby reducing the bottlenecks at certain intersections.

We look forward to working with our new mayor and City Council members to address these and other issues facing our neighborhood.

### The city responds

After five years of pushing, the neighborhood's shallow, sludge-filled canals are finally on a viable path to dredging, city officials said.

By next month, the city aims to hire new consultants to obtain permits, said Ben Koplín, who for years has managed the plan for the city. "The project is as close as I've ever seen it," he said.

Part of the holdup has been a layered permitting process that requires an answer to the issue's hardest question: where to put the dredged-up sediment, Koplín said. But the city's targeted consultants, who specialize in dredging, say they have found disposal locations and should be able to secure the permits, he said.

The next obstacle is approval from the City Council to hire the consultants. The council is expected to address the issue next week.

Council members Charlie Miranda and Harry Cohen, whose districts split Sunset Park, said they were open to moving the project along.

"I don't think you're going to get much resistance from the council," chairman Miranda said. The dredging "is past



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*Carrie Grimail and her daughter, Olivia, 8, would like to see more sidewalks in their Sunset Park neighborhood.*

due."

Miranda also supported the idea to add left-turn lanes to West Shore Boulevard. Noting residents often complain about West Shore traffic but balk at widening the roadway, Miranda called left-turn lanes at certain intersections "a reasonable solution."

City transportation director Jean Dorzback said such lanes are planned for the intersections with Gandy Boulevard and Fair Oaks Avenue, but nothing as far north as Sunset Park.

"There's nothing active at the moment," she said. "But that's not to say if concerns are expressed, we couldn't revisit that."

Brent Morris, the city's chief stormwater engineer, said that although flooding can be particularly bad in Sunset Park, as it's a terminus for stormwater runoff, the problem extends across South Tampa. Thus, he said, the city is aiming to upgrade the entire stormwater drainage system — a comprehensive project that will take years.

By December, Morris said, his team will have identified the best solutions to stem the problem from Spring Lake Drive to Interstate 275, an area that includes Sunset Park.

As for sidewalks, the city said it relies upon requests when building new ones. The last request from Sunset Park came in 2005: One person nominated a 2,000-foot stretch on San Miguel Street. The city has considered the proposal every year, but passed it over for projects with more support or for more high-traffic areas, said city sidewalks manager Jan Washington.

Washington said the only way streets will get new sidewalks is if residents nominate them.

"It could be just a bunch of moms whose children play on a certain street," she said. "Well, write a little petition, send it to me and that's done. We want to work for them."

*Jack Nicas, Times staff writer*

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### **About this series**

With changing faces at City Hall — from the City Council to the mayor's office — *City Times* wanted to know which neighborhood concerns will face our new leaders and their ideas for resolution. So we asked community leaders to tell us. Throughout the spring, we'll publish those concerns, in residents' own voices, along with responses from officials. If you want to submit a letter of concern for consideration for Your Voice, please send it to *City Times* editor Sharon Tubbs at tubbs@sptimes.com or by mail to 1000 N Ashley Drive, Suite 700, Tampa, FL 33602.

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