

Concord Charter Trust invests in heated sidewalks

By: Ben Leubsdorf Monitor columnist

Downtown bra-fitters and financial planners will have more than plows to protect them from ice and snow next winter. Workers tore up the sidewalk last week in front of Charter Trust Co. and Zoe & Co. Professional Bra Fitters, 90 and 92 N. Main St., and installed a snow-melt system that diverts excess heat from **Concord Steam's** distribution network into pipes just beneath the pavement.

In other words, they built a heated sidewalk.

Christine Donovan, Charter Trust's chief operating officer, said a self-clearing sidewalk was an attractive prospect "after yet another winter of shoveling and having icy sidewalks." The investment management and trust administration company, which owns its building and the upper floors of Zoe's building, paid for the work, though Donovan declined to say how much. The city gave permission for the project, and **Concord Steam** acted as the main contractor. "Charter is looking at this as an investment in our building, and it's something that's going to be nice for our clients, to be able to enter the building with no snow whatsoever in front of it," she said.

Many downtown buildings are heated by **Concord Steam's** network, which for 15 years has heated two sections of sidewalk, on Theatre Street and in front of the Capitol Center for the Arts, 44 S. Main St.

A larger network of heated sidewalks is on the wish list for the Re-Thinking Main Street project, the streetscape redesign plan championed by Concord 2020 and Main Street Concord. But even if the city comes on board, that work wouldn't start for years and depends on securing millions in federal money.

In the meantime, Charter Trust's heated sidewalk could be a "showcase for what it would be right downtown," said Mark Saltsman, **Concord Steam's** vice president.

The model often mentioned is Holland, a city of about 33,000 in western Michigan known for its annual tulip festival. It installed hot-water tubing under its downtown streets and sidewalks in 1988, and that system, the city says, can melt an inch of snow an hour, making salting, plowing and slips a thing of the past.

The Concord city government plows sidewalks, but downtown merchants still have to do some shoveling to clear their doors, "particularly when there's not enough to actually plow," Donovan said.

Hence the roughly 450 square feet of heated sidewalk now in place near the entrance to Eagle Square. Saltsman said the system uses waste heat left over when steam is converted at its destination, circulating it at 90 degrees or so under the sidewalk. That's enough, he said, to bring the pavement above freezing.

Donovan said, since the system will draw off waste heat, Charter doesn't expect to see its heating bill rise much if at all next winter.

The new system could become a visible example of a heated sidewalk's benefits, said Jessica Eshleman, executive director of Main Street Concord.

"If we were to see a series of snowstorms happen so close in proximity again, we would see it demonstrate its maximum potential. . . . I'm certain every business owner will have a little bit of sidewalk envy going into the next winter," she said.

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