

Information about Poetry Sidewalks

Compiled by Lucy Tyrrell
Bayfield Poet Laureate 2020–2021

What's the idea?

Consider having short poems by local poets imprinted in the cement of new sidewalks

What cities and towns in Wisconsin already have poetry sidewalks?

- Appleton (More poems are added each year. Poems are stamped in sidewalks on city-owned property adjacent to parks and city-owned buildings, as well as in residential neighborhoods throughout Appleton. A map of all current poem locations can be found at appleton.org.)
- LaCrosse
- Madison (Monroe Street)
- Waupaca
- Grafton
- Sheboygan (just starting their project)

Are there examples from other states?

- Northfield, Minnesota (10 poems each year beginning in 2011, a library tour exists: <https://conservancy.umn.edu/handle/11299/174608>; also a website for the sidewalk poetry: <https://www.northfieldmn.gov/630/Sidewalk-Poetry>)
- St. Paul, Minnesota (many, many poems; mapped locations).
- Winona, Minnesota
- Boston, Massachusetts
- Billings, Montana

What's involved in poetry sidewalks?

- A mold of the poem is created and pressed into wet cement. Cities could be contacted for information about what companies make molds and at what cost.
- Specialty company that makes the molds: Fourth Dimension Signs, Vadnais Heights, MN (651) 481-9036.
- Some cities/towns add poems each year in sidewalk squares that are being replaced. Others seem to add poems when constructing a specific area.
- The poems are solicited from residents or children of the town in "contest" format, and poems to place in the sidewalk are selected "blind" by a selection committee.
- A limit of characters per line and line number are included in the instructions for poem entries to allow the poems to fit in the sidewalk block.
- The town/city partnered with an art or cultural organization to fund and/or coordinate the sidewalk poetry.
- In Madison, past and present poets laureate of the city were involved.
- At least one town created a hand-bound book of the sidewalk poems.
- Several towns created interactive maps for their webpage, showing the location of each poem. Clicking on the location brings up the poem to read online. One city created audios of each poet reading his/her poem, which were coordinated with the online map.

What's it look like?

Mold for poem:



Pressing into wet cement:



Poem in sidewalk:

