



## **ENGINEERING DEPT. POLICY STATEMENT**

### **PROCEDURE FOR CITY STREET IMPROVEMENTS (October 25, 2021)**

Most of the subdivisions built in Birmingham were complete and in place prior to the Great Depression. The expectations of a public street were different in that era. Cities and villages accepted gravel streets with little provision for drainage.

Subdivisions built today are required to provide public roads with an engineered pavement built to last anywhere from 20 to 40 years. Handling storm drainage is an important part of the design. The cost of the pavement and storm sewer system is paid for by the developer, and that cost is then passed on to the first homeowners who purchase a home or property within the development. After the new street is installed and approved to their standards, the local City then takes over ownership of the pavement, and promises to maintain it into the future.

Birmingham, like other cities built by the 1920's, accepted gravel roads without storm sewer systems to serve as their local streets. By the end of World War II, the public's expectations about what a public road should look like, and how it should function, was changing. Many cities took on ambitious construction programs, funded by bonds, and paid back through special assessments to the adjoining, benefitting properties. Birmingham took a more passive approach, electing to chip seal its gravel roads beginning in the late 1940's. The chip seal helped solve many of the problems of a gravel road, but did not resolve the more complex issues of drainage.

#### **ROAD IMPROVEMENT OPTIONS**

##### **A. Citizen-Initiated Project:**

Street improvement projects in Birmingham have historically been financed through the creation of a Special Assessment District (SAD). The district was authorized by the City Commission after consideration of a petition that was submitted indicating that over half of the property owners on the street were in favor of having their street paved, and that they were prepared to be charged for a portion of the cost. If your property is located on an unimproved road (one surfaced with a temporary cape seal surface consisting of asphalt emulsion and stone chips), then the property has never been included in a special assessment district to cover the cost of constructing a fully-improved road.

Residents interested in having their streets paved are encouraged to call the Engineering Dept. at 248-530-1850, to get the process started. Usually, one or two residents take charge of the process. A petition with the appropriate language is prepared by the Engineering Department., and forwarded to the petition circulator. They are then



responsible for talking to their neighbors, and collecting signatures on the petition, documenting those that initially support the proposal.

Every street is unique. That is why we ask that petition circulators discuss the specifics with the Engineering Dept. prior to collecting signatures. Generally speaking, a new street will include the following features:

1. New concrete pavement with integral curbs to control drainage, built at 26 ft. wide between the face of the curbs. The 26 ft. width provides just enough room for a car to pass through, if other cars are parked on both sides. An asphalt pavement section, designed to provide an equivalent performing pavement as compared to concrete, along with concrete curb and gutter, may be considered as an alternate pavement design on a case-by-case basis.
2. The City will review the current conditions of the sewer and water systems in the public right-of-way, referred to as “mains”. Unimproved streets often need some or all of these systems replaced. The cost of these improvements would be charged to the City’s Sewer and Water Funds, and would not be included in the special assessment.
3. In addition to the mains, the City also looks at the age and size of each home’s individual water and sewer laterals serving their homes. These pipelines are considered a part of the private system serving each property. If the pavement is being replaced, and these pipes are either too old or too small, they will also be replaced as a part of the project. These costs are charged to the benefiting property in a separate special assessment from that established for the road paving.
4. Each driveway approach is removed and replaced to meet the current standards for driveways operating on the street. The size of the approach is measured and billed to the benefiting property through the road paving special assessment. Trees and sidewalks are left in place as much as possible. The grass lawn area between the sidewalk and the new street is removed and regraded to help ensure that the new sidewalk drains correctly. The new lawn area is sodded for quick, high quality restoration. Individual parking areas that may have been built along the edge of the road are removed, and not replaced. The new street is wide enough to support parked cars in most cases.

If a petition is submitted showing over 50% are in favor of the road improvement, the Engineering Department will prepare an informational booklet detailing the project being considered, and an estimate of the costs involved. It is mailed to all owners in the potential district, and a neighborhood meeting is conducted for those that would like to discuss and learn more about what is being considered.



If over 50% remain in favor of the project after this process, it will be moved forward to the City Commission for a public hearing, and possibly authorization. If the project is authorized, it will be designed and built by the City as soon as funding and construction schedules permit.

**B. City-Initiated Project:**

From time to time, the City Engineering Department may determine that construction of a project on an unimproved street should be initiated by the City. The main factors for making this determination would be where public sewer and/or water system improvements are needed, and construction of those utilities would necessitate removal of a portion of the existing roadway. Instead of simply restoring the cape-seal road surface after the utility construction, the City may start the process by engaging the property owners on the street about constructing an improved road. The City-initiated process would include the following steps:

1. The Engineering Department will identify project areas as part of the usual Capital Improvement Planning (CIP) process, where projects are planned over the upcoming 5 year time period. Occasionally, the need for a project is more unexpected by nature, and may not be part of the 5-year CIP.
2. Before starting the detailed design phase of a project on an unimproved street, the Engineering Department may engage the property owners that are in the project area to survey their opinions on the project by sending them an Expression of Interest form. Information and questions on the Expression of Interest form could include:
  - a. Project description and explanation of the purpose of the project (improvements to sewer or water system, or other reason) – including anticipated street width, pavement material, construction period, and estimated SAD cost ranges.
  - b. Ask if they are supportive of the project to improve the sewer and/or water system along the street.
  - c. Ask if they are supportive of constructing an improved street upon completion of the underground utility work.
  - d. Ask their opinion if the finished road surface paving material should be concrete or asphalt.

This preliminary Expression of Interest Survey will be communicated to the affected property owners by mail, and email if that has been provided to the City. General communications can be posted on the City's website and social media



outlets to inform the public in general that design of the project will be starting, and if you are one of the affected properties, to look for the survey. The survey would be open for a minimum of 30 days.

3. Begin preliminary design of the project: performing topographic survey; reviewing sewer and water system needs; preparing preliminary plans; and refining cost estimates.
4. Prepare an informational booklet for the project, as described in the Citizen-Initiated Project process section of this procedure document. The information booklet will be mailed to all property owners in the potential SAD, and a neighborhood meeting will be conducted for those that would like to discuss and learn more about what is being considered.
5. Prepare an Interim Report for City-Initiated Unimproved Street Project and present to the City Commission. Interim report would include: Expression of Interest survey results; feedback from public information meeting; cost estimate update including SAD component; and suggested resolution to proceed with final design of the project.
6. Set public hearing dates for road paving SAD and sewer & water lateral replacement SAD; hold public hearings of necessity; and hold public hearings confirming the assessment rolls.
7. Complete project design, and issue bid documents (with alternate paving design if warranted).
8. Present project to City Commission for award of construction contract, and decision on alternates (if any).

With City-initiated projects, the Special Assessment District process and development of costs to be assessed is exactly the same as that followed for petition-initiated projects.

### **SPECIAL ASSESSMENT COSTS**

Since costs for constructing road improvement projects change over time, you are encouraged to contact the Engineering Dept. for current estimated costs. Property owners can expect to be charged based on the following general schedule:

- **Paving Assessment** – Charged based on a unit rate times the footage of your property facing the street being improved. The unit rate is based on all paving related costs incurred to complete the project, minus 15% paid for by the City. If the property is on a corner, and the long side is being improved, the owner will be charged 33% of the unit rate, while the other 67% is paid for by the City.



- **Driveway Assessment** – Each property that has a driveway or driveways needing approaches to the new street will be charged by the square foot that the contractor charged the City to install them. The driveway assessment cost will be added to the paving assessment for each benefitting property in the district.
- **Sewer Lateral Replacement Assessment** – Each home served by a sewer lateral that is over 50 years old, or constructed with materials or pipe size not meeting current City standards, will have a new 6” PVC pipe installed to replace the existing one. Sewer laterals built with the road improvement projects are usually at least half off the cost of getting this work done on an individual basis, and reduces the chance that the new pavement will need to be damaged by utility cuts in the future.
- **Water Lateral Replacement Assessment** – Each home having a ¾” dia. pipe, or any size that is constructed with materials not meeting current City standards, will have a new 1” dia. pipe installed to replace the existing one (or larger size to match existing). If the home is significantly improved or replaced in the future, the water lateral would have to be replaced at that time, resulting in damage to the new pavement. The cost of this work is generally significantly less if done in conjunction with the road improvement project as compared to undertaking the water lateral replacement separately.

Special assessments for Paving Assessments, as well as Sewer and Water Lateral Replacement Assessments, can be paid off when due, or paid over a period of time (typically 10 years), with interest charged on the remaining balance, as determined by the City Commission at the special assessment hearing.