

**Birmingham City Commission - Special Workshop Meeting Minutes  
Monday, September 13, 2021**

**6:00 p.m.**

**Municipal Building, 151 Martin**

**Vimeo Link: <https://vimeo.com/591369155>**

**Workshop Session**

**This will be considered a workshop session of the City Commission. No formal actions will be taken. The purpose of this workshop is to participate in a discussion regarding Staff Recommendations for Moving Forward with Unimproved Roads Program.**

**I. Call to Order**

Pierre Boutros, Mayor

**II. Roll Call**

Alexandria Bingham, City Clerk, called the roll.

Present: Mayor Boutros  
Mayor Pro Tem Longe  
Commissioner Baller  
Commissioner Hoff  
Commissioner Host  
Commissioner Nickita  
Commissioner Sherman

Absent: None

Administration: City Manager Markus, City Clerk Bingham, Consulting City Engineer Surhigh

**III. Presentation & Discussion**

CM Markus introduced the item. CCE Surhigh presented the item.

In reply to Commission inquiries, CCE Surhigh explained:

- There may be some occasions where the Engineering Department recommends that lower-priority areas be improved at the same time as higher-priority areas for a variety of reasons including continuity between the areas, water and sewer condition, resident preferences or other possible reasons;
- Even the green areas require a lot of work since they are unimproved;
- Sewer liners are evaluated as a option for all streets, but the costs are often comparable to a full sewer replacement and it is often more efficient to just replace sewers if construction is already being done on the road;
- To address stormwater runoff and flooding, pipe capacity is evaluated as one of the factors for

unimproved streets' sewer rankings;

- The Engineering Department will also be continuing maintenance work on improved streets during the whole process of improving unimproved roads; and,
- He would consider replacing the high-ranking water and sewer pipes a health, safety, and welfare issue, noting that pipes in particularly poor condition can lead to water main breaks and contamination issues.

In reply to Commission inquiries, CM Markus explained:

- The City would seek an expression of interest from residents to determine their interest in potentially improving their street before initiating final engineering design;
- Much of this process will be dependent on the Commission having the political will to pursue the improvements even in the face of some resident opposition;
- The Commission will have to decide whether resident enthusiasm for improving a street should cause a street to be improved sooner. Since all the streets need to be improved eventually, it might not be a bad criterion to consider, and Staff would advise the Commission about the circumstances to consider in each particular case;
- His objective is to put the structure for the process in place in Fall 2021 so expression of interest can be solicited from residents in Summer 2022;
- The City will need to be strategic about continuing to use cape seal while also improving roads in order to avoid doing both to a street in quick succession and thus double-assessing residents;
- Improving 2.5miles of roads per year would be a realistic expectation; and,
- Next steps will include City Attorney Kucharek recommending ordinance changes and CCE Surhigh recommending procedural changes.

Commissioner Hoff stated that the majority of residents enjoy living on improved streets even if there was prior resident opposition to the improvements.

Commissioner Host thanked Staff for their work on the project. He said he appreciated CM Markus saying the City might be able to improve 2.5 miles of road per year, and said he was glad to see that deep-strength asphalt might be permitted as an option in some cases.

Mayor Pro Tem Longe stated that when the expression of interest postcards are sent out to residents the City should let them know if their water and sewer systems are particularly high-ranking on the Engineering Department's list, noting that they may not be otherwise aware. She suggested that the City consider having the ranking systems weigh health, safety and welfare conditions more heavily than surface conditions.

Commissioner Nickita commended the AHUSSC for their work on the item. He listed a number of factors that dictate the pace of street improvements, including Birmingham having more streets per mile than other nearby communities, Birmingham having older streets, the process of both community and committee reviews for all improvement proposals, the demand on Staff time while other projects continue and the demand on outside resources such as construction companies and materials. He cautioned that improving 2.5 miles of road per year would be aggressive. He also stated that flooding is an Oakland County issue that has been occurring for years, and that fixing municipal infrastructure alone will not resolve the issue. He explained it needed to continue to be a county-wide effort.

The Mayor thanked everyone involved for their work on the project.

#### **IV. Public Comment**

Anthony Long described his experience of initiating the petition process to improve Cummings Ave. He stated that the two residents who were not in favor called him after the work was completed to thank him for pursuing the improvement. He also stated that the City should improve roads with concrete since new home construction cuts into the street and concrete repairs better.

Andrew Haig suggested that the weather of the last 18 months showed that the ten year storm calculation of a one-hour, 1.7 inch rainfall, used to measure pipe capacity, is now out-of-date due to climate change. He recommended the City consider adding a buffer to that amount. He asked if the City could pursue bonding through the federal infrastructure bill to get better preferential rates and bond payments, or whether the City could use the federal government as the bank. He then asked whether the cost breakdown for improving a street should consider gas lines, laterals, and possibly moving electric lines subsurface. Continuing, he asked what would happen to fiber, cable, and phone lines.

CM Markus noted that Birmingham has access to bonds at a lower interest rate than the revolving loan bonds that are available. CM Markus said he was also in the process of meeting with DTE and that he was pushing the issue of moving the power lines underground. He explained that the cost of improving the roads, sewers and water lines was already nearly prohibitive, and ventured that attempting to add more items to the improvement process would derail the project.


Katie Schafer thanked the Commission for continuing to work on the issue. She stated that she had also initiated a petition process to improve her street but that it had resulted in contention between neighbors. She explained that experience was what led her to join the Ad Hoc Unimproved Streets Study Committee (AHUSSC). She concluded by saying that more public education would result in more favorable responses from residents.

The Mayor thanked Dr. Schafer for her work on the AHUSSC and said it had been a pleasure to work with her on the Committee.

David Bloom asked if the City could bond for a special assessment for the properties in the hopes of getting a better special interest rate or a longer paydown period to help the homeowners. He agreed with Mr. Haig about evaluating whether more sewer capacity would be appropriate given an increase in rain and possibly increased strain on the sewer system due to larger homes being constructed. He said the public would need more engagement, not just education. He asked whether sewer linings ultimately decrease sewer capacity.

<b>V. Adjourn</b>
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Mayor Boutros adjourned the meeting at 7:28 p.m.



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Alexandria Bingham, City Clerk  
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