



DPW on hot seat over potholes

Aldermen ask if, why repairs took longer in minority areas

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Milwaukee aldermen are calling on the Department of Public Works to explain why potholes in predominantly minority areas took longer to fix this year.

The inquiry comes in the wake of a Journal Sentinel investigation that found that the city takes 11 days on average to fill potholes in heavily minority areas and seven days in mostly white census tracts. Some parts of the city waited months to get potholes fixed from January through mid-July.

Mayor Tom Barrett told the Journal Sentinel that he believed work crews should have been dispersed more fairly.

"At this point, I want to hear whether the department agrees with (the Journal Sentinel's) conclusions," said Ald. Robert Bauman, chairman of the Public Works Committee. "I'm not sure there are racial disparities in how the city distributes public services."

Bauman scheduled a committee meeting with the Department of Public Works for Thursday morning. City officials said Tuesday that they have not received a formal meeting notice and declined to

comment further. It's uncertain who would speak on the department's behalf.

Also Tuesday, Ald. Ashanti Hamilton said he may request a formal audit of Milwaukee's public services to check whether similar disparities exist elsewhere.

"This inquiry has caught my full attention and has led me to believe that there's a strong possibility that there may be other similar service discrepancies in other areas . . . involving other city departments," said Hamilton, whose District 1 waited an average of 15 days for pothole repairs - the longest wait in the city.

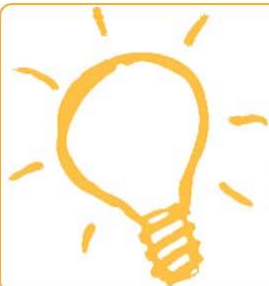
Bauman said he didn't think the meeting Thursday would result in new policies. He said it was an opportunity for aldermen to ask questions about how street crews choose where and when to fill potholes.

Bauman said there could be more discussion about policy changes after the comptroller's office reports its formal audit of street maintenance and reconstruction efforts. That report is expected within the next two months, but it mostly addresses street life cycles, not potholes.

During the Journal Sentinel investigation of pothole repairs, city officials told reporters one of their main priorities was filling potholes on high-traffic streets. But the Journal Sentinel compared different arterial streets and found that some in the north waited longer than low-priority residential areas in the south.

Some of the neighborhoods with the quickest repairs were also home to the employees in charge of dispatching repair crews. Their potholes on the city's south side were fixed faster than potholes in most aldermanic districts and the mayor's neighborhood. City officials said that where managers live has no bearing on their ability to

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dispatch crews equally.

Officials told the Journal Sentinel that an unusually large number of complaints could be one possible reason for unequal service. During the peak repair months of February through April, the citywide disparity of service worsened. On average, repairs north of Capitol Drive took 18 days while repairs took eight days farther south.

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