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FOR INFORMATION CALL

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Ald. Jim Bohl
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Overhaul Sought For City's Broken Streets, Struggling Maintenance System

*Ald. Jim Bohl Suggests Using Outside Consultant to Assess City's Roadway
Infrastructure Needs, Provide Outline For How Best to Prioritize Repairs*

Long before today's media report detailing a grim study about the City of Milwaukee's glacial street maintenance program, Ald. Jim Bohl had been working on possible ways to fix the city's broken street repair system.

In fact for years Ald. Bohl called for the city to end what he terms its "Band-Aid approach" to street maintenance, and back in July the Common Council's Public Works Committee heard his proposed resolution that would authorize the Council to spend up to \$50,000 to hire a consultant to review and evaluate the condition of city streets and its maintenance and reconstruction procedures. The proposal has been held while the city Comptroller's Office conducted an evaluation to see if it could perform just such an analysis, and the study from Comptroller W. Martin "Wally" Morics cited in today's media report – highlighting a 163-year average timeline to repair neighborhood streets in Milwaukee – was to be considered before the consultant proposal would be brought back before the committee.

Ald. Bohl said the Comptroller's study aptly describes the serious shortcomings of the city's current street maintenance program, but a deeper, broader review is needed as soon as possible.

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Street Repairs Need Fixing/ADD ONE

“Over the past two decades we’ve witnessed a systemic decline of road conditions and a near dismantling of the city’s road maintenance system,” Ald. Bohl said. “And I’m afraid our patchwork approach to road maintenance in recent years has led us to a point where residents have literally lost faith in city government’s ability to keep streets and alleys safe and in good repair.”

“The status quo just isn’t working, and I believe we either address our decaying road and alley infrastructure very soon or run the risk of paying the much higher bills of inaction down the line,” he said.

Part of any solution to Milwaukee’s street maintenance problems must be a strategy that ensures a more cost effective way for the city to maintain roadways, Ald. Bohl said. “Why does it cost \$200 per adjoining property owner to surface coat a street in Wauwatosa and \$500 per adjoining property owner for the same job in the City of Milwaukee?” he asked.

“In Wauwatosa it comes down to efficiency and being meticulous about maintenance – and that’s where we’re falling way short,” he said, noting that an independent consultant could offer straightforward steps the city can take to address its roadway infrastructure and maintenance shortcomings.

A systematic decline in the conditions of city roadways is perhaps most visible during the freeze-and-thaw period of late winter and spring, when potholes open up on streets throughout Milwaukee. The potholes – many of them at the same exact locations year after year – are the subject of complaint calls from residents and business owners many times a week, but their yearly re-emergence reflects deeper flaws in the way the city approaches road and alley maintenance and repaving, said Ald. Bohl.

The city has had to weigh “difficult choices” in recent years when faced with road repair decisions, Ald. Bohl said, but he also contends three factors have exacerbated the problem:

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Street Repairs Need Fixing/ADD TWO

- A large increase in the assessable portion (the amount paid by adjacent property owners) of project costs. Starting in 2002 the share went from a roughly 50-50 split to an 80% share paid by property owners, and this has resulted in about 2/3 of proposed street and alley repaving projects being voted down by residents.
- Deep cuts in regular road maintenance and tarring.
- Drastic movement away from sustainable roadway repaving schedule and system.

To get the city's street repaving program back on the right road, Ald. Bohl said the city needs to start by resuming reasonable and effective preventive maintenance. "We've cut our crack filling crews and our pothole filling crews to the bone, and it shows," he said.

"As the saying goes, 'You can pay me now or you can pay me later,'" he said. "Each time we defer maintenance or do it on the cheap we're closing our eyes to higher repair costs down the line for taxpayers, and I think that's wrong."

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